

TRAVEL
INSIDER



CANADA*

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FAR

FROM

NORMAL

The thrills are naturally phenomenal in Churchill, Manitoba. Speed through a forest by dog sled, kayak among beluga whales and watch polar bears in their own environment. At night, things get even better – you're under the Northern Lights.

Dave Daley wakes to the sound of 43 panting dogs.

As the sun rises in Churchill, Manitoba, beams come through conifers and water shimmers on either side of the small peninsula. Inside a four-by-five-metre cabin in the woods, Daley gives his dogs a cuddle. “Dogs are very energetic beings and no matter if it is the summer or 30 below, I always touch them with my bare hands because that is how our energy flows.”

A long-distance dog-sled racer, Daley is the owner of racing kennel and tour operator **Wapusk Adventures** (wapuskadventures.com). Here, visitors experience a thrilling sled ride while learning about the culture of the Métis, a group that emerged in the late 18th century as Europeans in the fur trade integrated with Indigenous people.

Daley has lived his entire life in Churchill, which lies 733 kilometres south of the Arctic Circle. A proud Métis man known across Manitoba as the “Northern Adventurer”, he’s travelled by dog sled seven times across the ice to Arviat in Nunavut, a distance of about 260 kilometres. He once made the 20-day journey from Churchill to Winnipeg – 1200 kilometres – by sled.



The crew at Wapusk Adventures prepare a dog team in Churchill, Manitoba



Dave Daley, sled-dog racer and owner of Wapusk Adventures

Dave

Most of Daley’s dogs are rescues. “There are lots of retirees in my yard,” he says. “I believe all animals have souls like we do and are to be respected. There’s no other animal that has a relationship with humans like dogs do.” Churchill is home to wolves and wolverines and Daley’s not comfortable leaving his dogs alone at night. “This is a pretty wild place,” he says, pointing out that three different species of bear are known to roam the outskirts of town.

Once part of an Indigenous trade route, this area is the junction of distinct ecosystems, where forest meets tundra and the vast Hudson Bay. With the right guide, this is *the* place to experience some of the world’s most stunning and unique natural phenomena. Between July and November, about 1000 polar bears migrate here – hence the region’s nickname, The Polar Bear Capital of the World. In the summer months (mainly July and August), up to 4000 beluga whales come to the river estuary. It’s also one of the best places to see the Northern Lights, with an average of 300 nights of activity each year. As a result, it’s possible to see polar bears roaming amid magenta wildflowers, kayak near a pod of mating whales and watch green swirls colour the sky all on the same visit.

A tour with Daley begins with storytelling. He might recount experiences from his races or pass on wisdom from two 80-year-old Elders, with whom he shares a coffee most days. After that, it’s time for a ride. Each sled is typically pulled by six Northern Huskies and Daley knows which ones work best together. Rea is a guest favourite – a lead dog with icy blue eyes, a white coat and playful nature, she’s been with Daley since she was three months old and her chatty barks and sighs almost sound like she’s talking.



All of the dogs are brimming with excitement as they pant, bark and shuffle, raring to move. When it’s time to go, they take off like Olympic sprinters. The sled speeds through the forest, with white spruce and tamarack trees on either side and the dogs bounding in front. This experience isn’t long – you’ll cover only about two kilometres – but the sensation will linger well into the evening, when green tendrils across the sky herald nature’s next performance.



More unique ways to take in Canada’s natural beauty

Travel in a Tundra Buggy

Ride in a purpose-built, all-terrain Tundra Buggy across Churchill’s ice and snow to see polar bears in the wild from the safety of the vehicle. Or head to Dan’s Diner – a fine-dining experience in a remote forest with ideal conditions for viewing the Northern Lights. [frontiersnorth.com](#)

Tour Lake Louise on a horse-drawn sleigh

Get cosy in the back of a fairytale sleigh as your route hugs the shores of frozen Lake Louise, passing between trees dripping in icicles. Tours depart from Fairmont Château Lake Louise. [fairmont.com](#)

Fly over Virginia Falls

Witness water cascading down a vertical drop twice the size of Niagara Falls with a flight over the Nahanni National Park Reserve, Northwest Territories. [spectacularnwt.com](#)

Go arctic diving in Nunavut

Kayak and snorkel among grounded icebergs while watching for polar bears, seals, whales and even narwhals off the coast of Baffin Island near Pond Inlet, across the bay from Greenland. [arctickingdom.com](#)

Chase frozen waterfalls in Ontario

The cliffs and slopes of the Niagara Escarpment combined with an extensive system of lakes and rivers means Ontario has an abundance of waterfalls – there are more than 100 around the Hamilton region alone. In winter, see the impressive ice curtains of the frozen torrents at Devil’s Punchbowl, Tiffany Falls or Ball’s Falls, all within two hours of Toronto. [tourismhamilton.com](#)

Bike back-country trails in the Yukon

Originally built in 1899, the Yukon’s first wagon road has been transformed into a 33-kilometre trail outside Dawson City. Hike or cycle across forested alpine landscapes as they burst into bright yellow and fiery red autumn hues around late August. The trail is open from June to mid-September. [travelyukon.com](#)