

March 02, 2011

Kathryn Follitt

There's something special about the return of baseball season, and not just because it signals the start of spring weather. Down in Florida our Blue Jays are swinging their way through Grapefruit League games, and gearing up for opening weekend here at the Rogers Centre April 1-3. That's just one month away, but still an eternity for true fans of the game, so if you need a baseball fix in the next few weeks check out the Ultimate Baseball Hall of Fame package in Cooperstown, NY. Available March 17 and 18, with two nights' accommodation at The Inn at Cooperstown, this deal features exclusive VIP access to the National Baseball Hall of Fame with an after-hours private tour, a special baseball artifact presentation, a private reception with Hall of Fame staff, even a personalized commemorative bat. Other perks include a Hall of Fame magazine subscription and a 10 per cent discount on all purchases from The Hall of Fame store, catalogue and web site for one year. Prices start at \$595, double occupancy. This is the fifth year for the Ultimate Baseball Hall of Fame packages and the response last year was "overwhelming" says The Inn at Cooperstown. The historic property, dating back to 1874, is just a block and a half from the National Baseball Hall of Fame and a short distance from other local attractions including the Fenimore Art Museum and Brewery Ommegang. While The Inn at Cooperstown has the lock on this Ultimate Hall of Fame package, there are other hotels in town, with information available at www.thisiscooperstown.com/getawaynewyork.cfm. For The Inn at Cooperstown and Ultimate Baseball, see www.innatcooperstown.com and click on "Packages".



Winter activities at Deerhurst Resort in Huntsville include trying out a team of sled dogs.

Toronto Star/File Photo

ONTARIO OUTINGS: Last-minute availability for March Break getaways, right in our own backyard? Not a problem. Deerhurst Resort in Huntsville has everything from maple sugar bush tours, to indoor and outdoor sports, to special theme days March 12 – 19 including Family Play Day, Olympic Day and Adventure Day. Featured activities during March Break, which vary day to day, include jewellery making, archery, 'Survivor: Family Challenge' and (for the adults) wine and beer tastings (www.deerhurstresort.com). In Port Stanton, [Bayview Wildwood Resort](#) also has a full lineup for March Break, from guided snow shoe hikes, family broomball and horse-drawn wagon rides to indoor pursuits including a teddy bear workshop, scavenger hunts, even a "Wet & Scaly" show where kids (and anyone else who's game) can get up close and personal with a variety of reptiles. And at Great Wolf Lodge in Niagara Falls, "The Beach Bash" runs until March 27 and offers Nightly Story Time, a hula hoop and limbo contest and more, with accommodation in a wide variety of rooms and suites, from standard family suites to KidCabin Suites, equipped with its own 'log cabin' room-within-a-room complete with a bunk bed, day bed and its own TV. See www.greatwolf.com.

TORONTO CALLING

A March Break "getaway" in our own city makes for stress-free vacation planning. Through Tourism Toronto's www.SeeTorontoNow.com website, you can book hotel packages starting from \$126 per night at more than 90 GTA properties, with admission for two to select attractions including the Hockey Hall of Fame. If you're happy staying put and just want to know what's on around town, Tourism Toronto offers its calendar of family-friendly events for the week. At the Bata Shoe Museum, it's "Rockstar Madness" with the unveiling of a pair of Justin Bieber's shoes, plus tribute shows taking place March 14-18 at 11 a.m., 1 p.m and 2 p.m. For a more traditional "zoo" atmosphere, the Toronto Zoo's March Break program includes the Education Auditorium and Playtime Forest. Casa Loma has princess and pirate-themed activities with storytelling and performances, a sure-fire hit with younger visitors. The ROM presents Water: The Exhibition, and at Rogers Centre, there's the Spring Fling carnival with rides and entertainment. And in Woodbridge, the Kortright Conservation Centre presents its Maple Syrup Festival from March 5-April 10. See www.SeeTorontoNow.com.

MONTREAL FAMILY GETAWAY

From food to art to old-style ambience, there are few cities in the world as exciting as Montreal. Tourisme Montreal's Family Getaway packages come with a 'Passport' offering special discounts at attractions including the Montreal Insectarium, Montreal Botanical Gardens, Biodome de Montreal, the Granby Zoo and Atrium Le 1000, an indoor skating rink. You'll also receive dining deals ranging from free kid's meals to 25 per cent off the bill after 3 p.m. Package prices including one night's accommodation start at \$119 with hotels ranging from L'Appartement Hotel Montreal to the Hyatt Regency Montreal. See www.tourisme-montreal.org.

PORTER TO WINDSOR AND THE SOO

Windsor and Sault Ste. Marie just got that much closer, especially for downtown Toronto residents, with Porter Airlines' announcement that it will offer daily flights to each city starting this spring. Windsor service starts April 27 with up to three daily round trip flights, with one-way fares from \$89. Service to The Soo is scheduled to begin May 4, with up to two daily round trips, and one-way fares from \$99. See www.flyporter.com.

EXPLORE ROCHESTER

How wonderful — a learning space devoted entirely to play. Rochester's aptly-named Museum of Play is one of the city's hotspots with younger visitors, and parents are only too happy to tag along. Well-known brands connected with the museum include Sesame Street and the Berenstain Bears, plus there's the Dancing Wings Butterfly Garden, an American Comic Book Heroes presentation and a 1,700 gallon coral reef aquarium. With the Hyatt Regency Rochester's Explore Package, you get two adult tickets to the museum (kids under two years old get in free) along with a one night stay with full breakfast and 2 p.m. late check-out. See www.rochester.hyatt.com.

HOT (SPOTS) IN CLEVELAND

You might think Cleveland's attractions begin and end with another well-known hall of fame — in this case, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame — but there's more to this city than the I.M. Pei-designed glass pyramid by the lake. A true winter escape is available at the Cleveland Botanical Garden, where 'Orchid Mania' is on now through March 27, showcasing hundreds of colourful, blooming orchids. On Fridays and Saturdays until April 16 at Hale Farm & Village, there's "A Fugitive's Path: Escape on the Underground Railroad", an indoor/outdoor tour that re-enacts the lives of runaway slaves in 1859. And just outside the city, an exhibition on loan from Athens, Greece called "Impossible Realities" highlights the topsy-turvy work of M.C. Escher at the Akron Art Museum, through May 29. Cleveland's many hotels include the boutique-styled Glidden House, where the Encore Package comes with two tickets to the Cleveland Orchestra plus one night's stay and breakfast for \$189 (U.S.), and the Hyatt Regency Cleveland, offering 15 per cent savings off three night stays with its Stay More, Save More deal. Of course, it goes without saying that several hotels offer "Rock Hall"-themed packages, including the Hampton Inn Cleveland Downtown and the Intercontinental Hotel Cleveland. More information about the city's attractions and hotels can be found at www.positivelycleveland.com.

Kathryn Follitt is a Toronto-based freelance writer. Prices quoted are subject to change and availability.