

Going Places

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OUTDOORS HOLIDAYS

Ride 'em, cowboy!

Ever wanted to round up cattle? Rope 'em, sort 'em, brand 'em and take them out to summer pasture? Here's your chance: British Columbia's **Elkin Creek Guest Ranch** is organizing a spring cattle drive -- well, two of them actually: One is next weekend, May 18 to 21, and the other next month, June 15 to 18. For the occasion, guests have a chance to help with the herd of 130 cattle. The ranch is located in the Chilcotin region of central B.C., about two hours southwest of Williams Lake. The cost for the three-night package is \$695, based on double occupancy, and includes accommodation, meals and the cattle drive (but not getting to the ranch). The drive itself takes place on the second day. The first day is spent getting pointers about riding and herding, and the final day can be spent doing other outdoor activities. www.adventurewestresorts.com/elkin or 1-877-346-9378.

EASTERN TOWNSHIPS

Try the tourist train

Starting tomorrow, the Orford Express Tourist Train will offer half-day excursions for people who want to explore Quebec's picturesque Eastern Townships by rail. The train runs weekends and holidays only and offers several different types of packages, including brunch, dinner or sightseeing trips. The excursions last three to four hours, and the train travels from Sherbrooke to Magog and back. (There are plans to extend the route to Bromont during the summer.) Costs range from \$40 to \$75 for adults, depending on the package. Along the way, visitors can see views of Lake Magog and Mount Orford as well as the pastoral panoramas of the Townships. www.orfordexpress.com or 1-866-575-8081.

GEAR TO GO

Smooth shave

Forget about lugging along a big can of shaving cream -- even if carry-on rules would permit it. This tiny bottle of shaving oil from Cromwell & Cruthers does the job beautifully, moisturizing your skin while it's at it. Intended for men, but it does a great job of women's legs too. \$4.50 at Mountain Equipment Co-op.

Q & A

Can I snorkel in Costa Rica?

Q We're travelling to Costa Rica in June. Are there resorts where we can snorkel off the beach?

A Costa Rica's coastline touches the Pacific and Caribbean, yet its shallow waters are hardly teeming aquariums. "Snorkelling is not off the beaches like in Belize," says Orlando Burgos, the Costa Rican owner of Costa Rica Travel Guide (1-877-786-6826, www.costaricatravelguide.com), which specializes in Latin America. "You need to journey a little bit." While many of the country's resorts have beach access and snorkelling, the best marine life requires a drive or boat ride:

- Manuel Antonio National Park, in the central Pacific region, has pockets of good snorkelling, such as in the tidal pools of Playa Espadilla Sur and around the coral reefs of Playa Manuel Antonio.

- In Cahuita, on the Caribbean, snorkellers can explore a coral reef aswarm with sea fans, tropical fish, green turtles and other critters.

- Cocos Island, 555 kilometres off the Pacific coast, is the ultimate underwater experience. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it has been compared to the Galapagos Islands. Reaching the park, which has no accommodations, is an adventure unto itself: The boat trip from Puntarenas can last up to 36 hours.

- For a less arduous adventure, take a snorkel tour to the Murcielago Islands in the Guanacaste region, along the northern Pacific coast. The islands are rife with whale sharks, manta rays and dolphins.

- If you plan to spend most of your time in mask and fins, stay in the Tamarindo region. Tamarindo Diria Beach and Golf Resort (011-506-653-0032, www.tamarindodiria.com), for one, is a four-star property that offers three-hour snorkelling tours. Barcelo Langosta Beach (1-800-227-2356, www.barcelo.com) includes snorkelling equipment in its all-inclusive price, and guests can snorkel off the beach or see more vibrant sea life on a tour.

For more information, contact the Costa Rica Tourism Board: 1-866-267-8274, www.visitcostarica.com

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- Colour Photo: (Train)
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