



during the winter months has been boosted by the rising popularity of winter sports, especially cross-country skiing. Last winter, between December 1 and March 31, there were nearly two million visitors to the national parks of Canada.

In the winter, visitors to parks can enjoy a variety of recreational activities, including skating, tobogganing, snowmobiling, skiing – and even outdoor camping.

While most campers store their gear once the mercury dips, there are some whose enthusiasm is not dampened – or chilled – by the arrival of winter.

Some national parks, like Banff, Alberta, have unserviced winter campsites, located on remote trails. For public safety, winter visitors who are camping or touring must register before and after each trip.

Most national parks have areas specially designated for winter activities. Snowmobile trails, for example, are separate from tobogganing or cross-country ski trails. This separation ensures not only visitors' enjoyment, but their safety as well.

There is also fishing during winter months, in parks like Saskatchewan's Prince Albert National Park, where visitors ice-fish for northern pike, lake trout and walleye.

By far the most popular winter sport enjoyed in Canada's national parks is skiing. Down-hill and cross-country skiing facilities attract enthusiasts

from all over Canada and the United States. At the season's peak up to 2,500 visitors may be found on the slopes of Sunshine Village in Banff, Alberta.

Cross-country skiing doesn't attract the same crowds to a single location; but the number of skiers who enjoy the parks this way is growing steadily. In Quebec, where cross-country skiing has become very popular, the number of visitors to the national parks last

winter increased by 254 per cent.

One of the purposes of operating a national parks system in Canada is to educate Canadians about their natural environment. Parks Canada offers school programs year-round, providing interested groups with an opportunity to visit interpretation centres in the parks, and to appreciate the wonders of nature first-hand.

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