

Why visit Canada this season? First of all, there hasn't been a big panic north of our border about diseased porkers running around spreading flu. And Canada must be a great place to live, because you don't see hordes of poverty-stricken Canucks crossing the border illegally to seek a better life in the U.S. Those assessments may be a bit cruel, but as my uncle Nildo the bookie always said, ya gotta go with the odds.



We've been to Canada many times, in its big modern Eastern cities of Montreal and Toronto, its wild west interior destinations of Banff and Moose Jaw, and its beautiful West Coast havens of Victoria and Vancouver. The people throughout Canada are endlessly friendly to visitors, including the French-speaking citizens in Quebec and Montreal. You can make their smiles grow wider if you know a few phrases in French, even just to order one of their great dinners and sip their delicious wines.

If you happen to be traveling in Canada when the U.S. dollar is strong, you can get some great bargains in all the stores, as well as more reasonable rates at restaurants, clubs, hotels and resorts. Speaking of resorts, Canada has some of the most beautiful in the world, with great scenery and recreation spots in the summer and fantastic ski slopes in the winter.

The food in cafes, restaurants and ready-made groceries is diverse and delicious. We were

there last winter for a hockey game, and we animal lovers were shocked when the arena coffee shop offered us deep-fried beaver tail. We were relieved when the delicacy turned out to be a long, long doughnut shaped like the little critter's flapper. However, we still haven't recovered from hearing corned beef in Canadian delis called smoked meat.

If you want a fun bargain trip from the U. S., just cross the border into Canada. And don't worry. Those friendly Canadian guys with the Smokey the Bear hats are Mounties, not U.S. Border Patrol agents.