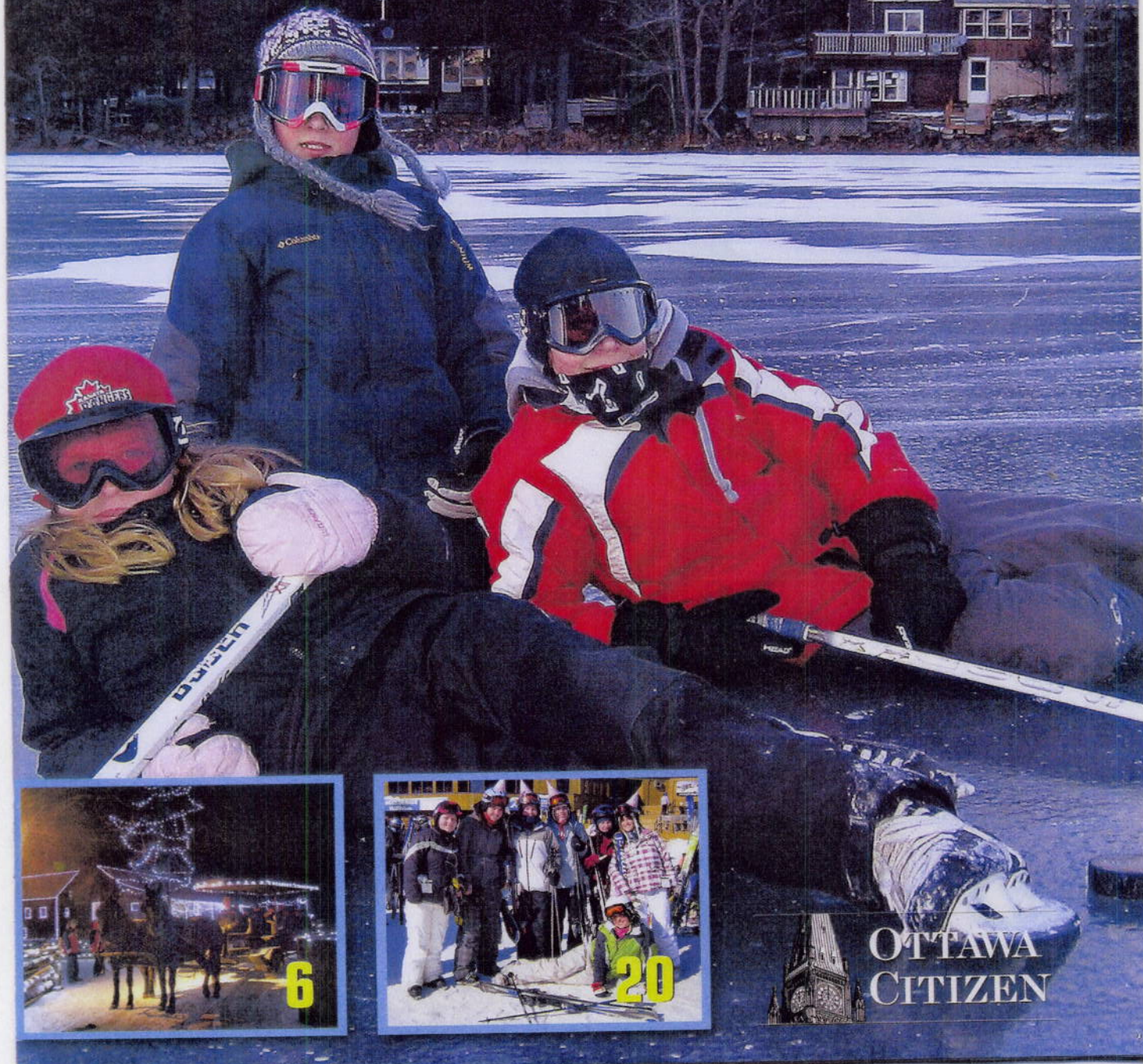


Celebrate Winter

2010



OTTAWA
CITIZEN

Ask about nearby activities when choosing your winter escape

BY MARY ANN SIMPKINS

Numerous inns within a half-day drive from Ottawa offer a cozy retreat during the winter. But how do you find the right one for you? Before booking a room, Robert Milling of the Wakefield Mill Inn & Spa advises doing some research. "People don't ask enough questions," says Milling.

For instance, what do you want to do during your stay? The Wakefield Mill obviously has spa facilities at the mill but do you know about the numerous other activities? In talking to guests in the lounge, Milling finds they often don't realize a hiking trail lies right outside the door. Part of the Trans Canada trail, the 175-km trail goes through Gatineau Park. "I'm a big fan of going out in November," says Milling. "It's the best hiking season. The air is so crisp."

The season determines the type of activities available. When the snow arrives, you can cross-country ski from the Wakefield Mill's front door. At the new cross-country ski kiosk, guests can get their skis waxed and pick up complimentary snowshoes. Snowshoeing ranks among the Inn's most popular activities but to fully enjoy it, Milling suggests bringing your own cross-country ski poles. www.wakefieldmill.com.

Nearby activities include a few you might not expect to operate year-round. At Captiva Farms, you can ride along snow-covered rolling hills on horseback or opt for the more seasonal sleigh ride or dog sledding. www.captivafarms.com.

Or explore the Canadian Shield inside Lafleche Cave. Open all year, the cave drips with ice stalagmites and stalactites. You can also rent snowshoes to tramp the 10 km trail through the surrounding woods. Snowshoes come with a kit to build a warming wood fire. www.adventurelafleche.ca/en/lafleche-adventure-cave.

Ask about parking. At most inns, it's not a problem except sometimes at inns located in a city. The Tuscan Villa-style Rosemount Inn & Spa in Kingston provides a couple of



Photo: Captiva Farms

Sleigh rides, horseback riding and dog sledding are some of the winter activities offered at Captiva Farms.

spots on site for "first-come, first-parked." Otherwise, you park on the street. A few times a year, however, events attract so many people, a nearby parking spot might be difficult to find.

Still, it's worth a long walk to stay in one of the Inn's 10 antique-filled rooms. In such historic properties, be sure to ask about the size of the room and amenities. A handsome four-poster bed and gas fireplace compensates for the small size of one guestroom. Some have fireplaces, jacuzzi tubs and/or walk-in showers with body jet. Only three rooms have TVs. The largest, the two-storey Edwards Suite located in the adjacent Coach House, is the only room with a fridge, kettle and microwave. www.rosemountinn.com.

Ask about the dining facilities. If it's miserable outside and you want to avoid the bad

weather, an in-house restaurant is a blessing. The Claramount Inn & Spa in Picton, Prince Edward County, gives you the option. Besides the breakfast included in the room rates at most inns, the Claramount also serves lunch and dinner. Their highly acclaimed Clara's restaurant, presided over by the former director of the Waring House Cooking School, features delicious regional dishes in a room where banks of windows look onto Picton Bay.

Unlike the tiny rooms in many old houses, rooms and bathrooms in the beautiful yellow-painted Colonial Revival 1906 mansion are spacious. Victorian-style antiques in its seven rooms add to the old-world atmosphere. In some, you'll need the small step stool to climb into the four-poster bed. Canadiana furnishings fill the three suites in the nearby Carriage House. www.claramountinn.com.

Be sure to check if the same services are available during the off-season. The Athlone Inn in Gananoque, for example, serves delectable contemporary French cuisine Tuesday to Sunday nights in summer. From mid-October to mid-May, however, their elegant dining room opens only for dinner Thursday to Sunday. Fortunately, the bountiful breakfast

included in the room rate is served year-round. www.athloneinn.ca.

The location of the inn can also make a difference. At the family-run Cove Inn in Westport, owner Mary Cowan says "After a couple of hours in Westport, you feel at home. Walk through the town and people will smile at you. They'll speak to you." In the two 1870's houses comprising the Inn, staff know your name. A friendly atmosphere is encouraged by treating guests like family and welcoming them with a carafe of wine in their room.

The reason you're going away for a weekend can also determine your choice. At the Cove Inn, card players can seclude themselves in a section of the Inn where separate guestrooms open onto a private reception area.

For a more romantic weekend, indulge yourself in the Perth Manor Boutique Hotel in Perth. Restored to its former elegance, the Georgian house captures the grandeur of the past through its period furnishings. Oriental rugs, French-style bed tables and four-poster beds give each of the six rooms its own individual charm.

Eating breakfast in the Tapestry Room envelopes you in the past. The William Morris-designed wall covering was the talk of the town when it was installed. The glorious tapestry remains a symbol of the house's opulence. www.perthmanor.com.



The Cove Inn in Westport, (left) and the Rosemount Inn in Kingston (below) and are two cozy inns to escape to this winter.



Photo: Mary Ann Simpkins



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