

# Canada and Eco-lodge Holidays Are a “Natural” Fit

Some eco-lodges are truly remote, one might say immersed in a natural setting, while requiring considerable effort or expense to reach them. Other eco-lodges are more accessible, only a short drive or boat ride removed from the beaten path while still retaining the feel of a genuine nature adventure. I will share two authentic eco-lodge experiences in Canada, each one with a distinctive personality and a natural backdrop that is guaranteed to offer a memorable eco-holiday.



The first indication that “remote” is about to happen is when you park your vehicle on the shore of Québec’s St Lawrence River and transfer to an expert-driven vehicle. You are not permitted to drive yourself into **Chic-Chocs Mountain Lodge** ([Chicchocs.com](http://Chicchocs.com)), located in the mountainous terrain of the province’s eastern Gaspé Peninsula. In winter, you will ride in a Sherman tank-sized snowmobile; in warmer seasons, it will be a hardy bus used to navigate rough forested roads. About 1.5 hours later and 615 metres higher, guests arrive at the beautifully-designed lodge, offering instant nature therapy immersion in a protected wilderness reserve.

With prefabricated modules flown in by helicopter so as not to damage the surrounding landscape, the lodge rests on its own mountain top, overlooking layers of other mountain tops as far as the eye can see. At first, the quietness is almost uncomfortable. The 18 ensuite rooms, all in naturally-finished wood and furnished with Québécois handicrafts, the giant living room with fireplace, and the superb cuisine served family style with guests and guides sharing dishes around the table, all encourage relaxation and conversation. The lodge prides itself on being environmentally friendly, with both staff and guests practicing reduce, re-use and re-cycle on a daily basis. Everything

possible is biodegradable including fuel.

A unique aspect of this lodge is that the government of Québec is the owner, a model experiment opened in 2005 to encourage people to discover remote natural environments in every season while impacting the surroundings as little as possible. Out on the trails and alpine meadows looking back from another valley or mountain peak, the lodge is so perfectly camouflaged as to be virtually invisible.



In winter, guests come for the snowy peaks and valleys, but there is no need to bring your bulky clothing and outdoor equipment with you. The lodge's multi-purpose room provides warm clothing in a range of sizes and everything required for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing on well-marked trails and hillsides. In the warmer months, hiking, animal and bird spotting, lake kayaking and fishing or swimming under a towering waterfall offer pleasant excuses to be outdoors. All is part of your eco-lodge stay, including naturalist guide services and walkie-talkie sets for those who wish to set off on their own for a few hours.

No matter what the season, wildlife encounters abound. Woodland caribou, moose and deer are the most common large animals with the occasional black bear, especially in berry season. The natural habitat of the Chic-Chocs Mountains makes it a real haven for all these large animals. Expect to meet a moose or two while out hiking because there are nearly five per square kilometer!

On Vancouver Island, 4,000 kilometres west and accessible by car is **Strathcona Park Lodge**, ([Strathcona.bc.ca](http://Strathcona.bc.ca)), both a lifelong learning nature centre and a relaxing nature retreat. Conceived 52 years ago by high school teachers, Jim and Myrna Boulding, as an outdoor education and environmental learning opportunity for school children and tourists of all ages, their vision has now become a model for similar facilities around the world. The lodge is still family-owned, with son

Jamie and his wife Christine successfully expanding this nature-as-classroom experience and welcoming individuals, families and groups to the lake on which the lodge is situated. Deliberately rustic and spread out across the heavily-wooded property, the accommodation consists of multi-room cabins suitable for families or groups of friends, and larger naturally-weathered structures with bedrooms and private balconies to absorb the splendid tranquility of the lake and snow-capped mountains beyond.

Guests are encouraged to choose from a daily menu of adventures, such as making native bread (bannock) over a beach campfire, canoeing, sailing or kayaking, orienteering and hiking with an educational guide to learn about the plants, animals and geology of the area. Three favorites during my stay were a two-hour educational walk among some of the tallest trees in the world, a tranquil guided kayak trip to the end of the lake, and a visit to a series of dazzling waterfalls bordering the lodge just inside Strathcona Provincial Park, the oldest provincial park in British Columbia.



For those who want more intense action in their nature holiday, there is supervised cliff rappelling, ziplining, wilderness camping and learning survival techniques. And don't think that these appeal only to the young and fit! The lodge has been partnering with Elderhostel since the 1980s to offer sold-out, seven-day "Intergenerational Adventures" for active seniors and their 9-14 age grandchildren. "We have had grandparents bring each of their grandchildren here individually, some over a decade," says Executive Director, Christine Clarke, "with siblings taking home glowing reports of their generational experiences. By the end of their week here, grandparents are often viewed differently for all the challenging things they did, and for all they shared with their grand kids."

**By Alison Gardner**

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