

50 things to do in Canada this summer

There are hundreds of great things to do across Canada this summer. Here are just 50.

BY NATIONAL POST MARCH 27, 2008



There are hundreds of great things to do across Canada this summer. Here are just 50.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

1. Tour an airborne firefighter

Originally built as bombers for long-range missions and patrols, Coulson Flying Tankers now drop 60,000 pounds of foam on raging forest fires. With wingspans of 200 feet (wider than a 747), they reside at Sproat Lake in central Vancouver Island. Free tours when crews aren't putting out flames.

www.martimars.com

2 Paddle into the setting sun

A sunset kayaking tour from Gabriola Island (20 minutes by ferry from Nanaimo) offers a multitude of treats, from the gaudy display in the sky to the eye-level view of otters, seals and (look up!) bald eagles. \$45 a person, with two-person minimum. www.jimskayaking.com

3. Zip it

Whistle over whitewater and old-growth forest on a series of zip lines, some as long as 2,200 feet. Perfect for adrenalin junkies. Adults \$98 to \$119. www.whistler.com/zipline

4. Feed the sea lions

Take a behind-the-scenes tour of the Vancouver Aquarium. Learn all about the sea lions and sea otters from staff, prepare some of their favourite treats and get up close to the animals while working alongside their trainers. \$25 to \$35. www.vanaqua.org

5. Seek a sea serpent

Did you know that Canada has its own version of the Loch Ness monster? There have been plenty of sightings of Ogopogo, a snakelike creature said to be anywhere from six to 20 metres long, in Okanagan Lake in the B.C. Interior. Try your luck. www.ogopogoquest.com

6. Saddle up for cowgirl boot camp

At Elkin Creek Guest Ranch in the spectacular Chilcotin Mountains, you'll be solidly trained in the three Rs: riding, roping and rustling up some grub over an open fire. \$825 a person, double occupancy, for three nights, including meals and activities. Cowgirls only June 13 to 15.

ALBERTA

7. Embark on a fossil safari

Dino teeth and bones are literally lying around Dinosaur Provincial Park north of Brooks, in the southeast of the province. Once the edge of an inland sea, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is one of the world's richest fossil beds. Reserve a tour at least a month ahead. Adults \$8. 403-378-4344; tprc.alberta.ca/parks/dinosaur

8. Peer at the petroglyphs

Ancient rock carvings, paintings and pictographs at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, about 100 km southeast of Lethbridge, vividly depict hunting, vision quests and scenes of battle. It's the largest concentration of rock art on the North American plains, some of them up to 6,000 years old. 403-647-2364; gateway.cd.gov.ab.ca/site-information.aspx?id=177

9. Bask in the spray of North America's largest manmade waterfall

At 210 feet (64 metres) high, Edmonton's Great Divide Waterfall is higher than Niagara Falls. Activated on holiday weekends in the spring and summer. Check out the schedule at www.edmonton.ca.

10. Strathmore Heritage Days Stampede

And you thought you had to go to Pamplona for the running of the bulls. This stampede offers the traditional chuckwagon races, rodeo events and monster truck rides. On top of that, for \$25 (yes, you pay!), you can don a red shirt and run a track with a rampaging bull behind you.

www.strathmorerodeo.com

11. Go zorbing

Straight from New Zealand, comes the latest thrill sport: At Canada Olympic Park just west of Calgary, you can flip and bounce down a hill in what is essentially a giant hamster ball. May through September, \$30. www.canadaolympicpark.ca/home/activities.asp?season=summer

SASKATCHEWAN

12. Discover Moose Jaw's Capone connection

Sleepy Moose Jaw earned the moniker "Little Chicago" in the 1920s, when American gangsters rode the rails north to beat the heat of Prohibition. Tour the underground tunnels -- complete with animatronics -- where Al Capone's mob ran their bootleg operation. Adults \$13.

www.tunnelsofmoosejaw.com

13. Get a vision of the Prairies, pre-contact

Grasslands National Park in the southern end of the province preserves one of the country's only undisturbed tracts of mixed prairie grassland. Look for Canada's only black-tailed prairie dog colony and rare pronghorn antelope, burrowing owl and bison. Guided hikes \$4.90 a person. pc.gc.ca/pn-

14. Take a Mountie crash course

Shaped like a prairie snowdrift, the new RCMP Heritage Centre in Regina celebrates all things Mountie. There's an interactive forensics display for budding CSIs, an array of transport from dogsleds to planes and tales of life on the frontier, when the RCMP befriended Sitting Bull, tamed Klondike prospectors and organized manhunts. Adults \$12. www.rcmpheritagecentre.com

MANITOBA

15. Bust out a-town session

Our skater lingo may be a little sketchy, but the skateboard park at the Plaza in Winnipeg's vibrant Forks neighbourhood is distinctly, well, gnarly. Covering an area of more than 44,000 square feet, it boasts a 30,000-square-foot plaza and 8,500-square-foot bowl complex with a 17-foot cradle. Free. www.theforks.com

16. Go snaky

Got a reptile-crazy kid? In spring, tens of thousands of red-sided garter snakes congregate in a writhing, wriggling (procreating) mass for several weeks at the snake dens of Narcisse, about two hours north of Winnipeg. Free. gov.mb.ca/conservation/wildlife/managing/snakes

17. Be one with the belugas

Some 3,000 belugas make the Churchill River estuary their summer home, attracted by its abundant fish, lack of predators and pollution-free water. Sea North Tours tows game snorkellers behind a Zodiac with curious whales in hot pursuit. \$150 for two hours. www.seanorthtours.com

FAR NORTH

18. Golf under the midnight sun

Tee off at midnight during Yellowknife Golf Club's Canadian North Midnight Classic and play as long as you can. The record: In 1970, a local man golfed 171 holes in a 33.5-hour marathon. Non-members \$125. www.yellowknifegolf.com

19. Great Northern Arts Festival

Up to 120 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists and performers from across the North congregate in Inuvik for 10 days of workshops, demonstrations, children's activities and a comprehensive Festival Gallery. Evening performances of song, dance and storytelling. www.gnaf.org

20. Win a diamond in the rough

The Deh Cho travel route circles through Alberta, the Northwest Territories and British Columbia among some of the world's wildest places. Pick up a Deh Cho passport before heading out. Acquire 12 "diamond in the rough" stamps and you could win an \$11,500 Canadian diamond.

www.dehchotravelconnection.com/contest/index.htm

21. Sip a cocktail with the lights of Toronto strung out before you

Good bets include the Panorama (on the 51st floor of the Manulife Centre; entertainment.com); Canoe (atop the TD Tower; oliverbonacini.com) and the Roof Lounge on the 18th floor of the Park Hyatt (parktoronto.hyatt.com).

22. Parade with the swans

Heralded by horns and trumpets and led by children and pipers, at 2 p.m. Stratford's famous swans waddle from their winter quarters to the Avon River, ushering in the arrival of spring. Other special events: concerts and tours of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival's costume warehouse.

www.welcometostratford.com

23. Walk in the clouds

Haliburton Forest and Wildlife Reserve's suspended walkway through the canopy of a 200-year-old pine forest feels a bit like an ectomorphic trampoline. Take in breathtaking views and, if you're really lucky, catch a glimpse of wolves, foxes and moose. \$95 for a four-hour tour. www.haliburtonforest.com

24. Channel your inner Van Gogh

The lake, dunes, fields and barns of laid-back Prince Edward County (two and a half hours east of Toronto) provide endless fodder for wannabe artists. Stay at a B & B (pec.on.ca) and sign up for the County Art Workshops' three-day weekends (www.thecountyartworkshops.com; \$240) or a weekend glass, pottery or watercolour class (www.theredbarns.com; \$200 to \$300).

25. Go directly to gaol

From 1842 to 1972, the Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol in Goderich housed a gaggle of thieves, murderers, debtors, madmen and starving itinerants in its 48 tiny cells. (Wrongfully convicted Stephen Truscott heard hammering and feared they were building a scaffold for him.) The staff tell great tales. Adults \$5. www.huroncounty.ca/museum

26. Cultivate a Blyth spirit

Early in his career with the quirky Blyth Theatre Festival, artistic director Eric Coates saw a calf delivered on stage when a cow, who was "performing" in a play, went past her due date. Specializing in original Canadian works, the annual summer fest in Blyth, about 60 minutes north of London, has premiered 87 plays. www.blythfestival.com

27. Afternoon tea? A capital idea

The nation's capital, that is. Tea at Ottawa's Fairmont Chateau Laurier kicks off with the arrival of the "tea sommelier," followed by an array of sandwiches, desserts and (our favourite) warm scones. Posh, but not so pinky-in-the-air that kids feel awkward. (When one tyke dumped his fruit salad in his lap a few minutes in, the evidence was whisked away discreetly.) 613-241-1414; www.fairmont.com/laurier

Follow in the footsteps of the Bard of Montreal: Mordecai Richler. Down a medium-fat smoked-meat sandwich at Schwartz's (3895 St-Laurent Boulevard; www.schwartzsdeli.com); a chewy-sweet sesame bagel at St-Viateur Bagel (253 St-Viateur W., and others; www.stviateurbagel.com); veal mar-row hors d'oeuvre at French bistro L'Express (3927 St-Denis; 514-845-5333); and a rib steak at Moishe's (3961 St-Laurent; www.moishes.ca). Chase with a nice single malt.

29. Celebrate Quebec City's 400th anniversary

Special events in spring and summer include an exhibition from the Louvre; an all-night spectacle of dance, acrobatics and film on the banks and water of the St. Lawrence (Aug. 15); and the city's favourite chanteuse, Celine Dion, belting out her greatest hits on the Plains of Abraham (Aug. 22). www.myquebec2008.com

30. Opt for an island idyll

Need a break from the nonstop events? Slip over to the charming and fertile Ile d'Orleans by ferry or bridge from Quebec City. Just eight km wide and 34 km long, its patchwork of fields and pretty towns attracts an eclectic mix of artisans, from blacksmiths to makers of jam, cheese, cider and chocolate. www.iledorleans.com

31. Navigate a water labyrinth

Rev up your paddleboat and head off along the 6.5 km of canals that wend through the marshland near Wakefield. You will be equipped with a compass, radio and field guide (to help you identify resident plants and creatures). \$40 per paddleboat. www.eco-odyssee.ca

NEW BRUNSWICK

32. Settle by the seaside

Pretty St. Andrew's-by-the-Sea offers the classic beach vacation: warm waters and sandy strands, a touch-pool where little ones can stroke a sea star, a salmon interpretation centre (with an underwater viewing room), whale-watching and a first-rate hotel (the Fairmont Algonquin). town. standrews.nb.ca/visitors.cfm

33. Shediac Lobster Festival

Take on a tasty crustacean at this yearly event featuring a kids' parade, lobster suppers, live music and a nightly lobster-eating contest. www.tourismnewbrunswick.ca

34. Watch the tide come in

At Hopewell Rocks National Park on the Bay of Fundy, discover the distinctive flowerpot rock formations and hidden sea caves. Then hunker down to watch some of the highest tides in the world come in, rising an amazing two to two and a half metres an hour. Adults \$8. www.thehopewellrocks.ca

35. Uncover the covered bridges

NOVA SCOTIA

36. Party like an Acadian

You'll feel like long-lost kin when you take part in Musique de la Baie. Every day in July and August, restaurants in Clare county, on the North Shore, gear up for kitchen parties. The fiddling is fiery and there's top tapping galore. Be sure to order rapure (a traditional Acadian dish of grated potato and meat). Schedule posted in April at www.musiquedelabaie.ca.

37. Trace your family's path to the New World

If your ancestors were among the one-million immigrants, war brides and evacuees who arrived in Halifax from 1928 to 1971, there may well be a record at Pier 21, Canada's Immigration Museum. Come armed with info: date of arrival, ship name, etc. Staff researchers will dig up passenger lists, shipboard tales and photos. Adults \$8.50. www.pier21.ca

38. Lounge in a deck chair - on the Titanic

OK, the deck chair you recline in at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic is a replica, and the deck is an oversized photograph. But the Titanic exhibit features the wireless operator's log of the doomed ship's distress calls, one of the only intact deck chairs in the world that matches those that were on the Titanic and part of the grand staircase. Adults \$8.50 in summer. museum.gov.ns.ca/mma/index.html

39. Dive into the past

Explore the underwater remains of the 64-gun Le Celebre, sunk by the British in Louisbourg Harbour in 1758, or the 180-foot-long sponge-and anemone-crusted section of the Arrow, an iron tanker that went down in the Bras d'Or Lakes in 1970. Easy Dive of Cape Breton Island organizes expeditions to the province's wealth of shipwrecks five days a week in summer. Cost varies. www.sporting-mountain.com

40. Get chummy with a shark

Take shelter in a shark cage, while a chum slick (blood and guts) is spread on the water to attract the sleek predators. \$1,000 for up to six divers. Must be a certified scuba diver (not to mention stout of heart). August to October. www.lunenburgoceanadventures.com

41. Find evidence of the Earth's birth pangs

Interpreters at the Fundy Geological Museum point out cliffs that were once seabeds, deposits of volcanic lava rocks from ancient fissures and the treasures left behind by the tides as you walk along the ocean floor. Every day except Sunday. Register in advance. \$5 to \$10 a person. museum. www.gov.ns.ca/fgm

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

42. Celebrate Anne (with an "e")

party in PEI National Park, country fair and community picnic with old-fashioned games and races. Kids can dress in period costume, go to school in Avonlea, watch pig races or enter an Anne look-alike contest. Non-stop live entertainment and lots of ice cream and raspberry cordial (non-alcoholic, of course. For the harder stuff, head to Rossignol Estate Winery, the province's only winery, in Little Sands on the south shore; rossignolwinery.com). gov.pe.ca/visitorsguide

43. Walk the line

When the P.E.I. railway stopped service in 1989, the island converted its rails to the Confederation Trail. Bike or hike from one end of the island to the other past red-sand beaches and exuberant wildflowers. Free. www.islandtrails.ca

44. Pose with a 14-foot spud

The lowly potato holds an exalted place on the island. The 7,000-square-foot Potato Museum houses a Potato Hall of Fame, a collection of old farm machinery and a number of relocated historic buildings such as a one-room schoolhouse. Look for the giant spud outside the town of O'Leary. \$6.

www.peipotatomuseum.com

45. Exercise your pipes

The College of Piping and Celtic Performing Arts of Canada offers week-long workshops all summer long. Learn to play the bagpipes and drums or dance the Highland fling. Tuition varies. May need basic equipment. Register in advance. www.collegeofpiping.com

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

46. Stand at North America's most easterly point

This distinction belongs to Cape Spear, also the home of Newfoundland's oldest lighthouse. Wander the premises to get a sense of how a lighthouse keeper and his family might have lived in the 1800s. pc.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/nl/spear

47. Ogle an iceberg

Newfoundland and Labrador has bragging rights as iceberg alley. Massive flotillas of glacial ice begin arriving from Greenland from spring through early summer. Use www.icebergfinder.com to pick a promising cliff top, and watch the show drift by.

48. Do nothin' with the puffins

In spring, the penguin-like Atlantic puffin comes ashore to breed in colonies. Mum lays the eggs and dad helps to incubate them, spending some 43 days confined to the nest. Gatherall's Puffin and Whale Watch takes groups out daily from Bay's Bull, Nfld. May to early October. Adults \$54.

www.gatheralls.com

49. Learn Viking manners

restaurant, a replica of Leif Erickson's home, serves Jiggs dinner (salt meat with yellow split peas) and cod tongues, among other local delicacies. Don't forget to burp: It's good manners.

www.fishingpoint.ca/feast.html

50. Dodge bullets on Signal Hill

Four days a week in summer, costumed soldiers break out the gunpowder and re-enact the final battle of the Seven Years' War on the historic crag of St. John's. Take in the panoramic views of the harbour and the city, with its jellybeancoloured houses. 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. parcscanada.pch.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/nl/signallhill

© (c) CanWest MediaWorks Publications Inc.