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Travel

This week's dream: Skiing the backwoods of Bohemia

"Before last winter, I had never given a thought to a ski holiday in Bohemia," said Joshua Hammer in *The New York Times*. Then a friend in Berlin, where I live, came back raving about his vacation in the western corner of the Czech Republic. A three-hour drive southeast of the German capital, and a one-hour drive from Prague, Bohemia's Jizera Mountains rise to about 4,000 feet. Though they lack the glamour and grandeur of the Alps, they do offer downhill skiing on a par with Vermont's, and some of the finest Nordic skiing in Central Europe. Every winter, Czech and German families flock to Bedrichov, the main resort village, whose surrounding hills are laced with nearly 100 miles of cross-country trails that thread through virgin forests and past frozen lakes and "stunning" mountain vistas.

I stayed with my two sons at a family-owned hotel in Janov nad Nisou, a mountain village. We rented cross-country skis in Bedrichov, then "plunged into the forest."



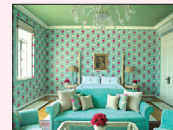
A fairy-tale setting for cold-weather fun

Because a heavy snow had fallen, the going was difficult at first, and Czechs "flew past us with breathtaking agility, skating seemingly effortlessly up steep slopes." Gradually, I found a rhythm and began taking special satisfaction in the downhill runs, "a feeling of having earned the exhilarating ride." During one gentle descent through a dense forest, we rounded a corner and were greeted with a scene out of the Brothers

Grimm: "a meadow dominated by a castle-like dark villa, with gabled windows and huge icicles dangling from the roof." It was the Samalova Chata, a guesthouse that began life as a 1756 glassblowing factory before becoming the summer home of Czechoslovakia's first chancellor. In the oak-paneled dining room, Czechs and Germans were washing down plates of roast pork and dumplings with steins of beer.

During our five days on the trails, we saw no other Americans. We also heard no English except for a few friendly hellos. The language barrier could be frustrating when we were scanning a Czech-only menu or a trail marker about local flora and fauna. But "the heartiness of the food, the warmth of our hosts, and the beauty of the forest compensated for the communication difficulties." Besides, because all trails lead back to Bedrichov, we were never lost. At Samalova Chata (samalova-chata.cz), rooms start at about \$20.

Hotel of the week



The hotel's Kennedy Suite

Suján Rajmahal Palace
Jaipur, India

Many royal palaces in India have been converted into hotels, "but rarely has one made the transition with as much flair as Rajmahal," said Laurie Werner in *Forbes.com*. Built in 1729 by the Maharaja of Jaipur as a garden retreat for his wife, the palace opened its 14 rooms and suites to paying guests in 2014. Mughal-era features were preserved and combined with colorful modern touches. In 1962, Jackie Kennedy stayed in the turquoise-and-violet suite now named for her. For eye-opening flair, though, nothing can match the 51-shades-of-pink breakfast room. sujanluxury.com; doubles from \$500

Getting the flavor of...

Miami's fast-changing SoFi

When I first visited Miami Beach's South of Fifth neighborhood, "there wasn't much to discover," said Neece Regis in *The Boston Globe*. Twenty years ago, SoFi—the triangle below Fifth Street in South Beach—was home to one high-rise condo, some decaying Art Deco hotels, and one famous seafood joint. Fast-forward to 2016, and the area is booming. One block south of Fifth, you can enjoy wood-fired pizza and lamb souvlaki at Meze Aegean Bistro, or lobster rolls and fried clam bellies at Izzy's Fish and Oyster. "Art Deco hotels have gone boutique," and works by local and international artists are shown at the chic Williams-McCall Gallery. But even with new construction rising "on what seems like every block," old favorites remain. Joe's Stone Crab, opened in 1913, still pulls in locals and tourists alike. "As SoFi continues to grow, hopefully it will keep its neighborhood charm."

A small-town revival in Story, Ind.

"This is a story about Story," an abandoned southern Indiana town reborn, said Mark Taylor in the *Chicago Tribune*. Founded in 1851, the farming community 50 miles south of Indianapolis never topped a population of 200, and that number shrank to a handful in the mid-20th century. The comeback began in 1978, when a local couple turned the old general store into an inn and bought up the rest of the town's 23 acres. Eventually, lawyer Rick Hofstetter bought the whole package and converted the carriage house, old mill, and other historic buildings into guest cottages. Today, the entire town of Story is the Story Inn. Guests can hike and bike more than 100 miles of wooded trails, or "sleep late and gorge themselves on fresh, locally sourced Midwestern cuisine." Hofstetter calls Story the perfect town. "When you hear gunfire, you don't jump," he says. "It's friendly fire; someone's bringing home a deer for dinner."

Last-minute travel deals

Peru for two
Explore the wonders of Peru's Sacred Valley with a loved one. The Explora Valle Sagrado lodge is offering two-for-one deals on stays through Dec. 31, 2017. From \$2,160 for three nights, including guided tours and meals. Book by Feb. 29. explora.com

Polar bear cruise
See the Arctic on a seven-day voyage around the remote Norwegian island of Spitsbergen. For Realm of the Polar Bear cruises departing between June 13 and Aug. 10, rates start at \$3,699, a 15 percent discount. Book by Feb. 29. adventureswithexplorations.com

Off-season Cape May
Spoil yourself at the grand Congress Hall in Cape May, N.J. The hotel's Winter Warm-Up package includes a daily \$40 dining and cocktail credit and 15 percent off one spa treatment. Doubles start at \$119; book by March 3. capersorts.com