

Fall a tasty time in Ontario



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Q: My wife has recently discovered cooking. For our first anniversary, I wanted to arrange some kind of cooking-themed weekend that's not too far away. I'm hoping you could help with an idea as I'm really stuck.

— J. Paredes, Mississauga

A: Culinary weekends are growing in popularity, and the province has a Savour Ontario Culinary Getaways guide you can view online at ontariotravel.net.

In the Muskoka-area, the Chef Michael Smith Weekend at Deerhurst Resort is scheduled for Oct. 26-28. The two-night gourmet getaway will showcase the celebrity chef's newest cookbook *Fast Flavours: 110 Simple Speedy Recipes*, and includes a fun four-course family style dinner party event on the Saturday night.

Rory Golden, Deerhurst executive chef says, "Chef Michael is a talented chef and advocate for using local and regional ingredients, a culinary

philosophy in-line with that of Deerhurst and Savour Muskoka. This is definitely a weekend not to be missed!"

The package starts from \$404 per room per night based on double occupancy and includes accommodation, a signed copy of Smith's cookbook, breakfast, a Friday-night dining event featuring a P.E.I. oyster station and Savour Muskoka recipes, and the Saturday night Cook The Book interactive dinner party hosted by Smith. For information and reservations, visit deerhurstresort.com or call 1-855-843-0230.

Q: If the Toronto zoo is going to get pandas next year what about the pandas in the United Kingdom? Will they still be there?

— P. Reiner, Toronto

A: With the buzz earlier this year about Canada's Panda win from China, you might think our pair was one of a kind. Not so. Tian Tian and Yang Guang — the U.K.'s only pandas — are on display at the Edinburgh Zoo (edinburghzoo.org.uk/) and will remain there for 10 years.

Edinburgh Zoo custodians say the pandas are a crowd favourite and visitor numbers have surged since the bears moved in last December. To get in on Edinburgh's panda action, it's best to show up before 11 a.m. for walk-in tickets, otherwise book online for the 20-minute group tour (maximum 50 people per group).

A happy Indira Kemp, of Edinburgh Zoo, told me, "You only pay for the price of admission, so it's free to see the bears." Tian Tian and Yang Guang have a fun routine at the exhibit called the Panda Handstand, she added.

Folks who are unable to visit in person can check out the zoo's Panda Cam (edinburghzoo.org.uk/pandacam.html).

Q: We want to hike at Blue Mountain and have heard about some trails there. Do you know what routes people usually take and if



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Award-winning Canadian chef Michael Smith will lead a culinary weekend at Deerhurst Resort in Muskoka.

there are trail maps available?

— S. Blechman, Mississauga

A: Blue Mountain is part of the Bruce Trail system, which has nine sections. Visit Brucetrail.org for information on free interactive maps and maps that can be purchased. To explore Blue Mountain, click on the interactive map link, which provides an overview, distances between Tobermory and Niagara, suggested hikes and photos to give you a sense of the area. For instance, the 4.8-km North Rim of the Pretty River Valley Trail is a loop trail. At its highest point, it ascends 540 metres above sea level and is the highest peak on

the Bruce Trail. Those interested in geology might like to check out one of the Geology Hikes scheduled until Oct. 27. Bruce Trail Clubs organize over 1,500 hikes annually. For membership details, contact them at brucetrail.org/store/membership or e-mail info@brucetrail.org.

Q: How can I hook up with fellow cyclists in Chicago?

— M. Lewin, Toronto

A: Chicagoans love to cycle. The lakefront alone boasts 29 km of car-free bicycle paths. Several tour operators offer bike tours. Check out BikeChicago.com for cycling tour

schedules and bike routes. There's also a new non-profit organization called BikeandPark.com that caters to cyclists. Currently, three U.S. cities are members of this network including Chicago. BikeandPark.com provides an online directory for bike rentals, tours, bike-sharing programs, including details on showers and lockers located across the city. In Chicago, Bike & Park's main location is the McDonald's in Millennium Park (239 E. Randolph St.). According to *Cycling* magazine, Chicago was voted the No. 1 bike-friendly city in America.

Send questions to ilona@mycompass.ca

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