

Travelextra

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Collingwood is booming, too

► Here From J1

Seems the village and surrounding Georgian Bay beaches are attracting Quebecois in record numbers. One tourist official told me the Quebec tourist traffic here is now stronger than the American market, which the area relied so heavily on before 9/11.

Some of the "old" attractions at Blue Mountain only seem to be getting better with age.

Case in point: the Monterra golf course.

The Tom McBroom-designed gem that is so lovingly looked after by Ron Heeson and his impressive staff, is still one of the best courses to play in the province and along with its nearby Cranberry cousin — that course is part of the homey Cranberry Resort complex which is now under new leadership and promises to become bigger and better in the future — gives golfers a double dose of thrills for the least amount of money.

Unlike their Muskoka golf neighbours, Blue Mountain courses have managed to keep the lid on high greens fees and rounds here will cost almost half what some Muskoka courses are charging.

Trust me, the thrills on Blue's

courses match anything Muskoka is offering.

The golf thrills at Blue will only get better in the future, thanks to the addition of the new Lora Bay course, which is now under development a short drive from Blue's village.

Lora Bay, scheduled to open in 2006 — it can't come soon enough — is a co-designed project of Canada's McBroom and PGA veteran Tom Lehman. The well-respected American golf firm, Raven, which operates signature courses in places like Arizona and Florida, is part of the Lora Bay project, that promises to be one of the most impressive additions to an already attractive list of Ontario vacation courses.

On a site tour of the virgin Lora Bay course recently, one got the sense that this has the potential of being the best course in the province — maybe in Canada — thanks to some awesome elevated tees that afford golfers magnificent views of Georgian Bay and its rugged shoreline. Many of the holes at Lora Bay will border the water and others will

snake their way through an orchard, which the designers have wisely kept in their plans.

I saw Muskoka's Bigwin Island — still my favourite course in Ontario — in its early stages of development and reported back that two holes there (Nos. 6 and 18) put that course in a class of its own. At least six of Lora Bay's holes will rival Bigwin's duo.

The Lora Bay project has already impressed many people, including the CBC's Peter Mansbridge, who reportedly signed up — for about \$150,000 — to be a member and get one of the home lots that will border the course.

It's not just Blue Mountain that has seen the benefits of the Intrawest investment here. Nearby Collingwood and what is known as the Southern Georgian Bay market is booming. Its population growth rate is 50 per cent higher than the rest of Ontario and many of the 750,000 visitors the area gets every year never want to leave.

Collingwood's shipbuilding past is now being marketed as a tourist attraction and its rich

heritage is packaged so well that it is the perfect complement to the Blue Mountain experience.

The ski season was once the main draw to this area but golf and the Intrawest village have made Blue Mountain a 12-month destination.

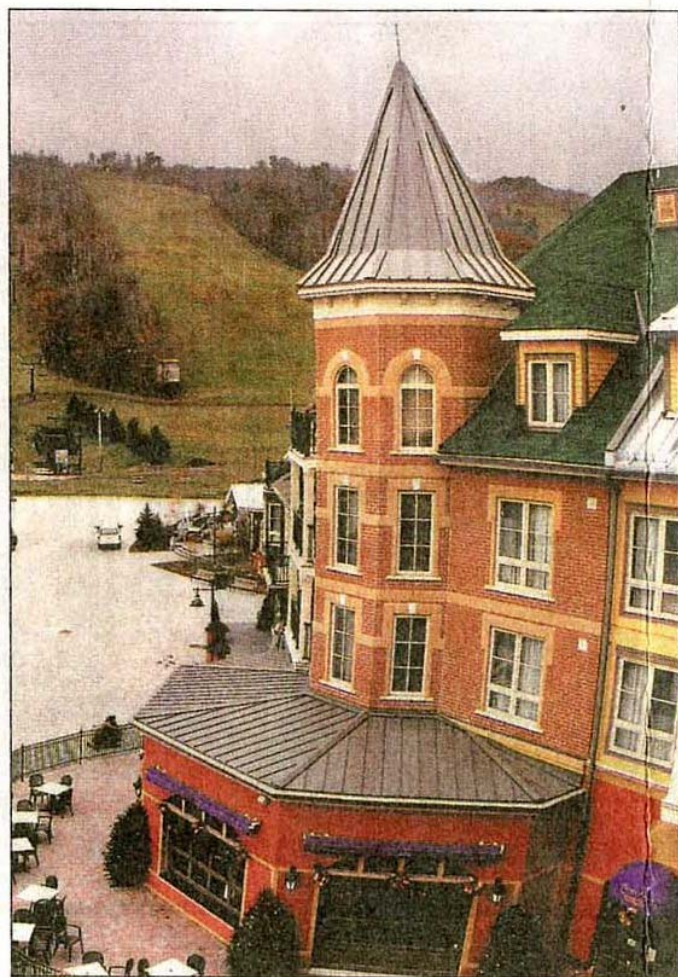
One can only imagine what the area will look like five years from now.

Marc Atchison is the Star's Travel Editor.

Correction Locations wrong in two Travel maps

Maps in two recent Travel sections had errors. The city of Yokohama is located southwest of Tokyo, not on the northern tip of the island on Honshu, Japan as shown on a map on Saturday. Also, the locations of Gananoque, Ont., and Brockville were reversed in a map last Thursday.

The Star regrets the errors.



JIM ROSS FILE PHOTO/TORONTO STAR

The alpine village at Blue Mountain looks very much like the vacation properties developed in Mont-Tremblant, Que., and Whistler, B.C., by giant Intrawest Corporation. At Blue, like Whistler, there's a youthful edge to the place.