

Plan a shopping vacation during the holiday season

BY MARY QUINLEY
CORRESPONDENT

"Tis the season for shopping. It's also a fabulous excuse for a holiday getaway via car, train or plane.

To help jump-start your plans with your favorite shopping partner, here's a sampling of holiday packages. Let the shopping begin!

CHICAGO

The Windy City invites you and yours to Chicago, an annual family-friendly celebration with a medley of holiday markets, ethnic fests, parades and indoor/outdoor cultural activities.

"The holiday season is really

a magnificent time to visit Chicago and to take advantage of great shopping opportunities," said Dorothy Coyle, director of the Chicago Office of Tourism.

The city offers many choices and values from the downtown shopping on Magnificent Mile and State Street to the shopping in neighborhoods and museum gift shops, Coyle said.

One of the more unique shopping possibilities is Christkindlmarkt, a replica of an authentic German marketplace. It features more than 50 European vendors selling an array of handmade items from wooden ornaments and toys to German food. The market will be open from Nov. 28 through Dec. 23.

The "Chicago for the

Holidays" option from Dec. 6-8 includes a visit from Nordstrom and FAO Schwarz personal shoppers and tickets to a theater performance. Cost is \$980 for a single and \$4,540 for a double at the Fitzpatrick Chicago Hotel.

Need more info? Call the Chicago Office of Tourism toll-free (877) CHICAGO or visit the Web at www.877chicago.com.

GREAT LAKES CROSSING

Check out the "Shop, Sleep, and Shop Again!" deal at Great Lakes Crossing in Auburn Hills.

"Make it a girlfriend getaway and stay at a hotel or take that special someone and stay at a bed-and-breakfast," said Jennifer Clarke, tourism marketing specialist.

Packages begin at \$107 per room. Included are accommodations, taxes, breakfast, a \$25 dining voucher per room good at participating restaurants, tote bag and a Visitor Savings Card with discount coupons.

Be sure to ask for a "twipe card" from the hotel/bed-and-breakfast or pick up one at a local Big Boy restaurant or a Pistons home game. Bring it to the shopping center for your chance to win a \$100,000 Great Lakes Crossing gift certificate.

The shops provide tremendous values on high-quality merchandise for a whole lot less, said Clarke.

You'll find a Neiman Marcus Clearance Center, Burlington Coat Factory, Off 5th Sales Fifth Avenue Outlet, Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World, multiple restaurant choices, theaters, a children's play area and lots more.

Great Lakes Crossing is at 4900 Baldwin Road in Auburn Hills. For information, call toll-free (877) SHOP-GLC or check the Web at www.shopgreatlakescrossing.com.

TORONTO

"Toronto is a shopper's paradise, especially with the U.S. exchange rate," said Ellen



Combine holiday shopping and a mini vacation in Chicago.

Flowers, media relations officer, Tourism Toronto.

Hotel prices start as low as \$65 U.S. per night. Together in TORONTO packages include transportation options such as VIA Rail.

The possibilities for shopaholics are endless. Do you prefer an indoor mall? Then meander through the Eaton Centre that is located in the core of the city and houses more than 300 stores.

If fun-and-funky boutiques, second-hand stores or high-end shops pique your interest, check out the neighborhoods.

In the Nutcracker Neighborhood there are lots of small cozy specialty shops, including a shop which has the most extensive Christmas decoration collection I have ever seen," said Flowers.

Check out Tourism Toronto's Web site www.toronto-tourism.com or call (800) 205-7638 for more details.

HOTEL BARONETTE'S HOLIDAY

SHOPPING PACKAGE

Looking for a close-to-home holiday adventure mixed with eclectic shops, upscale dining

and comfy sleeping quarters? Then check out the Hotel Baronette's Holiday Shopping Package.

For a rate of \$119 a night plus tax, guests receive a shopping bag, VIP Card with coupons for various stores at Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi, hotel beverage reception and a free goodie bag. Up to four people are allowed in a room. Meals are not included in the package.

Gala Hallmark, Crabtree & Evelyn, Baily Banks & Biddle and free valet parking are some of the discounts offered with the VIP Card.

After your trek through the mall, soothe your tired muscles at the hotel's sauna or whirlpool. Or dine at the elegant No. VI Chophouse & Lobster Bar.

The package is valid on Friday and Saturday nights through Dec. 22. Reservations are required by calling (800) 395-9009.

Hotel Baronette is at 27790 Novi Road, just off I-96, on the perimeter of Twelve Oaks Mall.

MALL OF AMERICA

Go ahead and bring the kids on this shopping excursion. A

roller coaster, amusement park, an aquarium and a LEGO playground attract families to the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minn.

Yet shopping is the main attraction. The mammoth complex houses four anchor stores (Macy's, Bloomingdale's, Nordstrom and Sears), more than 500 other stores, an array of eateries and movie theaters.

From Dec. 6-23, MLT Vacations is offering a package to the mall for \$317 per person. This rate includes air, hotel accommodations and taxes for two nights at the Clarion Hotel in Bloomington, free airport and Mall of America shuttles, Mall of America coupon book, complimentary shuttle service to Mystic Lake Casino (approximately 30 miles southwest of the mall) and 500 Northwest WorldPerks Bonus Miles.

Seven days advanced notice is required. For more information, call (800) 800-1504 or visit www.nwnworldvacations.com.

Mary Quinley is a Livonia resident and writes about food and travel for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. You can reach her at MQinfo@aol.com.



A youngster rests his feet and gets a "ride" while shopping in downtown Chicago.

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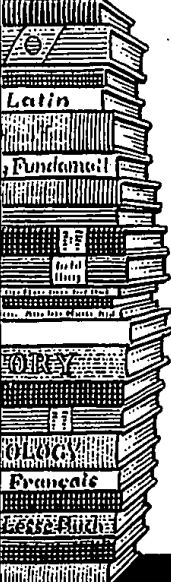
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HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

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