



**ASPEN AND ST. BARTS FULLY BOOKED?
THERE'S STILL ROOM AT THE INN IN LOTS OF COOL PLACES**

New York, NY, (November 1, 2005) — Anyone hoping to find accommodations over the winter holidays at the more fashionable ski resorts or chic islands in the Caribbean might as well forget it: they've been fully booked for months, in some cases for years. Happily, there are many other options – from ice skating in the courtyard of the Plaza Athénée in Paris to cross country skiing in what has been called America's prettiest small town of Woodstock, Vermont. Here are a few of them:

LONDON

For millions of Americans, the Christmas holidays are inextricably bound to Charles Dickens and his full-bodied depictions of 19th century **London**. So why not celebrate in the city itself, wandering its historic streets, visiting eminent museums, Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle, attending the Royal Ballet's performance of *Cinderella*, or skating at the Somerset House Ice Rink where participants get into the spirit with flaming torches? Information is available at: www.visitlondon.com/christmas. London's grandest hotels offer festive holiday options.

The Dorchester offers a traditional Christmas Carol Afternoon Tea on weekends through December, a five-course Christmas Eve dinner, and Christmas Day lunch, plus champagne and canapés in the Dorchester Bar. Boxing Day (December 26), a British tradition, is celebrated with a jolly lunch and afternoon tea, and New Year's Eve is feted with a champagne reception and six-course dinner. Special winter rates begin at £255 per

night, double occupancy, including English breakfast. Information is available at www.dorchesterhotel.com.

Another option might be to combine the holiday merry-making of the city with a country getaway. Situated in a historic manor house on 300 acres of Hertfordshire parklands just outside London, **The Grove's** holiday gets underway on December 24 with a visit to Santa's Grotto in the fanciful Winter Wonderland, complete with falling snow. On Christmas morning, Father Christmas delivers gifts to the room for the little ones and reappears later with more loot at the lunchtime feast, with circus entertainment and children's activities in Santa's Grotto all day long. On Boxing Day, the theme shifts to recreation, with golf on The Grove's championship 18-hole course, sybaritic treatments at the Sequoia Spa, bicycle excursions, and hiking. The two-night stay is priced from £1,450 per adult and £390 per child sharing the room. Information is available at www.thegrove.co.uk.

PARIS

There is no lovelier city in the world at Christmas than **Paris**, where millions of white lights decorating the boulevards, trees, and parks give true meaning to the "City of Lights." Most luxury hotels in Paris spare no expense in making the holidays memorable. At **Le Meurice**, every family traveling with children will have a Christmas tree in their room, while the entire lobby is done up with fanciful trees decorated by the city's most creative florists and designers and festooned with flowers, fruits, and vegetables. A two-night "Christmas Shopping Package" is offered December 1-28 that includes breakfast, Christmas tea with exquisite pastries, and surprise presents for adults and children. Booking ahead is recommended for an exceptional two-star dinner prepared by Chef Yannick Alléno, predicted to be well on his way to receiving a third Michelin star for *le Meurice*, the hotel's premier restaurant. Package prices begin at €675, double occupancy. Information is available at www.meuricehotel.com.

There's a special holiday treat at **Plaza Athénée**, whose exterior is all dolled up in garlands of white lights. For the first time, the hotel will have a marvelous skating rink in its courtyard, the *Cour Jardin*, as well as a grand Christmas tree decorated with wooden toys and candies in the lobby. From December 1 through January 15, the skating rink will be the main attraction in a two-night "Festive Season" package that also includes breakfasts and a gift voucher for the hotel's Plaza Red gift line. A gala five-course Christmas Eve dinner and a sumptuous three-course lunch on Christmas day will be served at Le Relais, one of the restaurants overseen by the legendary Alain Ducasse. Package prices begin at €90 per night, with a two-night minimum stay. Information is available at www.plaza-athenee-paris.com.

ACROSS AMERICA

There's no more traditional place to spend Christmas in the US than at the **Woodstock Inn & Resort** in central Vermont, where the winter holidays are a quintessential New England fantasy made real, with snow covered landscapes, roaring fires, heaps of presents, fragrant spruce trees decorating the public rooms, and more trees outdoors strung with white lights. On Christmas Eve, Santa takes the children on a caroling horse-drawn sleigh ride through the village, and throughout Christmas week, arts and crafts, walking tours, "kids in the kitchen" classes, and a host of other activities entertain indoors while excellent downhill and cross country skiing and snow shoeing make the great outdoors lots of fun. Room rates begin at \$299 per night. Information is available at www.woodstockinn.com.

In Santa Fe, guests at **Inn on the Alameda** can enjoy the crisp Southwestern air – perhaps with skiing in the morning and attending wonderful multi-cultural Christmas concerts in colonial churches later in the day. Particularly enchanting are the *farolitos*, small paper bags filled with sand and lit from within by votive candles, that adorn many of Santa Fe's downtown buildings. Room rates, including breakfast, start at \$235 per night. Information is available at www.innonthealameda.com.

For celebrity watching over the holidays, nothing beats sitting by the pool or in the Polo Lounge at **The Beverly Hills Hotel** in the midst of luxurious surroundings and Rodeo Drive shopping, elaborate decorations, and the mellow atmosphere and beauty of Southern California. Rooms are priced from \$425 per night, double occupancy. Information is available at www.beverlyhillshotel.com.

Another choice for the holidays is **Barnsley Gardens** in Adairsville, Georgia, north of Atlanta, where fishing, kayaking, and cycling take the place of snow. Holiday festivities nonetheless abound, including carriage rides, the traditional trimming and lighting of the Barnsley Christmas tree, and special celebratory meals. There's even a resident Fairy Godmother who can make holiday wishes come true! With over 12 miles of hiking trails, nature walks and wildlife searches offer more outdoor fun. Two-night Christmas packages are \$1,300 per couple and include breakfast and dinner; New Year's packages start from \$735 per couple including a gala New Year's soirée. Information is available at www.barnsleyresort.com.

FOLLOW THE SUN

If you must have sun, there's still some space on the **Crystal Cruises** 14-day Mexican Riviera voyage departing Los Angeles December 21 where, by happy coincidence, all three holidays will be celebrated in style. Festivities include a Christmas tree lighting with carols and cookies, Hanukkah dreidels, the arrival of Santa Claus, Chocolate Tea Time, \$100,000 worth of seasonal décor – from ornate sleighs to Old English toy soldiers a sumptuous Christmas feast, and a gala New Year's Eve. There's even a performance of "A Christmas Carol," plus a Christmas Mass, a Protestant Christmas Eve service, and a lighting of the menorah candles for the eight nights of Hanukkah, which, this year, overlaps Christmas and New Year's. Fares begin at \$6,425 per person, double occupancy. Information is available at www.crystalcruises.com.

CONTACT:
Alice Marshall Public Relations
(212) 861-4031
news@alicemarshall.com

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