

TRAVEL INSIDER

## Great winter city escapes

BY ALFRED BORCOVER | Special to the Tribune

*January 20, 2008*

For anyone craving a short winter escape without traveling far or spending a bundle -- an urban change of pace, so to speak -- Midwestern cities provide great options. Don't laugh.

Whether you enjoy museums, art, theater, music, gambling or shopping, cities such as Detroit, Des Moines, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis and St. Louis have much to offer. What makes these mid-sized cities appealing is the ease with which you can pursue your favorite activities for more moderate prices than, say, in Chicago.

Here is a sampling of what you can find in these six cities, with examples of seasonal hotel packages. (Unless otherwise indicated, the package is one night for two people, and does not include taxes and parking.) Web sites for each city have an accommodations or deals link where you can find packages.

Detroit: Motown has had its ups and downs, but now things are definitely on the upswing. Spearheaded by an \$800-million, 18-story hotel with 400 rooms, the newly opened MGM Grand Detroit complex includes a casino, spa, restaurants by celebrity chefs Wolfgang Puck and Michael Mina, and five nightclubs and three casinos. Other major draws: the Detroit Institute of Arts, recently reopened after a \$158 million, six-year renovation designed by Michael Graves & Associates, and the nearby Henry Ford museum in Dearborn, a museum that gives Washington's Smithsonian a run for its money. The adjacent Greenfield Village, with the original homes of Robert Frost, Thomas Edison, Orville and Wilbur Wright, and George Washington Carver, is closed until April.

- The Inn on Ferry Street, Detroit Institute of Art package: \$189, includes breakfast, museum admission and parking.

- The Dearborn Inn (Marriott), the Henry Ford package: from \$179, includes tickets for two attractions and breakfast.

Details:<http://www.visitdetroit.com> ; 800-338-7648.

Des Moines: Flush from the invasion of presidential candidates, reporters and political pundits for the Iowa caucuses, the city is more than ready for an influx of winter visitors. Political junkies can get a taste of the caucuses at an exhibit in the State Historical Building. Cultural draws include the Des Moines Art Center, a fine museum designed by Eiel Saarinen with modern wing by I.M. Pei; the Des Moines Symphony Orchestra and the Iowa Ballet.

- Des Moines Marriott Downtown, Weekend Escape: from \$164, includes a \$50 gift card to the

hotel's Rock River Grill & Tavern.

- Embassy Suites on the River, Embassy Escape: \$204, includes bottle of champagne, box of chocolates and \$40 off dinner at the hotel.

Details:<http://www.seedesmoines.com> ; 800-451-2625.

Indianapolis: Home of the NFL Colts, NBA Pacers, the Indy 500 and the NCAA Hall of Champions, the Indiana capital also offers rich cultural experiences at the Indianapolis Museum of Art; the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art; the Children's Museum of Indianapolis and the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.

- Hampton Inn, Kid in Everyone package for two adults and two children: \$209, includes two-room suite, two adult and two children's tickets to the Children's Museum, Circle Center Mall coupon book, breakfast and parking.

Details:<http://www.indy.org> ; 800-323-4639.

Milwaukee: In many ways, Milwaukee is a smaller version of its big neighbor to the south, serving up art, theater, music, fine dining and funky neighborhoods. While beer and the city remain forever linked, it's the soaring Santiago Calatrava sail at the Milwaukee Art Museum that has become the city's icon. The Milwaukee Public Museum provides a glimpse into the city's past, and it just opened the anatomical Body Worlds exhibition. The Milwaukee Symphony and other performers play in Uihlein Hall, and there's plenty of theater as well. The historic Third Ward and Brady Street are worth exploring on foot.

- Pfister Hotel, Lion King package: from \$346, includes tickets to "The Lion King" and parking.

- Metro Hotel, Shop Till You Drop package: from \$234, includes \$20 Metro bar/cafe credit, 30-minute spa treatments, gift certificates/discounts at stores and boutiques, and parking.

Details:<http://www.milwaukee.org> ; 800-554-1448.

Minneapolis: While weather reports might make Minneapolis off-putting, the city is an exhilarating place to spend a few days. In addition to a dazzling array of architecture, the city's cultural offerings seem endless -- the Walker Art Center, the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Weisman Art Museum Minneapolis, a symphony orchestra and, of course, the spectacular new home of the Guthrie Theater.

- Crowne Plaza Downtown, Heart to Heart package (Feb. 13-17): \$129, includes bottle of champagne, breakfast and parking.

Details:<http://www.meetminneapolis.com> ; 888-676-6757.

St. Louis: The soaring Gateway Arch, at 630 feet, is the world's tallest national memorial, well-anchored in Jefferson Expansion Memorial Park near the riverfront. Visitors not fearful of heights can zigzag their way to the top in a kind of cable car/elevator for a spectacular view. On the ground, folks taking advantage of the city's Winter Magic hotel bargains can dip into the St. Louis Art Museum, see performances in the Fabulous Fox Theater and check out the Hill, the city's Italian district.

- Hampton Inn St. Louis Downtown, Arch Family Getaway: \$139, includes room for up to four people, up to four Gateway Arch tickets, up to four tickets to the "Great American West" movie, breakfast and parking.

Other hotels simply offer special winter rates.

Details:<http://www.explorestlouis.com> ; 800-916-0092.