

Romance Away

by Carol Baker

It's not how far away you go, but how far away you seem to be.

Abandoning the clutter of everyday life is often a key ingredient in the recipe for romance.

Dog sledding maybe? The notion does seem rather romantic. Dress warmly and head up to Mount Seymour and it may seem like you're a million miles away. Mushing on the mountain is available 09-11 Feb, 07-09 and 14-16 Mar. For more info, go to mountseymour.com.

The Bonnie & Clyde Spa in Richmond has a getaway day Valentine's special: buy one and get another at 50 percent off. Togetherness services, from facials to massages, are available throughout February. For more info, go to bonnieandclydespa.com.

The Sunshine Coast sounds romantic (the Spanish translation Costa del Sol sounds even more so, but that's a long flight away!). At Rockwater Secret Cove Resort, the tent-house suites come with a king bed, fireplace and Jacuzzi, while the oceanview cabins feature romantic views of Malaspina Strait. Their Valentine special includes an overnight, sparkling wine, chocolate truffles, hot breakfast, turndown service, and candlelight dinner. The tenthouse package (available 14-16 Feb) costs \$400. For more info, go to rockwatersecretcoveresort.com.

All reports about Victoria's Villa Marco Polo are great. Their February Romanza package (\$250 per person), which is selling fast, includes a night at the opera with Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, one of the world's most adored love stories. Also included are dinner at Zambri's (a good Italian restaurant), a grand gourmet breakfast, and overnight accommodation.

The Italian Renaissance-style villa, originally built as a gift to a young bride in 1923, has several suites with double soaker tubs, fine European linens, hardwood floors, and king beds. The library has books, games, and a cozy fireplace, but the pre-loaded iPods and docking stations in guestrooms are also popular. For more

pampering to perfection, villa guests can visit the in-house spa. Tel. 877-601-1524 or visit villamarcopolo.com.

Vancouver Island's award winning Aerie Resort (35 minutes north from Victoria) is holding a two-day yoga retreat 22-24 Feb with master teacher Sally Adnams. Included are four hours of sessions designed to calm the mind and tune-up the body. The package (from \$800 per person) includes a two-night stay, wholesome meals, a yoga mat and a journal. For more info, call 800-518-1933 or visit aerie.bc.ca.

Quebec City, perhaps the most romantic urban space in our country, celebrates its 400th birthday this year with various sporting and cultural events. From 01-17 Feb, the world's largest winter carnival is pulling out all the stops with countless activities, shows and parades. For more info, visit carnaval.qc.ca.

A new pathway, waymarked for walkers, winds from Faubourg Saint-Jean-Baptiste to Petit Champlain (passing through the Saint-Roch, Old Port and Place Royale neighbourhoods). A walk along this route reveals Quebec City's many faces: its history, military and religious heritage, museums, commerce, parks and, most of all, its courteous and friendly residents.

South of the border, at the Hotel Monaco in downtown Portland, you and your partner will love the elegant accommodations, the rose petals turndown, the chocolate body paints and brush, the chilled champagne, continental breakfast in bed, valet parking and a late checkout (from \$220 per couple). For more info, call 800-711-2971 or visit monaco-portland.com.

Nestled in the Columbia River Gorge (70 km east of Portland), Skamania Lodge offers great deals designed to rekindle romance — with entertainment, spa specials and other pamperings. Cupid's Valentine Delight (\$400 per couple), on Sat 09 Feb, includes an overnight, dinner in the Cascade Room with jazz pianist Tom Grant, and a bouquet of red roses delivered to your door. For more info, call 800-221-7117 or visit skamania.com.

For a Rocky Mountain high, fly to the Hotel Teatro, a luxury boutique hotel in



downtown Denver. Costumes and pix from local theatrical productions decorate the hotel. Their Valentine special (from \$270; available 08-17 Feb) includes sparkling wine, chocolates, fresh strawberries and breakfast in bed. For more info, tel. 303-228-1100 or visit hotelteatro.com.

Canadians have long had a love affair with Hawaii's golden sands, warm breezes, tropical gardens, Vitamin D in the form of sunshine, and the spirit of aloha.

The recently renovated Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea features fine art by Hawaiian artists, a premium steak and seafood restaurant, and oceanfront traditional Hawaiian hale for The Spa (the lomilomi massage is a delight!).

Also in Maui, couples can drift hand-in-hand high over the blue Pacific in a tandem parasail. You can have a JUST MAUIED banner attached to the two-seater harness for a playful photo op.

How about sunset or sunrise at 3,000 metres? Maui's dormant volcano Haleakala ('house of the sun') is a great place to get high. One of my loveliest memories is an awesome sunrise glow of reds, pinks and

gold from the crater rim, followed by a fast gravity-powered bike ride down the mountainside (my husband preferred helicopter flightseeing which was also spectacular).

If you do get to Hawaii to celebrate Valentine's, here are a few words to whisper:

Aloha (Love to you)

Aloha au i 'oe (I love you)

E komo mai (Welcome)

Ku'uipo (Sweetheart)

E ho 'omau maua kealoha (May our love last forever)

Mahalo (Thank you)

Maluhia (Peace)

