

Canadian dreaming

Receiving a Masters in Modern Adventure—Arctic and urban safaris in unforgettable Manitoba

Sometimes our richest experiences are the ones that are the most unexpected. Case in point, a college reunion that started in a hotel ballroom and ended in the prairie province of Manitoba. Manitoba? There is a story here, and it involves beluga whales and the ballet in just one chapter. Over a decade had passed since the carefree days of college, but our tight knit group of friends always kept in touch, and while at a recent reunion, we agreed we longed to relive those days of wild abandon. Soon, there was talk of a reunion getaway. John, the biology major turned celebrity photographer, was the adventurer in the group; he spoke of his amazing visit to Manitoba and before we knew it, we were on the plane and on a mixed bag adventure of a lifetime.

Lords of the Arctic

Our first destination was a connecting flight from Winnipeg to the town of Churchill, a community of hardy northerners that boasts the international reputation as the Polar Bear Capital of the World. While the warmer season called for the bears to return to the deeper tundra, we had other fish to fry in Canada's only sub-Arctic seaport: thousands of beluga whales awaited us in the Churchill River at the mouth of the Hudson Bay, feeding and singing, as these "sea canaries" are known to do. Our tour operator allowed us to hear first-hand their haunting and beautiful cries as we kayaked and snorkelled with these friendly, curious sea mammals.

Lights Alive

In Churchill, we learned the Manitoba

nightlife is like no other in the world. Mother Nature sends her lasers to make shifting curtains of spectacular northern lights in the night sky. The dramatic display of Aurora Borealis is an eye-filling of glowing green, red, yellow and white with no dance floor in sight. We were too stunned to dance, anyway, and John snapped pictures of us, lifelong friends content to sit in awe under this sky of wonder.

Fish tales

By the next day, bright lights and 900-pound belugas turned to red sunsets and fish on the fly as we were flown to a world-class lodge to try our luck at pulling out one of 10,000 trophy-sized fish caught in Manitoba's plentiful waters each year. With the aerial drama of migratory birds overhead, the old college spirit prevailed as the competition grew feisty; Arctic grayling, brook trout, a 20 lb northern pike and walleye all made an appearance, or so some of us claimed upon returning to the comfort of our rustic and luxurious heritage lodge. Over a feast of caribou pepper steak and pan-fried arctic char, we mused about the ones that got away late into the night.

And now for something completely different

Trading our wilderness wardrobe for strappy shoes and urban wear, we returned to Manitoba's capital and were surprised by the multicultural explosion that is Winnipeg. North America's second largest Fringe Festival is just one of the



draws of this thriving arts scene and relished the challenge of dividing our time between music festivals, theatre and culinary fare. We were not disappointed when we took up John's suggestion to visit the Winnipeg art gallery, which is home to the largest collection of contemporary Inuit art in the world. In-between venues, we delighted in sampling everything from Ukrainian perogies and and asian fusion menus to bannock, an aboriginal staple. The most special evening of all was our last night together to see the internationally renowned Royal Winnipeg Ballet, where we were treated to a sheer romantic spectacle with exquisite dancing and opulent costumes. It was an amazing way to end an evening and a magical way to end such a diverse adventure. Our reunion in Manitoba, as we used to say in college, was definitely one for the books.

Planning this trip

Regular flights to and from the Winnipeg International Airport make this destination simple. Northern adventures are accessible by air via Winnipeg, as well as by car travel or train.



For more information, visit www.travelmanitoba.com. For Winnipeg itineraries call Destination Winnipeg at 1-800-665-0204 or visit www.destinationwinnipeg.ca

Did you know...

"Manitoba" originated from the Aboriginal word "manitou", meaning "spirit".

Winnipeg boasts the title "**Slurpee Capital of the World**" as its residents have a year-round penchant for the convenience store slush drinks.

Manitoba is home to famous musical artists **The Guess Who, The Crash Test Dummies, The Watchmen** and **Chantal Kreviazuk**.

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CHURCHILL, MANITOBA,
The polar bear capital of the world.