



"God bless us, every one!"

TINSEL towns

HOLIDAY FESTIVALS FROM EAST TO WEST

If this time of year conjures up images of prancing sugar plum fairies and mountains of mincemeat, you may want to add a snowy stroll through Quebec City's **Petit Champlain**, the oldest commercial quarter on the continent, dating to the mid-17th century. During each weekend in December and every day from the 25th to 31st, the cobble walkways will be festooned like an old-fashioned tree, as the area transforms into Christmases past, present and future as part of a

three-kilometre-long itinerary devoted to Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. The festivities include an animated crèche, carollers in period costume and fiddle players (quartierpetit-champlain.com/en).

In the nearby suburb of **L'Ancienne-Lorette**, Le Noël Hamel translates as the biggest show of holiday decorations in the

country with 6,000-plus offerings from around the globe in a 15,000-square-foot space. Last-minute shoppers will be pleased to hear it's on until January (jardinhamel.com).

With Dec. 21 heralding the longest night of the year, SAD sufferers might want to park themselves in front of light therapy boxes and pray. In **Vancouver**, it also signals the 17th annual Winter Solstice Lantern Festival that last year drew 18,000 people out from under their electric blankets and into the streets for an evening of ebullience. Staged in five different parts of the city, this free festival celebrates with lanterns, singing, dancing, drumming and art.

In one area, visitors will find a giant Tree of Life, and can contribute to ritual floor drawings (known as *rangoli*), while illuminated labyrinths created with more than 700 beeswax candles brighten the night. "One way to get through the darkness is to focus on the return of light," explains festival creator Naomi Singer. "So I came up with this celebration of our relationship with the sun." Singer says this year, a spiritual healing space has been added to annual favourites such as Tibetan bowl tonings (secretlantern.org).

HiGH-TECH HOLIDAY

Should you be a gadget gal like me, you'll agree few things boost your hard drive more than a hotel with free WiFi and high-speed access, let alone motion sensors and touch-screen walls. Take the Andaz in New York City, where the front desk is a thing of the past — floating hosts check you in with mobile tablets. Equally cool is Paris's Le Pavillon des Lettres, where the 26 rooms (each is devoted to a letter of the alphabet corresponding to an international writer) feature an iPad loaded with international bestsell-



ers, hip playlists and daily papers. Once inside the guest rooms at Aria Resort & Casino in Las Vegas, the lights turn on automatically and the curtains part for a view of the city. The Peninsula, a luxury hotel in Tokyo, even has an electronics service department while the rooms boast Internet radio with 3,000 stations, mood-lighting controls and wireless phones with Skype.

Dear Santa, In addition to the noise-cancelling headphones and pashmina I'm never without, I'd like to add a few carry-ons to this year's list of inflight goodies. Please bring me a **sleep mask that won't smudge my mascara**, leaving me fresh-eyed for customs (mindfold.com). To ensure a latte actually makes it on board instead of spilling en route, could you wrap me up a **Tugo cup holder** (goodtugo.com) that fits within the frame of the handle of my rolling luggage? I know I've been naughty with all my overweight baggage, but I could manage much better if you put under my tree a **hand-held digital scale** (balanzza.com). As for an iPad? Yes please, Santa.

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