



Spotlight

33 FISH STORY

GET YOUR COOL ON THIS WINTER WETTING A LINE THROUGH THE ICE

BY JENNIFER BAIN

I grew up believing there was one way to catch a fish through a hole in the ice: snowmobile to a hut somewhere on a quiet lake, set up wooden tip-ups by the holes in the cabin floor, and use minnows as bait. Then wait patiently for a strike while eating brown-bag lunches or boiling hot dogs on a propane camping stove. Boy, was I ever sheltered. After several winters spent fishing my way across the country, I have discovered clever twists to Canada's most underrated winter experiences. Here are two one-of-a-kind ice-fishing adventures.

NOCTURNAL CREATURES

Burbot are the unsung heroes of the Canadian fish world. The only freshwater member of the cod family, burbot look similar to eels, have a catfish-like whisker called a barbel and feel slippery because they're covered in protective mucus. These bottom-dwellers hunt at night and ambush their prey, so Yukoners such as guide Michael Doody — who creates custom fishing trips through Mount Logan Lodge (and its satellite business, Yukon Guided Adventures, pictured above) — get permits for baited setlines. Doody takes me out at dusk to check his 10 lines, refresh the fish skin bait, then cover the ice holes with mounds of snow so they don't freeze. The next day we return to check the lines again, then drive around the area looking for bison, elk and wolves. Burbot are his favourite fish, and

since the white, flaky meat is widely considered the "poor man's lobster," he uses it for a beer-battered burbot feast.

Where: Between Whitehorse and Haines Junction, Yukon

When: December to March

Why: For a strange and unusual fish

Fun fact: Burbot spawn in mid-winter under the ice in shallow water

ICE CONDO ESCAPE

Ontario's Lake Nipissing, where I grew up ice fishing in utilitarian huts, is now awash in snazzy ice condos. Each comes with bunk beds, a stove where you can pan fry your catch, a table where you can play euchre, a television, a furnace and a private loo. People "like the fact

that they are not on a schedule for when to go out on the ice and come off in the evening, as the fish do not bite on a schedule," says Cara Lee Hughes, who runs South Shore Camping & Ice with her husband, Garnet. Bring your own equipment or learn to string a line, elastic cord and warning bell from the ceiling into the hole. Nipissing is beloved for pickerel, but the species officially known as walleye has been overfished, and so catches must now be at least 46 centimetres long to be keepers. Consider chasing the plentiful yellow perch instead.

Where: Lake Nipissing, Ont.

When: Boxing Day to February/mid-March

Why: For the thrill of seeing what bites at 3 a.m.

Fun fact: This lake boasts 42 fish species

34 SLEEP IN THE TREES

It's your very own nest. Treetop Haven, about 40 kilometres west of Charlottetown, leaves two of its five TreePODS — elevated geodesic domes, each with an outdoor hot tub, a kitchen and a bathroom — open until December 31. Nestled on 20 hectares of birch and evergreen forest, Treetop Haven offers snowshoeing on a private trail, stargazing and forest bathing literally in the trees. Mount Tryon, P.E.I. —Aaron Kylie

