

gettingaway

Manly Manitoba



ON THE TOP: Churchill is the Polar Bear Capital, and you're most likely to see them in the fall.

ON THE LEFT: Catch a Goldeyes game for some fast-paced AAA baseball.

ON THE RIGHT: Those brave enough to snorkel in the cold water can get a closer underwater look at the beluga whales.



IT'S ALL ABOUT NATURE IN THIS EYE-POPPING CANADIAN PROVINCE.

BY RONA DISTENFELD/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Canada, oh Canada. The land of Mounties who always get their man, vast forests and winter snows that can bury a house. Most visitors to Canada head for Toronto and Montreal to the east or Vancouver to the west. Right in the middle, roughly due north of Texas, the lesser-explored lands of Manitoba offer once-in-a-lifetime experiences for the more adventurous.

The tiny town of Churchill, on the western shore of Hudson Bay, is as remote as it gets while still offering creature comforts. There are no roads in to Churchill; you get here by plane or train.

Churchill has been the gathering ground for polar bears for centuries. Every summer, as the ice breaks up, the bears head for land. Many of them stay in the protected areas around Churchill, and come fall they gather to return to the ice as it forms on Hudson Bay. Locals have learned to leave their homes unlocked to provide shelter, just in case someone runs into a bear.

In the summer months the bears stay farther afield, but you run a good chance of spotting one with a local guide. Kelly Eliasson of Polar Bear Alley Expeditions is considered an expert. He has spent a decade studying the bears and writing about them, and is one of the best at guessing where to look for them.

Churchill is also a gathering spot for more than 200 species of birds and the gentle beluga

whales. These beautiful mammals are only about 15 feet long, making them one of the smaller whale species. They live in pods and use the Churchill River as a breeding ground to keep their babies safe from the orcas, or killer whales, that consider the belugas easy prey.

These friendly and curious whales will come right up to a small boat, like a Zodiac, and braver souls willing to bear the cold water can snorkel with them through Sea North Tours.

They give the humans in the water some space, so there's no danger, and you can get a closer underwater look as they swim and play beneath you. You can also go out kayaking with the whales, or view them from the comfort of a larger boat.

You travel to Churchill via Winnipeg, Manitoba's capital. It's a pretty city, with old and new architecture and lots of cultural amenities, but the best part is the easy access to nature.

The Red River is prime catfishing territory. There are some monsters out there, and guide Todd Langley of City Cats Guiding Service has a knack for finding them, so you can bet on pulling in some big ones. The only thing tougher than getting those fish into the net is holding them up for a photo — at 35-plus pounds, they're a handful!

Winnipeg also has a AAA ball club, the Goldeyes. After a morning pulling in the whoppers, catch a game to recharge your batteries.

If you go

Polar Bear Alley Expeditions

www.polarbearalley.com

Sea North Tours

(204) 675-2195

www.seanorthtours.com

City Cats Guiding Service

(204) 955-2744

www.citycats.ca

Goldeyes Baseball

www.goldeyes.com



ON THE TOP: Guide Todd Langley of City Cats Outfitters knows where to find the big catfish.

ON THE LEFT: Sandhill cranes are one of the many bird species that call Churchill home for part of the year.