

COLDPLAY

6 WAYS TO CHILL
IN WINNIPEG
THIS WINTER

By Anne Bokma



Warming hut fire

Photo by Dan Harper

Winnipeg has often been relegated to middle child status in the great Canadian landscape. Not only is it literally the longitudinal middle of the country, it's been overlooked in favour of its more flashy urban siblings.

NOW IT'S PAYBACK TIME

Manitoba's capital has recently been singled out by *National Geographic* as one of the best trips on earth. Even savvy *Vogue* thinks it's hot stuff, declaring this city of 800,000 "an absolute must-visit destination."

Cold? Sure it is—the average winter low is a bracing -20°C . But Winnipeg wears its chilly rep with pride, much as one might don a fur-trimmed duck down Canada Goose parka. Capitalizing on its official designation as a "winter city" (it earned the new status last year from the World Winter Cities Association, joining with the likes of Anchorage, Alaska and Rovaniemi, Finland), it has lots of ways to keep the blood pumping, even during a deep freeze.

The two most compelling attractions (in any kind of weather) are the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (conceived as "a journey from darkness to light") and the Journey to Churchill at Assiniboine Park Zoo (where you can view massive polar bears frolicking overhead in a playful bear ballet through a glass dome). Both will leave you breathless for very different reasons.

Winnipeg proves the best way to beat the cold is to embrace it. Here are some ways to do just that:



Canadian Museum for Human Rights

Photo by Aaron Cohen

Photo by Thermea Spa



Thermea

1 SWIM

Well, more like float, at Thermea—an outdoor Nordic spa where you cycle through a hot-cold-relax-repeat regimen that includes hot tubs, cold plunge pools, dry saunas and eucalyptus- and orange-scented steam rooms. Exfoliate with a custom-made lavender scrub and then pour yourself into a chair at the onsite upscale restaurant. Dress code? Your complimentary plush white robe will do just fine.

2 SKATE

Dig your blades into one of the world's longest skating paths, the five-kilometre Red River Mutual Trail located at The Forks, a bustling social hub and the famous point where the Assiniboine and Red Rivers meet. Glide past 20 architecturally designed "warming huts" (really more like public art installations), the work of top Canadian and international designers, including sculptor Anish Kapoor, creator of Chicago's famous silver Bean sculpture.



Photo by Envirofoto

Assiniboine Park

3 CYCLE

Trek downtown on a fat bike. The tires may seem comically big, but don't laugh—they'll keep you stable through the snow and slush on the city's bike lanes. Downtown, Winnipeg BIZ has a moveable feast bike tour with menu samplings at five eateries, including the Prairie 360 revolving restaurant and the street-food-inspired Merchant Kitchen.

4 SLIDE

Just because the city is situated on a flat prairie doesn't mean you can't hurl down a hill at top speed—the FortWhyte Alive eco-centre has a mighty-high man-made toboggan run that propels you out onto a frozen lake. (The centre also hosts magical full moon, backwoods snowshoe hikes followed by a bonfire with s'mores and cider.)

5 SUP

Savour one of the world's most unique culinary experiences at RAW: Almond, an annual three-week pop-up restaurant where fancy five-course meals are served by a revolving roster of top Canadian chefs in an elaborate tent on the frozen ice of the Assiniboine. Wait staff slide around in rubber boots serving up dishes, such as roasted sable fish and shoyu-marinated duck breast. Meanwhile, diners at long communal tables keep their coats zipped, their toques on and their palates panting for more.



Photo by Jacqueline Young

RAW: Almond

6 SNOOZE

Thaw out after a chilly day by getting toasty under the covers at the new 120-room Alt Hotel, the downtown's coolest sleep spot. Its funk factor includes a bohemian lounge with modernist red dragon-net chairs and a large wall filled with 2,500 photos of the city. On the practical side, it's dog-friendly, has year-round flat rates, a free breakfast and its green features include floor-to-ceiling thermal windows offering a new take on a city you'll never look at quite the same way again. Just like your middle sibling who ends up surprising you.