

## NEWS RELEASE

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# Increase in winter getaways to Brainerd expected

## Economic conditions may mean more vacations closer to home

BRAINERD, Minn. – For businesses in the Brainerd Lakes Area, it takes more than worsening economic conditions, election fatigue and high gas prices to dampen winter tourism spirits. In fact, those factors are expected to lead to a very good winter season in this area.

Families are expected to stay closer to home again this winter, opting for shorter vacations that are within driving distance and don't put nearly as big a dent in the pocketbook. For those families, the Brainerd Lakes Area has just what they're looking for: relief from cabin fever and a great chance to enjoy some fun winter – and not so wintry – activities.

Many lodging properties remain open during the winter and offer excellent specials and off-season rates for weekend or long weekend stays. And while visitors are in the area, they'll find a lot to do because instead of closing for the winter, the Lakes Area makes the most of its natural resources and its penchant for celebrating.

“We're anticipating an excellent winter season here,” said Gretchen Ennis, Brainerd tourism director. “We're hearing that the economy will keep people closer to home this winter. Where they may have gone south to find sun or to the mountains for skiing in the past, they'll be opting instead for shorter vacations closer to home.”

Active visitors will find plenty to do here in the winter, with an excellent and diverse collection of groomed cross-country ski trails, 1,500 miles of groomed snowmobile trails, downhill skiing, snowshoeing, snow tubing, ice fishing, sporting clays and darkhouse spearing. One of the local resorts even offers sled dog rides.

Those who enjoy vacationing at a slower pace will find plenty to do as well. The Brainerd Lakes Area is home to excellent spas, fantastic dining and unique shopping. There's even an opportunity for romantic horse-drawn sleigh rides, outdoor bonfires and more.

The calendar is always full of fun festivals and events throughout the winter:

- **November 28** – Nisswa City of Lights Celebration

The city of Nisswa ushers in the holiday season by counting down to 5:30 p.m., when the city's holiday lights will be turned on. Activities include horse-drawn wagon rides, storytelling, food merchants, bonfires, carolers, holiday music, an appearance by Santa Claus and fireworks for the grand finale.

- **January 10-11** – Ice Fest, Breezy Point Resort

A unique lineup of activities are featured during Ice Fest, including the Ice Auger World Championship, snowmobile radar runs, helicopter rides, hay rides, live music, bonfires, fireworks, and lots of food.

- **January 23-25** – 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Antique Snowmobile Rendezvous, Pequot Lakes

This weekend event features a huge collection of antique snowmobiles from throughout the country. A weekend full of activities includes trail rides, a Vintage Snowmobile Show, antique snowmobile “racing” (drag racing, oval racing, reverse oval, obstacle rallies), a Style Show, banquet, keynote speaker and more.

- **January 24** – Brainerd Jaycees \$150,000 Ice Fishing Extravaganza, Gull Lake

The world’s largest ice fishing contest is scheduled again for noon – 3 p.m. on Gull Lake. Ice fishing’s largest prize package will be up for grabs as more than 10,000 anglers are expected to take to the ice as they compete for \$150,000 in cash and prizes, including a 2009 Ford F150 pickup. All proceeds are donated to Confidence Learning Center and other local charities.

- **February 6-8** – 6th Annual Crosslake Winterfest

Activities include a medallion hunt, outdoor and indoor tournaments, games for the kids, food contests, fishing contest on Trout Lake, and much more.

- **February 28-March 1** – 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Crosslake Dog Derby, Crosslake

Mushers and their sled dogs will bring their unique style of racing to Crosslake. Teams of two to 10 dogs will be competing at sprint distances from two to 10 miles. The event will include skijoring, which is when a cross-country skier harnesses his or her dog to their waist and races that way.

- **February 28-March 1** – 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Gull Lake Frozen Fore, Gull Lake

Vaguely resembling golf, the Frozen Fore is a unique fundraiser for several local charities. Businesses on Gull Lake each produce a golf hole that is usually as challenging and unique as they are fun. More than 500 participants joined the fun last year.

- **March 7** – Polar Bear Plunge, Breezy Point Resort

Starting at 1 p.m., this is the craziest fundraiser you’ll ever see as 250 “plungers” jump, flip, cannonball and belly flop into frozen Pelican Lake to raise money for the Special Olympics. Prizes are awarded for Best Male Costume, Best Female Costume, Oldest Plunger, Youngest Plunger and Best Team Costumes. The plunge begins at 1 pm.

- **March 14** – 35th Annual St. Patrick's Day Parade & Celebration, Crosslake

A popular event for Irish and Irish-wannabes alike, the St. Patrick’s Day celebration features an impressive parade through Crosslake starting at noon, along with live music, food, kids activities a bonfire and much more.

A comprehensive list of activities and events in the Brainerd Lakes Area is available by visiting the Brainerd Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce Web site at [www.explorebrainerdlakes.com](http://www.explorebrainerdlakes.com). Lodging specials and packages are available on the property’s Web site; some are featured on the chamber’s Web site as well.

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**For more information or photos, contact PR Coordinator Geoff Gorvin at 218-829-2838.**