



sand &

SNOW

Story | KATHRYN HUNTER

Looking for the ideal winter getaway but can't decide between sandy beaches and snowy slopes? Turn the page for a look at some of the year's hottest—and coldest—destinations for 2013.





CONRAD RANGALI ISLAND MALDIVES RESORT
LEAVENWORTH CHAMBER



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UDAIPUR

Graced with names like Venice of the East and City of Sunrise, Udaipur, India, is an exotic land of shimmering lakes, ancient temples and majestic palaces. With its balmy climate and vivid culture, this far-flung locale attracts visitors from around the world during the peak season of September through March.

Many of Udaipur's luxury accommodations are housed in centuries-old palaces or ornate reproductions. On the banks of Lake Pichola, The Oberoi Udaivilas offers a resort setting fit for a king of any era. Your welcome to The Oberoi Udaivilas begins with a scenic boat ride across the lake. The palaces of Rajasthan were the inspiration for the resort's magnificent domes and pavilions, landscaped gardens and richly embellished interiors. Lakeview rooms open onto a semi-private moated pool, and suites feature their own private swimming pools and dining rooms.

Countless heritage sites located in or near the city offer a glimpse into the region's opulent and fascinating past. The City Palace, the most-visited attraction, is an assortment of exquisite palaces, courtyards and gardens built by rulers over a span of approximately 300 years. Rising from an island in the lake like a resplendent white mirage, the Taj Lake Palace, constructed as a summer palace by Mewar royalty in the mid-18th century, is now a luxury hotel and a popular stop for boat tours.

From its colorful marketplaces and meandering streets to its historic structures and unique museums, Udaipur is steeped with an air of romance and enchantment.



FINE FURNITURE

If King Midas had turned his attentions from gold to crystal, he would have found his match in the Maharaja Sajjan Singh. The Maharaja commissioned an extravagant and priceless selection of crystal objects from F&C Osler in England in 1877, though he died before his order was delivered.

View this rare and royally customized collection, which includes crystal chairs, chandeliers, crockery, tables and even a bed, at the Crystal Gallery in the Fateh Prakash Palace Hotel. Photography is prohibited. hrhhotels.com/Regal-Visits/Crystal-Gallery.aspx



MALDIVES

Discover the Maldives, an equatorial paradise so perfect it doesn't seem real—white sand, warm blue water, star-filled skies and, beneath the waves, coral reefs with all the color and movement of an endlessly turning kaleidoscope, teeming with life.

The Maldives are made up of 1,190 coral islands, roughly 280 of which are inhabited or developed for tourism. Located along the equator in the Indian Ocean, the islands don't receive a visit from Old Man Winter—the temperature stays roughly 88 degrees year-round, with a wet season (May to November) and dry season (January to March).

Many tourists visit the Maldives for the idyllic scenery, spending their time relaxing on the beaches of an island resort or sailing the surrounding seas on a liveaboard or “live aboard” vessel. But if you prefer having both two feet on land, the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island resort, set on two private islands, offers enticing accommodation options, including overwater villas up to 500 meters out to sea. Spa lovers will enjoy the decadent Spa Retreat and Over-Water Spa, and kids can share in the experience with pampering treatments designed especially for them at the Ice Cream Spa.

Another resort highlight is located 16 feet below the ocean—the Ithaa Undersea Restaurant, the world's first all-glass undersea restaurant, which boasts 180-degree views of marine life and serves a menu of delectable Maldivian-Western fusion cuisine.

Activities in the islands range from world-class snorkeling, scuba diving and surfing, to traditional spa treatments and cultural tours. When you pack your bags for the Maldives, you can leave your winter coat behind.



FISHING BY STARLIGHT

Night fishing offers a unique opportunity to experience the culture of the Maldives, where fishing is a way of life. As darkness falls, your boat is anchored near the edge of a reef. No experience is required to participate, because the crew is on hand to help and the fish are quick to bite. Using a traditional hand-reel line, you'll retrieve a cornucopia of the sea's bounty: reef fish like jacks, snappers, groupers, emperors and even barracuda.

Many Maldivian resorts offer night fishing trips, frequently followed by a barbecue of your catch on the secluded shores of an uninhabited island.



Sanibel



SANIBEL ISLAND

Sanibel Island, located on Florida's Gulf Coast near Fort Myers, is a favorite destination for sun-seekers. With activities for all ages and interests, the island makes for an excellent mid-winter family vacation on the beach.

The Sanibel Causeway provides easy access between Sanibel Island and the mainland. Book your getaway at one of Sanibel's beachfront resorts or hotels, or rent a private home or condo. You'll never have to travel far to find something fun to do or good to eat. Sample delicious and inventive island fare at more than 50 restaurants, from seafood and burgers, to Mediterranean dishes and gourmet ice cream. Pets are welcome at a wide selection of accommodations, restaurants and beaches.

Sanibel and nearby Captiva Island are barrier islands oriented east-west rather than north-south, which makes the Gulf currents unusually generous with their treasures. On 15 miles of unspoiled white sand beaches, an abundance of pastel-colored shells inspire young and old comb the shoreline for souvenirs from the sea. Golf, tennis, boating, fishing and shopping are other popular past-times. And with 22 miles of bike paths, it's easy to make your way around Sanibel Island on two wheels.

A large portion of Sanibel and Captiva Islands is preserved as wildlife refuge. To experience the area's natural wetlands, visit the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, home to more than 200 species of birds, as well as dolphins, manatees and alligators.

When you find yourself missing the summer sun, a visit to Sanibel Island is an easy cure.



DAVE MEARDON | KEVIN JAMES



PADDLING THE WILD

Pick up a paddle to see the sights of J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge up close. Tarpon Bay Explorers, the park's licensed concessionaire, rents kayaks, canoes, standup paddleboards and motorized boats for use on water trails or the open waters of the bay.

On a kayak or canoe, slide silently through mangrove

tunnels past wading birds and brooding alligators. Two guided tour options are available: The one-hour Kayak Trail Tour, led by a naturalist, is designed for all ages and skill levels. The two-hour Sunset Rookery Paddle Tour, a trip to the Rookery Islands where hundreds of birds roost for the night, is open to experienced kayakers only. tarponbayexplorers.com





SNOW



TAOS

Texans flock to Taos, New Mexico, for something they won't find at home: snowy slopes ideal for an unbeatable ski holiday. Taos is also a cultural hotspot, with a thriving community of artists, writers, musicians and filmmakers.

One of the few family-owned ski resorts in North America, Taos Ski Valley is operated by the original founders' children and grandchildren, giving it a singular and welcoming atmosphere. Because of the high elevation and surrounding desert, the powder is light and dry, and the trails are often remarkably uncrowded compared to other popular ski resorts. Though much of the terrain is considered advanced, there are also a variety of beginner and intermediate trails.

About half an hour's drive from Taos Ski Valley in the desert below, the city of Taos is a major tourist draw. Here, take in the picturesque adobe architecture and multitude of art galleries, museums, historic sites, luxury lodges, B&Bs, and charming cafes and restaurants. One-of-a-kind shops trade in locally made products like ceramics, leatherwork, hand-made clothing, jewelry and Native American handicrafts.

Near Taos, other ski areas include Angel Fire, Red River and Sipapu, but the opportunities for outdoor adventure aren't limited to the slopes. Get outside and go horseback riding, sleigh riding, snowshoeing, hiking, sledding, star gazing or hot tubbing the natural way at a primitive hot spring like Black Rock Hot Springs, accessible by trail.

Taos is an alluring setting, filled with an energy and beauty that makes it a year-round haven for the creative and adventurous.



SKI SKILLS

Hone your skills at the Ernie Blake Ski School, renowned for its popular Ski Weeks. Taos Ski Valley offers flexible and affordable programs for all levels of experience, including both private and group lessons.

If this is your first foray on the bunny hill, sign up for the Yellowbird Never-Ever Program (ages 14 and older). Designed

to teach the uninitiated how to ski or snowboard, the program includes four hours of lessons, equipment rental and a beginner lift ticket. And there's a guarantee—if after two full days of Yellowbird instruction you're still stuck on the beginner hill, you can continue in the program for free until you're on your way. skitaos.org/content/snowschoo



LOCAL LIBATIONS

Leavenworth is nestled in the scenic Columbia Cascade wine region, where visiting area wineries is a treat for the eyes as well as the taste buds. Sample the best of local vintages at downtown Leavenworth's many tasting rooms, or take a drive to tour the vineyards just outside of town.

Wine isn't the only refreshment the region is famous for. At orchards and tasting rooms, sip artisan ciders sourced from locally grown apples. The Cashmere Cider Mill Tasting Room offers flights of their famous Lady Blush Artisan Cider, tasting tours, gift items, culinary classes and a mouthwatering lunch menu. gourmetcider.com

LEAVENWORTH

If winter is that age-old scene from Christmas cards and snow globes, a quaint village amid snow-topped forests and mountains dusted in white, then Leavenworth, Washington, is the embodiment of what the season is meant to be.

Located only about two hours from Seattle, but surrounded by the extensive Wenatchee National Forest and Cascade Mountains, Leavenworth seems like a world apart. Once a logging town, in the 1960s Leavenworth began remodeling itself into a Bavarian alpine village, now complete with gingerbread storefronts of genuine German design, costumed locals in lederhosen and a flourishing Oktoberfest celebration. Local shops sell nostalgic curios like cuckoo clocks, music boxes, nutcrackers and beer steins. And though German fare isn't the only type of food in town, there's plenty of sauerkraut and strudel to be had.

The Cascades offer a stunning backdrop to the town, as well as the perfect playground for winter sports. Whether you want to try skiing, snowmobiling, sledding or sleigh riding, or simply want to build a few snowmen and snow angels in the fresh powder, the landscape is happy to oblige. And resorts and lodges throughout the area offer the other important perks of winter weather: a cup of steaming hot cocoa, a roaring fire, a comfortable armchair and a warm viewpoint from which to take in the wonderland outside.

"Wilkommen" to an authentic and unforgettable winter, however you choose to enjoy it.



Snow



CHENA RIVER STATE RECREATION AREA

Escape to a true winter wilderness this year, an icy landscape where the aurora borealis flickers in the night sky and long-legged moose trudge chest-deep through the snow. Chena River State Recreation Area, 397 square miles of native forest, river and tundra 30 miles from Fairbanks, Alaska, is a place of rugged adventure.

Chena Hot Springs Road parallels the Chena River, winding through the park's snowy woodlands from mile 26 to mile 51. Whether your journey is a day trip from Fairbanks or a longer excursion, you won't want to miss Chena River Hot Springs Resort at the end of the road. Open year-round, the resort's prime attraction is its steamy mineral waters, discovered in 1905 and long acclaimed for their healing properties. The outdoor Rock Lake remains a natural 106 degrees no matter the season. The resort also boasts indoor geothermal pools, an ice sculpture museum, nightly Snow Coach aurora tours, dog sled rides, a restaurant, a massage boutique, and 80 well-appointed rooms.

For an overnight experience in the wild, make one of the park's 13 rustic backcountry public-use cabins your destination. Immensely popular, the cabins require advance reservations, and snow machining, dog mushing, skiing, snowshoeing and skijoring are the favorite modes of transportation to get there.

In your cold-weather travels through Chena River State Recreation Area, you're likely to see wildlife like birds, moose and, more rarely, wolves. Spotting these Alaskan natives is just the icing on the cake, however; the scenery and solitude are magical in themselves. ♡





MEET THE WORKING DOG

The 1,000-mile Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race passes through part of the old Chena Hot Springs Winter Trail and finishes in Fairbanks. Cheer on these canine athletes and their fearless humans as they take on the challenging 10- to 16-day course in early February. yukonquest.com

You can also learn a thing or two about dog mushing yourself at the Chena Hot Springs Sled Dog Mushing School. After a one-hour training session, you'll get behind your own sled team and travel the resort's 2-mile dog sled trail. chenahotsprings.com

