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20 great things to do this winter

From a snow and ice carnival in Quebec to a tribal festival in Ethiopia, here are 20 reasons not to stay home and mope this winter

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Making a song and dance ... the Festival of a Thousand Stars where tribes from all over Ethiopia walk out of the desert and foothills to perform as array of ceremonial dances and songs.

Cool

Free art, New York, Jan 16-Feb 12

Californian video artist Doug Aitken transforms the walls of New York's Museum of Modern Art into the world's most thought-provoking cineplex. Every night, five different films, featuring the likes of Donald Sutherland, Tilda Swinton and singer Cat Power, will be projected on to exterior planes of the Yoshio Taniguchi-redesigned MoMA in a project called Sleepwalkers.

• Free. moma.org.

Architectural spa, Switzerland

If you want to get away from chocolate box chalets in the Alps, the place to go is Switzerland - really. In Arosa, the Tschuggen Grand Hotel has lavished £15 million on its new Bergoase spa, designed by Mario Botta, the man behind the La Scala renovation. Linked to the hotel by a glass bridge and built largely into the mountain, it features light wells that look like illuminated sails.

- tschuggen.ch

Luci d'Artista, Turin, until Jan 28

The Artists' Lights covers the city with displays from a range of creative people. Two of the highlights are a glowing crane, from which hangs an upended pyramid acting as a barometer; and a Fibonacci sequence running down the side of the Mole Antonelliana tower, the symbol of Turin.

- torinoartecontemporanea.it

Glasgow International Comedy Festival, March 8-24

For years, Glasgow produced all the comics but because of the fringe festival Edinburgh was synonymous with the craft. In 2003, the west hit back with a "pure" comedy festival - no numpties on stilts or physical theatre, just stand-up, comedy films, plays and the odd comedy seminar. So far, the only headliner announced for 2007 is Russell Brand (March 10), but last year's line-up included Jimmy Carr, Dara Ó Briain, Neil Innes and Jerry Springer The Opera.

- glasgowcomedyfestival.com

Trailer park snowboarding, France

Instead of cramming dozens of people into an apartment made for four, you can pile into a mobile home. The Parc L'Escale is in the pretty little French resort of Le Grand Bornand. From £413 for a week, including ferry crossings (for one car, don't get cheeky), you get a six-bed trailer with a kitchen/diner, and a decking area with barbecue and patio heater. Linda Barker designed the interiors, but don't let that put you off.

- thomson-ski.com

Extreme ice skating, Stockholm

As the Baltic sea freezes around the 24,000 islands of the coast around Stockholm, Swedes take to the ice. "Trip skating" gives you a mix of exhilaration (you can pick up a fair amount of speed on the open ice) and tranquility (it's crisp and quiet out here between the forested islands). Make sure you team up with a local guide who knows the safest places to skate.

- Nature Travels (naturetravels.co.uk) offers guided and fully equipped day skating trips on the ice just south of Stockholm at Trosa, for £199 for a group of up to five. For travel go to visitsweden.com.

Nuremberg Christmas market

Unlike many Christmas markets in Germany and elsewhere, Nuremberg's Christkindlesmarkt has strict rules on what can be sold - just traditional decorations, mulled wine, sausages, Zwetschgenmännle ("little prune people") and the excessively moreish Lebküchen (ginger cakes). The setting - especially if there's a dusting of snow on the steep, tiled roofs - is almost Disney Christmassy.

- Lufthansa (lufthansa.com) flies London City-Nuremberg for £102 in December.

The Bell Inn, Monmouthshire

September saw the Michelin Pub Of The Year award go to Wales for the first time (only just in Wales - the Bell Inn, Skenfrith, is just off the Wye Valley Road): organic beers to sup by the fire; guest rooms (ask for Coachman - spacious and free of the four-poster premium); and, above all, excellent food. Praise has been heaped on the breakfast of scrambled egg and smoked salmon from the Black Mountains.

- Doubles from £100 B&B, skenfrith.co.uk.

Winter Carnival, Quebec, Jan 26-Feb 11

Based in and around an enormous ice palace, entertainment includes dog sled races, snow rafting, ice sculpting competitions, and a freezing "snow bath" for an early morning dip. Mont Sainte Anne ski resort, just half an hour away, has three snowboard parks and views over the ice floes of the St Lawrence river, and après-ski is very much part of the carnival.

- carnaval.qc.ca, frontierski.co.uk.

Cádiz Carnival, Feb 15-25

One of the world's biggest and best. Ten days of music, costumes, satire, revelry and, er, takeaway fried fish-eating, culminating in a firework display and burning of a witch on La Caleta beach. The Barrio de la Viña is the famous centre of celebrations but there are up-and-coming rivals such as Plaza de las Flores. Cadiz may be in the south of Spain but it's also on the Atlantic so don't expect balmy temperatures - you'll need to wrap up.

- Stay at the Parador de Arcos de la Frontera, a former palace, £85 per night for a double room, parador.es.

Hot**Literary Sri Lanka, Jan 11-14**

Sri Lanka's first ever literary festival. As well as raising the profile of native writers such as Romesh Gunsekera and Yasmine Gooneratne, it will feature Indian stars such as Kiran Desai and Suketu Mehta - plus British authors with regional links: former BBC India correspondent Mark Tully, William Dalrymple, and sci-fi legend Arthur C Clarke, who has lived in Sri Lanka for half a century.

- cazenove+loyd (cazloyd.com) offer a week at Galle Fort Hotel during the festival from £1,290pp and can book festival events including dinners with authors at private houses; galleliteraryfestival.com (site not yet running).

Drink a proper caipirinha, Rio

Go to a small bar, where you wait and watch as the drink is freshly prepared. The best place is Academia da Cachaça in Leblon, near Ipanema, which stocks 2,000 varieties of the spirit, and serves a hearty feijoada - pork and black bean stew - to line the stomach.

- academiadacachaca.com.br. Five nights at the Caesar Park Hotel in Rio starts from £1,542 including flights and an evening with an expert at the Academia da Cachaça with cazenove+loyd (cazloyd.com).

Like a Vietnamese Cochin, this world heritage site is a fascinating mix of foreign influences - Chinese traders' houses and a Japanese bridge alongside traditional Vietnamese buildings - and a thriving shopping spot where cut-price tailors abound. Stay at the 150-year-old former home of a Chinese merchant, Vinh Hung 1 (that "1" is important, there are other Vinh Hungs) - and book one of the balcony rooms, featured in The Quiet American film, for £25 a night. Or splash out on a night at the new Nam Hai, a luxurious beach resort just outside the town (£180 per room).

- vietnamstay.com/hotel/vinhhung1. thenamhai.com

Save the manatee, Honduras

The Cuero y Salado wildlife refuge on the Caribbean coast of Honduras protects 10% of the world's population of sea cows. You can volunteer to work there (for a minimum of four weeks), patrolling the river, observing wildlife (jaguar, alligators, monkeys, boa constrictors) clearing trails and tour guiding. One of dozens of volunteer holidays from i-to-i.

- Four-week conservation trip, £985, dates throughout winter. i-to-i.com.

Big Day Out, Australia & NZ, Jan 19-Feb 4

The biggest music festival Down Under stops at Auckland (Jan 19), the Gold Coast (21), Sydney (25), Melbourne (28), Adelaide (Feb 2) and Perth (4) - with a permanent line-up including The Killers, Muse, The Streets and Kasabian. Register your interest (from any country) and there are weekly random draws until December 28.

- Tickets A\$115 (£45). bigdayout.com.

Paraglide in Patagonia

Soar above volcanos, copper-stained lakes and the occasional condor yet still feel loomed over by the Andes. Argentina's paragliding scene in places such as Bariloche is lively, with many Europeans and Americans basing themselves here in winter as teachers.

- Journey Latin America (journeylatinamerica.co.uk) offers two-week tailor-made holidays in Argentina, including paragliding in Bariloche, Buenos Aires, Perito Moreno, Tierra del Fuego etc from £2,234.

Junkanoo, Bahamas, New Year's Eve

The Bahamian version of first footing. At midnight, groups of musicians, dancers and general loons in costumes made from colourful crepe paper hit the streets and "rush" till dawn. Rush means make as much noise and have as much fun as possible, as onlookers drink rum cocktails and dance to Junkanoo music - as popularised by the Baha Men of Who Let The Dogs Out? fame. The biggest Junkanoo is in Nassau. And, yes, it is funky.

- For affordable accommodation in Nassau, go to bahamas.co.uk.

Festival of a Thousand Stars, Ethiopia, Dec 16-18

Tribes from all over Ethiopia walk out of the desert or the Gamo highlands foothills and the Rift valley to gather on a football pitch in Arba Minch, the main town of the area. There, they perform a dazzling array of ceremonial dances and songs, kicking up clouds of red dust. Fans of Bruce Parry's

BBC series, Tribe, will recognise the Dasnach and Hamar peoples.

- Wild Frontiers (020-7736 3968, wildfrontiers.co.uk) offers a one-week trip with three days at the festival for £1,350.

Experience New Mumbai, India

The best Indian chefs were once to be found in big hotels, but several high-quality restaurants (pointedly referred to as "standalones") have succeeded. These often serve Mediterranean or Asian food from further east, but always with a local reinterpretation. Most become nightclubs later in the evening - look out for Bollywood stars at Olive (0091 22 2605 8228), Indigo (+22 5638 5490) or Trishna's (+22 5639 9999).

- Jet Airways India (jetairways.com) flies to Mumbai for £375 in February.

Marrakech Marathon, Morocco, Jan 28

One of the world's most beautifully set races traces its way through the Medina, past the jutting muezin towers of mosques, weaving among palm groves and all with the startling backdrop of the Atlas mountains. When you've run yourself into the ground, stagger back to a riad.

- The Best of Morocco has a selection from £610pp for the week of the race, including flights and transfers. morocco-travel.com, marathon-marrakech.com.

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