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**Canadian winter**

***At Siwash Lake Ranch in British Columbia, recreation is outdoors amidst forest and meadow - skiing, snowshoeing, fishing and birding***

Are you ready for Siwash Lake Ranch located in the foothills of the Cariboo Mountains? Before you say "yes," read on.

The main lodge, perched on a knoll overlooking Siwash Lake, is miles from restaurants and highways; shopping is not an option in this 80,000-acre wilderness. Phone lines straggle down the nearest dirt road and this 7,000-square-foot ponderosa pine chalet has no city water or utilities. Recreation is outdoors, amidst forest and meadow. Evenings drift by the old-fashioned way - on the front porch or beside the fireplace, talking, listening to music, reading or playing checkers.

Most nearby neighbours are the four-legged sort: deer, moose, bear, badger, coyotes, horses, three dogs and a couple of pet cows. Guiding the enterprise with both hands on the reins is Siwash Lake Ranch's owner and 21st-century pioneer, Allyson Rogers. Equally handy with chainsaw or bread maker, this former city girl is hardly your typical hotelier.

Still, if you're ready to fly to Vancouver, Canada, catch a 55-minute commuter flight to Kamloops, drive two and one-half more hours on paved and dirt roads and abandon your cell phone, a few off-grid days at Siwash Lake Ranch is a glorious experience.

Until recently, Rogers took guests only in summer. But last year she added her first winter season with enticements we couldn't resist. Tempted by visions of frosty snowball fights, the northern lights, sled-dog treks, icicles on the eaves and cosy hours beside a crackling fire - we booked four days at the ranch at the end of a trip to Whistler Blackcomb Ski Resort, north of Vancouver.

You can ski or snowshoe right from the front door, across the frozen lake or follow logging and service roads in the forest. Rogers supplies the equipment or you can bring your own. Longer snowmobiling treks and ice fishing can be arranged through a nearby outfitter. But the highlight of our stay was the two days we spent learning to dogsled..

In summer, Rogers hires a chef, but in winter she wears the toque, serving three meals daily. The cuisine, best described as healthy American, mixes salmon, steaks and chicken with rice,

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vegetable dishes and salads. A tray with coffee and muffins appears at your room early each morning and appetisers and wine are served before dinner. Rogers' computer provides email access for making reservations and contacting home.

In summer, the horseback-riding programme is paramount. Rogers' wranglers guide long and short rides, give individual lessons and offer horse-care how-tos in the barn and on the trail. Non-riders can hike, canoe on the lake, swim off the dock, play horseshoes and fish in the Bonaparte River. With the lake in front and binoculars next to the window, the birding is extraordinary. TRIBUNE MEDIA SERVICES

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