



Edited by
**VICKY
LISSAMAN**

**LATES
'N'
BREAKS**

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MALLORCA: Enjoy a week's break all-inclusive at the three-star Santa Ponsa Hotel, Santa Ponsa for £299 with flight from Glasgow on March 5. To book call 0871 911 0202 or visit onthebeach.co.uk

cup of tea, check out our alternative winter games in the US



MUSHY PEACE: Our Rick in action on the dog-sled

HOLE-IDAY ON ICE

by **RICK LYONS**

THERE are some bizarre sports among the Olympic events these days...

And the 21st Winter Games, now on in Vancouver, has its fair share of the weird and wonderful.

Fans can follow everything from curling to snowboard cross and the madcap moguls.

But some pursuits have remained stubbornly outside the competition and you won't find thriving winter sports like ice fishing, dog sledding and ice-climbing at this year's event.

But cross the border into the US and they are part of the fabric of life.

In the Great Lakes region they pass for everyday recreation during the snow-bound winter months.

Frozen

And as I found out, they make for an interesting, alternative break.

I took a flight from Heathrow to snow-covered Minneapolis' St Paul where temperatures regularly drop to minus 15C during winter.

A few hours north by hire-car, I was in the wetlands which give the state its nickname - "Land of 10,000 Lakes".

My destination was Mille Lacs - a single frozen lake over 20 miles wide.

For five months of the year cabins are moved out on to lakes from which to fish. To call them huts is misleading in the extreme as the heated dwellings sleep up to ten and boast gas stoves, satellite TV and video game consoles.

Their occupants even form villages out on the lake and elect a mayor.

Driving down ice roads from which the snow had been ploughed, we passed signs pointing out the 10mph limit on the lake. The fishing is done from holes

drilled through the floor of each hut, from which baited lines are dropped into the water to tempt Walleye - a prized local catch.

None were biting in the ice house we visited, owned by Mac's Twin Bay Resort but, given the cosy surroundings, we didn't care.

Later we moved on to Buzzies On The Bay Bar and Restaurant to feast on burgers, steaks and other goodies.

From Mille Lacs, it's roughly 150 miles by car to Bayfield in Wisconsin. More famous as a summer resort, in January this tiny village on the shores of Lake Superior seems to have even fewer inhabitants than the official 611.

The next day we drove 15 miles inland to Vailhalla View Pub & Grub on Freedom Valley Drive. The bar and restaurant serves as a hub for snowmobilers who come to ride miles of trails criss-crossing the state.

At my turn to drive, I was shown three things before being let loose - throttle, brake and, in case of emergencies, the engine cut-off.

Worryingly, the speed of the briefing matched the speed of the vehicle. After

lunch at the Pub and Grub it was on to nearby Wollong Adventures in Mushing.

At the dog-sledding centre, visitors are invited to help harness the huskies and, if you're a dog lover, it's blissful.

Siberian huskies are a handsome breed and, despite looking like miniature wolves, are friendly and gentle.

When I approached with the harness they obligingly lifted up their front legs and dipped their heads to slip it on.

But they're desperate to run and there was a cacophony of barking and straining at the ropes before the off.

Sleds

Once under way they fall silent and it was the humans who start to yelp as they struggled to stay on the sleds.

My four-dog team of Starbuck, Sassy, Ruby and Ice dragged me along woodland trails at an exhilarating pace.

But the overwhelming feeling was one of peace. Above was a clear blue sky; while the snow was marked by the lengthening shadows of maples, aspen, oak and white birch trees.

In the evening the grand Old Ritten-

house Inn offered superb five-course fine dining. Cheaper oats can be found at the weirdly flamingo-themed Maggie's on Manypenny Avenue.

Leaving Bayfield behind, we made another interstate drive to Marquette in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Then it was straight to Downwind Sports to get kitted up for ice-climbing.

Crampons have a way of making you feel superhuman and, with the metal claws on my feet, I felt like I was born on the planet Krypton, before being bitten by a radioactive spider and breakfasting on spinach.

Sadly it proved to be false confidence as climbing the vertical ice wall was the most exhausting thing I've done.

The technique, our instructor tells us, is to use the ice picks for balance while supporting your weight on your legs.

I made it over a tricky ridge, touched the tree at the top, then absolved down.

Back in Marquette, I enjoyed a well-earned meal at the 19th Century Vierling restaurant followed by an unbroken night's sleep at the (supposedly haunted) Landmark Inn hotel, with my unorthodox winter games complete.

FACT FILE

Getting there: Fly from Heathrow to Minneapolis St Paul, Minnesota, from £388 and Detroit, Michigan, from £369 with KLM. Book on 0871 231 0000 or klm.com

Where to stay: Rooms at Bayfield Inn, overlooking Lake Victoria, cost from £48 per night (001 715 779 3363 or see bayfieldinn.com). Rooms at The Landmark Inn, Marquette, start from £79 per night (001 888 752 6362 or online at thelandmarkinn.com).

Ice fishing: An eight-hole ice house sleeping four can be rented from Mac's Twin Bay Resort, Mille Lacs, Minnesota, from £100 for 12 hours. Visiting the ice houses is free. Check out macstwinbay.com or call 601 320 676 8709 to book.

Snowmobiling: Prices start from £88 per day. Call the Boulder Marine Center, Wisconsin, on 001 715 385 2177 or visit bouldermarinecenter.com

Dog mushing: A two-and-a-half-hour dog-sled run from Wollong Adventures in Mushing, Wisconsin, costs £124. Visit wollongadventures.com or call 001 800 681 9746.

Ice climbing: Equipment can be rented from Downwind Sports in Marquette from £35 a day (downwindsports.com).

For lots more travel information on the Great Lakes of North America, log on to greatlakesnorthamerica.co.uk or call 06455 020 574 for a brochure.

GO FOR IT

If skiing and snowboarding aren't your



ACTION MAN: Rick tried out a snowmobile, left, and ice climbing, right, as well as fishing for the elusive Walleye from the luxury of his hut on Mille Lacs, main picture



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