

Canada 150: 10 National Parks to visit in 2017

[Kieran Meeke](#) / 23 January 2017



Canada is celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2017. The 10th installment in a series of articles, we look at some of the lesser known National Parks to visit to mark the occasion.

Saskatchewan is a province usually avoided by visitors to Canada but, hopefully coincidentally, the Prince Albert National Park is the most-visited in Canada.

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation, the birth of the country, [Canada has made entry to all 40 of its National Parks free during 2107](#).

Here is our list of Top Ten off-the-beaten-track ones many foreign visitors pass by.

Cool mountain peaks and even 'cooler' cities, Canada offers a world of experiences [Find out more here](#).

Wood Buffalo National Park of Canada, Alberta

Canada's biggest national park, the [Wood Buffalo National Park in Alberta](#), is larger than Switzerland and also holds the world's largest beaver dam. Spotted by a satellite research, the park only found out about the dam when the BBC approached them about filming it. That gives you an indication of just how big and unexplored the area is.

Much of the landscape is boreal plains, an area of shallow lakes, bogs and dense forests cut by meandering streams.

There are three major rivers and one of the largest inland freshwater deltas in the world. These wetlands are a major nesting and staging area for migratory waterfowl in the spring and autumn.

The park was set up in 1922 to protect the last remaining herds of wood bison in northern Canada and today still has 5,000 of them. It is also the breeding grounds of North America's largest bird, the endangered Whooping Crane.

Must-do: Visit the Northern Life Museum in Fort Smith, which is also the home of the museum ship "Radium King".

Elk Island National Park, Alberta

[Elk Island National Park in Alberta](#) was set up in 1906 by a group of local hunters to protect a small herd of about 70 elk in the area.

The herd has now grown to around 600, with surplus animals being shipped every year to new homes throughout Canada.

The next year, the last large herd of 410 wild plains bison was also brought to the reserve from Montana. These animals have served as a disease free stock for the reintroduction of bison throughout North America and around the world.

The present herd of round 450 bison can be seen grazing in the park and are considered one of the few remaining free roaming and genetically pure herds in North America.

Rangers can tell visitors their story and take you on a backstage tour the handling facilities.

Must-do: Play a round of golf on the nine-hole course at Astotin Lake Area, a unique chance to play in a park.

Mount Revelstoke National Park, British Columbia

[Mount Revelstoke National Park in British Columbia](#) protects the world's only inland temperate rainforest, sitting in an area of steep mountains with a warm, moist climate.

But it was Mount Revelstoke's vibrant wildflowers, in full bloom by mid-August, that inspired a group of local conservationists to set up the park in 1914.

The old growth cedar of Mount Revelstoke is increasingly a rarity outside the park. It also protects a small herd of mountain caribou and a home for grizzly bears and mountain goats.

In winter, the slopes of the mountain are a snow-shoers and skier's delight and the park contains one of the world's finest natural jumps, where several world ski jumping records have been set.

Ski jumping started here in 1915, when the sport was more popular than downhill skiing.

Must-do: The ski jump. Kidding! Take a mountain bike ride on some of the trails through the rainforest.

Discover Canada's west coast city of Vancouver and the majestic Rockies on a 15 night tour [Find out more here.](#)

Torngat Mountains, Labrador

Torngat Mountains in Labrador is the only park in the world where the staff is all Inuit. Its name comes from an Inuktitut word meaning "Place of Spirits" and it has been home to their ancestors for thousands of years.

With Eastern Canada's highest peaks, topped year-round by snow and cut by glaciers, and the picturesque Saglek Fjord on its southern edge, the park does not lack for dramatic sights.

There are perhaps 10,000 caribou here, which the Inuit still hunt. You might also see polar bears hunting for seals.

Many visitors come to fish for Arctic char, fierce fighters that each more than 20lbs in weight. There are also trout in the rivers and lakes of the park.

Wilderness camping is allowed anywhere but visitors can also stay in the comfortable yurt-style tents in Torngat Base Camp, home to a team of researchers.

Must-do: Spend a night looking at the Northern Lights.

Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba

With 1,150 square miles of deciduous forest, aspen parkland and prairie grasslands, Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba is among the most varied in landscape that Canada has to offer. That makes it popular with a wide variety of wildlife.

Even in winter, you might see for moose, wolves, lynx, elk fox, and otters. Winter snow enables you to see animal tracks and the park maintains groomed trails for skiers and snowshoeing.

Birdwatchers scan for more than 250 species of breeding birds, including rarities such as the Connecticut Warbler, Spruce Grouse and Great Gray Owl, which hunts during daylight. It is one of the best birding hotspots in Canada.

There is also a small bison herd in a special enclosure, with summer and winter pastures for year-round viewing.

Must-do: Tune into the Parks Canada radio for updates on what to see in the park.

Canada: history and sights of Churchill Manitoba

Nahanni National Park Reserve, Northwest Territories

Protecting part of the Mackenzie Mountains, the Nahanni National Park Reserve's central feature is the South Nahanni River whose rapids have been called the "Everest" of whitewater paddlers.

It was the first park to be listed as a World Heritage site, alongside Yellowstone in Wyoming, and its Náiicho (Virginia Falls) are twice the height of Niagara.

The park straddled the Continental Divide, with almost 12,000 square miles of wilderness. It's an area of legends about lost gold mines, decapitated gold prospectors and Sasquatch.

Perhaps this mythic creature is a survival from the last Ice Age, when the area's hot springs kept it free of ice.

With 40 species of mammals and 180 species of birds, you can expect to see anything from a black bear to a trumpeter swan.

Those not brave enough to face the rapids can fly in for a day trip to see Náiicho or join a local outfitters for longer stays to hike in the wilderness.

Must-do: Learn the history of the local Dene people, possible ancestors of the modern day Navajo.

Thousand Islands National Park, Ontario

Only a few hours from Toronto or Montreal, the Thousand Island National Park's many islands make it popular with kayakers and boaters, as well as campers.

There are campsites on 12 of the islands, which have to be pre-booked to avoid overcrowding. All equipment can be hired from the park. Large fixed tents are available on two of the islands and the mainland.

The park is made up of around 20 islands as well as part of the mainland of ecological importance. It protects a unique environment of "stepping stones" across the St. Lawrence River between the Canadian Shield and the Adirondack Mountains.

It is of vital importance to migrating bird and animal species and also home to several species of endangered flora.

Trails take visitors on moderate walks and hikes that vary from 20 minutes in length to a few hours.

Must-do: Try out kayaking with experienced guides who can provide all training and equipment.

Mingan Archipelago, Quebec

This string of 30 islands and more than 1,000 islets and reefs off Quebec has a distinctive lighthouse and historic keeper's house, built to protect shipping in the Gulf of St Lawrence.

But the Mingan Archipelago park's most distinctive features are the towering eroded limestone formations that date back to when this region of Canada was a tropical paradise. (Yes, it was a long time ago.)

The islands have their own microclimate and are still a paradise for birds, including puffins and razorbills, and animals such as beavers, ermines and silver foxes.

Offshore, you might spot seals, dolphins, porpoises and whales. The plant life is even more abundant and varied.

There are 42 camping grounds spread over six different islands, and you can also enjoy a four-star stay at the lighthouse station.

Must-do: Discover the writings of lighthouse keeper Placide Vigneau, who recorded daily life in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Canada: history and sights of Quebec City

Prince Albert National Park, Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan is a province usually avoided by visitors to Canada but, hopefully coincidentally, the Prince Albert National Park is the most-visited in Canada.

Its rolling hills make the park ideal for hiking, and almost as popular for cross-country skiing in winter.

The town of Waskesiu falls within the park, offering everything from hotels and supermarkets to a lawn bowling club and a beautiful golf course.

Grey Owl, played by Pierce Brosnan in the film named after the controversial English-born naturalist, had a cabin here on the edge of Ajawaan Lake in the 1930s.

Getting to it is a two-day return hike through forests of spruce, pine and aspen, camping beside the crystal clear Kingsmere Lake on the way. There is also a shorter canoe route.

Grey Owl, his wife and their daughter are buried beside a plaque that reads: "Say a silent thank you for the preservation of wilderness areas."

Must-do: Go water-skiing or wakeboarding on one of the many lakes.

Ivvavik National Park, Yukon

Take a floatplane to the Back of Beyond, then keep going and you will eventually hit Ivvavik National Park, a true wilderness. Its name means "a place for giving birth" in the Inuvialuktun language and it protects some caribou calving grounds.

From late May to mid-July, the Midnight Sun brings 24 hours of daylight for hikers or brave whitewater rafters following the raging Firth River for 90 miles to the Arctic Ocean.

Prehistoric hunters used a small hill near the Firth for more than 5,000 years to spot caribou herds. Grizzly bears, wolves, red foxes, muskoxen, Alaskan moose and lemmings are among the other animals you might see today.

The birdlife includes gyrfalcons and golden eagles. Fishing for Dolly Varden char and Arctic grayling is allowed with a National Park Fishing Permit.

Must-do: Try to come in late June or early July, when the wildflowers come out.

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