

Winter treasure

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THERE'S NOTHING blah about Toronto's island winter wonderland.

Skating, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, bike riding, hockey, a church where you can bring your dog and the greatest view of the city are all just a short ferry ride away.

The excitement starts just metres from the dock when the ferry starts crunching through the Toronto harbour ice. Look straight ahead and you might mistake this for an Arctic boat ride. If you look over your shoulder it's Toronto's skyline.

"It was cool because the ice breaks and crunches into little pieces," said Camila Rich, 11, who lives in Toronto, but was on her first winter trip to the island. "No matter what side you look on it's really pretty."

Rich and her brother Lucas, 8, rolled down the lagoon to a patch of ice cleared off by island resident Jake Chalmers. They put on their skates and went for a whirl.

"It's cool and we want to skate," Lucas said.

Their dad, Grahame Russell, said the Zamboni driver at

T.O. island offers kilometres of skating fun

Harbourfront told them about the ice at the island. If the conditions are perfect, you can skate for kilometres.

"We don't know about the February blahs because we love skating," Russell said.

Chalmers did a lot of shovelling to clear the rink.

'Do it for the kids'

"There's enough ice to shovel as many rinks as you want," he jokes. "But I do it for the kids, to see them have fun."

Get off the Ward's Island ferry and make a right toward

the Algonquin Bridge and you're sure to find the puck heads.

All the locals are still talking about the short stretch of three days earlier this month when the ice on Lake Ontario turned smooth as glass and 50 brave souls skated from the island to the Leslie St. Spit and back. It's an uncommon phenomenon, the first time in anyone's memory that it happened.

Skating on the ponds and lagoons are at your own risk, so follow the lead of the locals. They know where the best ice is found.

A fantastic way to warm up after a skate is hot chocolate by the fire in the Rectory Cafe. Open only Wednesday to Sunday, the food is good, the local charm is better.

"It's like getting out of the city every day," said George Bertwell, who was serving up the smoked turkey sandwiches and cups of soup.

'Peaceful in winter'

He said the cafe recently had concert pianists in entertaining the locals.

Back outside, the birds are swooping overhead and island residents pedal by on their bikes, offering a friendly wave.

"I think it's so peaceful in winter," said the area's councillor, Pam McConnell. "You really get a winter wonderland."

McConnell loves walking around the island in the winter and wishes more people knew it's more than a summer hot spot.

"The island doesn't shut down in the winter," she said. "It becomes more dynamic."

BLAH Beater

Our city's alive with the sound of music this week and next as 34,000 performers compete in the Kiwanis Music Festival of Greater Toronto.

You can enjoy the guitar trophy finals at 7 tonight at Calvin Presbyterian Church, 26 Delisle Ave., near Yonge

St. and St. Clair Ave. Admission is \$5 for adults and \$2 for students.

The senior band challenge begins at 6 p.m. tomorrow at Sir John A. Macdonald Collegiate, 2300 Pharmacy Ave. in Scarborough.

A full schedule is at www3.sympatico.ca/kiwanismusicfest.toronto.

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