

There's No Place like Burlington for The Holidays!

It's a busy season, Christmas, and it is easy to become stressed, and maybe a bit cynical, after negotiating busy streets and struggling through overcrowded stores.

The antidote is close at hand – think local, think heritage, think family.

Many of Burlington's attractions have special events and festive displays that are guaranteed to warm your heart and remind you what is really important about the season.

Above all, they are all family friendly and most of them are either free, or cost only a nominal fee. Even Scrooge would be amused.

The Royal Botanical Gardens

The RBG, for example, is still a warm and green place, even though the snow is blowing. Their special events are designed to bring you closer to the world of nature.

Doorways to the Holidays

If you haven't had a chance to see their Doorways to the Holidays Event, there's still time, and it is well worth seeing. The doors are almost a symbol of the true sentiment of the season – most are discarded used doors found curb side, or donated, that have been joyfully reinvented by RBG staff and volunteers. Close to a hundred doors, many with the wear and tear of use still evident, have been lovingly decorated for the holidays. One plain white door is brought to life with a white wreath, green and red holly and bright red wooden shoes. Another is a gentler

combination of soft blue and white, while another is decorated with a modern abstract wreath of doorknobs and hinges.

They are all intriguing, with a nostalgic charm that comes from their obvious age, and the fact that they have found a new life for Christmas. You might just pick up a few ideas for decorating your own doors. Wreath Expert Anne Dunbar of Wreaths 1962AD has created and donated five of her custom wreath designs for the doorways.

Breakfast with Santa

Visiting Santa at the Mall can be stressful, with line-ups and noise. Try a more sedate visit with Santa at the RBG. The **big guy in the red suit** will be there from 10 am to 4 pm on Saturday, Dec 18th and Sunday, Dec 19th. The reindeer will be there too, as well as **The Amazing Corbin**, the renowned magician who performs slight-of-hand tricks and mysterious magic with a light hearted touch.

Take some time to visit the **Model Railway Club Display**, with a miniature world traversed by little trains that loop through the landscape on curving tracks. The display will be at the RBG until Dec 19th.

Spend a Little Holiday Time with Mother Nature

Nature is a proven stress-buster, - being surrounded by green plants will lower your blood pressure, the scientists claim - so bring the family and hit the trails at the RBG. Every Sunday in December, there is a guided walk through the nature trails of the property from 2 pm to 3:30 pm. Each Sunday walk visits a different part of the gardens, from the Hendrie Valley to the north shore of Cootes

paradise. You may see bald eagles, fox tracks, deer or other seasonal denizens of the gardens, but you will definitely get fresh air and exercise.

Discovery Day Camps

Getting out of school for the holidays is a blessing for the kids, not quite so much so for busy parents. It isn't long before the little ones start looking for something to do. And here's a great solution – nature-based day camps at the RBG. The camps are for kids ages 4-13 and feature hands-on environmental-based programs, hikes, games, crafts and outdoor adventures. Mammal Maniacs, Animal World, Back to Nature and Eco Warriors are just some of the themed camps running from Dec. 20-23rd, and 27-31.

Greet the Winter Solstice as a Family

After Dec 21st, the days start to get longer, and the sun begins to come back. Welcome the sun in a solstice celebration that includes a night time guided hike with a roaring bonfire at the end.

Shop For Bargains and Unique Gifts

Where else could you pick up a smiling Buddha for the garden or a saucy cat for the backyard? The gift shop at the RBG is full of treasures, and right now most of them are on sale. “Many of our items are made in Canada, often by local artists,” explains Linda Palichuk a representative of Shop at the Gardens. “One of our most popular items is the Digit Garden gloves for women, a product that even got Kevin O’Leary, from the Dragons’ Den, to invest. And the

Garden Bandit, a Canadian made weeding tool, makes a great gift for a gardener.”

Snap up a unique piece of jewellery by Sandra Greenwood of Dundas, or some ceramic jewellery by Barbara Fotherby. “Our fire pots are also good sellers for backyards and patios,” Linda adds.

The Shop at the Gardens is a place where you can find something unique and special, and often locally made. It is a bonus that you will be away from the crowds and that, just around the corner, is the Mediterranean Garden where you can take a quiet walk.

Membership in the Gardens – a Perfect Christmas Gift

Membership has its privileges at the RBG, and there are many reasons for joining, including admission to the nature sanctuaries and gardens, lower costs for programmes, and discounts at the gift shop and restaurant. Membership also includes reciprocal free admission to other botanical gardens and arboreta throughout North America. If you know a gardener, or an avid walker who would love to frequent the Gardens, a gift of membership in the RBG would be a perfect present, and it wouldn't be something that would have to sit on the mantle. Or if this is something you have been promising yourself, consider becoming a member of the RBG in 2011.

For more details on any of these attractions or about membership, visit www.rbg.ca.

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