

## CANADA

# Camp in comfort in a snowy paradise

SUZANNE MORPHET thrives on holiday in a 'ski chalet on wheels'

**H**ow will you stay warm?" It was an obvious question when I told friends that my husband and I planned to camp in a motorhome in Canada in winter. "Your water will freeze!" warned one. "You've never driven an RV (recreational vehicle) and the roads could be icy," said another.

The fact these were Canadian friends, people who know Canadian winters, gave credence to their concerns, but the company we would be renting from — CanaDream — has deep Canadian roots too, and rents a fleet of winter-ready RVs with furnaces and extra insulation that promised to keep us warm and cosy down to -30C.

So after listening politely, Kit and I proceeded to plan.

We would pick up our 28-foot Maxi Motorhome RV in Vancouver and drive east across British Columbia to the Okanagan Valley, then turn south, cross the Canada-US border and explore some ski areas in the Cascade mountains of Washington State while gradually making our way back to Vancouver.

Before pick-up day, we watched a few of CanaDream's "how to" videos so we knew the basics, such as hooking up water and emptying waste tanks, but we also got tips for winter. These included "keep your furnace at 16C minimum to keep the holding tanks from freezing" and "pour boiling water over a waste cap that's frozen shut". I planned to leave these details to Kit since he likes to say, "If a guy can't be handsome, he better be handy!"

Leaving Vancouver on a sunny

Suzanne Morphet's first campground, at Camperland RV Resort in BC's Fraser Valley.



**That night we sleep soundly, snuggled under a heavy duvet in pitch blackness, any light and noise blocked by the insulated window blinds.**

6C afternoon in late January, we follow BC's longest river — the Fraser — inland, admiring the snow-covered behemoth to our south-east. Mount Baker is in Washington State and will be the last place we ski nine days hence. Reaching Camperland RV Resort

in the Fraser Valley, Kit carefully backs the RV into our first night's campsite while I stand outside to direct. (It helps to have two people to park a rig this big.)

That night we sleep soundly, snuggled under a heavy duvet in pitch blackness, any light and noise blocked by the insulated window blinds.

The next day, Highway 3 is dry and bare as we follow it east, up steep mountain slopes, into frosty valleys, past ponderosa pine forests, and through fields with grazing cattle.

Reaching the southern end of the Okanagan Valley, we're in the closest thing to a desert in Canada. Summers are hot and dry. But even here there's precipitation, and when it falls in winter, it's a light, dry snow, what locals call champagne powder. It's what skiers crave.

Apex Mountain Resort gets about 0.5m of snow annually.

All that "champagne" together with a high-speed quad lift and 600m of vertical drop means Apex approximates some of BC's better known resorts, but with far fewer visitors because there's limited accommodation.



Inside CanaDream's 28-foot Maxi Motorhome RV that's winter-proofed with a furnace, insulated walls and blinds, and hot running water.



At Junction 3 Coffee House in Osoyoos, guests can sit outside in heated 'igloos'.



A frozen wetland in the Fraser Valley, near Vancouver. Pictures: Suzanne Morphet



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Suzanne Morphet gives the bear at Apex Mountain Ski Resort a hug on a quiet day.

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We don't mind — we've got our "chalet on wheels".  
"We're at 7200ft (2190m) up at the top, which is the same elevation as the top of Big White, and quite a bit higher than Silver Star, higher than Sun Peaks," says manager James Shalman, naming some of BC's best known resorts, adding, "I grew up in Vancouver, skiing Whistler."  
"I've been here 23 years and not ever bored of skiing."

As we cruise some nicely groomed intermediate runs, the sun warms our faces and we rarely see another person.

It feels like we have the mountain all to ourselves.  
At the end of the day, we swap our rental skis for skates and glide silently through the forest on a kilometre-long skating loop, another nice surprise.

The weather couldn't be more different the next day at nearby Mt Baldy.

A ghostly white fog blankets the mountain. It's eerily beautiful, with fresh snow coating the Lodgepole pine trees, but it's hard to see. After a few runs, we drive back to the valley bottom to explore a couple of notable attractions.

At the Nk'Mip (IN-ka-meep) Desert Cultural Centre, the Osoyoos Indian Band has created engaging educational displays among the sage and Antelope-Brush shrubs on some of its 647ha.

Life-size metal sculptures of people and animals bring the muted winter landscape to life. Women pick berries and dig for bitterroot, while men fish with spears and erect teepees.

Inside the centre's rammed earth building, two multi-sensory theatres give visitors a feel for the desert ecology and the legends of



Above, enjoying coffee in the sun on the frozen edge of Lake Osoyoos in late January. Left, sculptures throughout the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre show how the Sylix people once lived. Below, the full route of the trip.

the people who thrived in this rare ecosystem before newcomers forced them onto reserves at the start of the 20th century.

By the 1930s, settlers had figured out how to irrigate the land. Today, the tiny town of Oliver is recognised as the wine capital of Canada, with more than 40 wineries in a 20km stretch.

At the District Wine Village, a circular collection of buildings, 13 artisanal winemakers work together, sharing presses and exchanging knowledge to create VQA (Vintners Quality Alliance) wines.

That night, we enjoy more local flavours at The Bear, The Fish, The Root and The Berry, within walking distance from our campground at Nk'Mip RV Park. Part of Spirit Ridge Resort, the restaurant's menu is inspired by traditional foods of the Sylix people: black bear, Chinook salmon, Bitterroot and Saskatoon berry.

On our final morning in Canada we walk from our campsite to the frozen edge of Lake Osoyoos to enjoy our morning coffee in the



sun. We also ponder some worrying news: a major winter storm is on its way to Washington State, where we're heading next.

Should we stick to the plan or change course?

**Suzanne Morphet was a guest of CanaDream and Destination BC. They have not influenced this story, or read it before publication.**

fact file

- CanaDream has seven pick-up and drop-off locations across Canada. It's the only RV provider in Canada offering certified winter-ready RVs. The CanaDream Club app provides options and preferred rates for more than 1000 campgrounds, activities, tours and attractions. CanaDream.com



Skaters enjoy the 1km loop through the forest at Apex Mountain Ski Resort. Pictures: Suzanne Morphet

In tomorrow's **Sunday Travel** you can find out if the rest of Suzanne Morphet's RV road trip goes according to plan