

FIVE DAY WHIRLWIND TOUR



Come and see the Manitoba you've only dreamed of! Our whirlwind all-inclusive hiking tour takes you from the towering Grass River waterfalls to the dunes of Spirit Sands with many a scenic treasure in between. Five full days of five star hiking going north as far as Thompson, then south and west to Flin Flon and Virden, with a full slate of prize hikes that are well off the beaten path.

Enjoy the comfort of a modern motorcoach while you sit back and appreciate the fine scenery and company of your fellow adventurers. You'll explore this beautiful province as you never have before. You'll meet the locals, you'll eat well, sleep well and enjoy that special brand of relaxation that comes with an active vacation.



Prairie Pathfinders since 1999

Your Prairie Pathfinder guides have decades of experience exploring the Manitoba countryside, finding hidden gems, and exploring trails well off the beaten path. As authors of three Canadian best selling titles including 'Hiking the Heartland- Explore Manitoba on foot', they bring with them a wealth of knowledge and a passion for sharing it.

With this BUS OFF & TAKE A HIKE Tour you can relax and watch the scenery roll by. Quality Design is our standard for all aspects of our tours, from accommodations and meals, to the vehicles and operators who support our tours. When available, all meals are prepared with fine, fresh locally produced ingredients and are "tastefully" presented in unique natural locations. Each itinerary is carefully designed to enable exciting encounters with nature at an enjoyable vacation pace.

The hikes on this tour are accessible for all reasonably fit adults.

Day 1



The tour begins with a visit to Steep Rock. No place could be more perfect for a coffee break the first day than on the cliffs at Steep Rock. A short walk takes you out along a spectacular outcrop of sheer limestone cliffs towering 20 to 30 feet above the eastern shore of Lake Manitoba. If you have ever basked in the sun on a Greek island, you'll imagine yourself returned.

Next, we travel to Grand Rapids Generating Station. This massive structure is built on the spot where the Saskatchewan River empties into Lake Winnipeg.

The highlight of the day is Pisew Falls Hike. The magnificent scenery of the falls is always featured in Manitoba travel literature and no wonder! These falls are the pictorial gem of

Manitoba's north. Boardwalks leading right up to the falls offer close-up views of the torrent, as well as the ferns and mosses that thrive on the spray. Our hike (3-4 km) will give us lots of time to enjoy the picturesque falls.

Stay the night in Thompson, Manitoba's third largest city. There was nothing here before 1956 until a massive body of nickel ore was discovered near the Burntwood River. Today the city emerges like a surreal vision of civilization amid the wilds of the boreal forest.

Hiking Highlights -

- **Steep Rock cliff hike 3 km**
- **Pisew Falls hike 4 km**

Monday's Accommodations @ Days Inn Thompson

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Day 2



A short hike along a part of Thompson's Millennium Trail called the Spirit Way will kick start our day. This pathway highlights the city's art, heritage, culture and scenery.

Next we start heading west following the Grass River corridor. There are two wonderful hikes on this river system. Wekusko Falls is a Prairie Pathfinder favourite and a nature lovers' dream. The Grass River plunges almost 12 metres through a series of falls and rapids. The hike showcases the cascading water with two suspension bridges.

The Karst Springs trail follows the Grass River upstream climbing a ridge that forms a divide between the Manitoba Lowlands and the Precambrian Shield. At the halfway point on the trail, signs lead you to a rich carpet of emerald green moss and lichen where an underground spring erupts from a limestone rock face.

Heading north through the rugged Canadian Shield on the way to Flin Flon we stop at Bakers Narrows Provincial Park. This park is a thin neck on one of the many bays of Lake Athapapuskow. We'll enjoy a short stroll to a viewing tower overlooking the lake and surrounding land.

Evening accommodation is in Flin Flon

This quirky mining community is dominated by the Hudson Bay Mining & Smelting Company smokestack which, at 251 metres is the tallest free standing structure in Manitoba.

After dinner, we'll take an unusual hike on Flin Flon's community path. It starts on a flat boardwalk, hikes up steep cliffs on wooden stairs and supplies a spectacular birds-eye view of the city built on the sides of rock outcroppings. Aside from the scenic beauty, you have historic attractions along the way including the natural beauty of the rock formations that were formed almost two billions years ago by underwater volcanoes.

Hiking Highlights -

- Thompson Millennium Trail 3 km
- Wekuska Falls 3 km
- Karst Springs 3 km
- Flin Flon Community Pathway 4 km

Touring Attractions -

- Bakers Narrows

Tuesday accommodations @ Victoria Inn North Flin Flon

Day 3



First stop of the day is the Clearwater Caves hike in Clearwater Lake Provincial Park. This trail rates as one of the most delightful strolls in Manitoba. High rocky cliffs and pristine shoreline make this a beautiful place to explore. By a series of stairways and viewing platforms, the trail weaves down and around deep cave-like crevices.

Heading south from The Pas, the road follows near Lake Winnipegosis and past the Salt Flats Ecological Reserve. If conditions are suitable a short walk to the flats will be on the itinerary.

Before long we are at the Porcupine Hills. Our next hike begins at the eastern end of the Porcupines. The trail starts at a wooden bridge crossing the Bowsman River then follows a well defined cart track that was once an old logging road dating back to the early 1900s. The trail winds through healthy forest with meadows sprinkled with wildflowers and ends at a scenic overlook that the locals call 'Pikes Peak'. From the overlook there is a stunning view of the Swan River Valley. To the west, you can see Thunderhill - the location for our last

hike of the day.

Swan River Valley occupies a flat break in the Manitoba Escarpment between the Duck Mountains to the south, the Porcupine Hills to the north and Thunderhill to the west. Although the valley has an abundance of opportunities for sightseeing and hiking, it has never become a popular tourist destination. For this reason we call it a secret treasure. Thunderhill is one of the prettiest spots in the valley. Our hike takes us from the south side of the hill to the north with glorious overlooks on both sides. Creative bridges over the creek and springs make this hike memorable.

Spend the night in the valley town of Swan River. The town is the hub for the agriculture and forestry business of the valley.

Hiking Highlights -

- Clearwater Caves 1 km
- Bowsman Overlook 6.4 km
- Thunderhill 4.5 km

Wednesday accommodations @ Westwood Inn Swan River

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Day 4



In the morning we will drive south through the Duck Mountains and the Shell River Valley and reach the trailhead for our hike on the south side of the Shell River. The trail follows the river through what is probably the most beautiful ghost town site in Manitoba with spectacular views of the Shell River Valley all around. Climbing the steep valley wall you will reach Asessippi ski hill.

After leaving the Asessippi park area, we are making a side trip to an area of unforgettable beauty that loops in an out of the magnificent Assiniboine River Valley. The earliest 'claim to fame' for this region was its micro-climate. It was given the name 'Banana Belt' by early settlers when they realized they could grow wheat here without freezing. At the centre of the tour is Millwood. Today, only a few of the oldest buildings are left but a graceful old stone bridge still spans the gently winding Assiniboine.

The second hike of the day circles a plateau overlooking the steep plunging valleys of the Assiniboine River and Beaver Creek. The entire horizon seems to open up as we hike at this dramatic spot. This legendary site is as famous for its beauty as its fascinating history. Two different forts, both called Fort Ellice were built here by the Hudson's Bay Company, the first one in 1831. This was considered an ideal location as the area was a rich fur bearing land and also near the bison. As well, it was close enough to the U.S. border to prevent the

Americans from moving north and capturing the lucrative fur trade. From the 1840s to the 1880s Fort Ellice was a major provisioning post. All trails led to Fort Ellice. This hike is definitely 'off the beaten track' as it is on private land. We are fortunate that the Foulliard family has given us permission to hike the trail.

Virden is our home for the night. A tour of the town has been arranged before dinner. The town's #1 precious gem is a 450 seat opera house built in 1912 and still in use today. A tour of the opera house will be followed by a tour of a completely furnished Victorian home, a chateau style former CP rail station which now houses an art gallery, and a 'must see to believe' costume gallery.

Hiking Highlights -

- Asessippi 4 km
- Old Fort Ellice 6 km

Touring Attractions -

- 'Victorian Virden' including the Virden Opera House

Thursday accommodations @ Jay's Inn Virden

Day 5



Our final hike is out on the dunes of the Spirit Sands trail in Spruce Woods Provincial Park. This desert-like area is a geological wonder left by the evaporated basin of an ancient lake. You wonder if you are actually in Manitoba as you take in your surroundings. The trail is through spectacular moving sand dunes, oak groves, gentle rolling open grassland, a dense spruce stand and a coulee of aspens. Shade of the spruce and aspens can be most welcome on a hot summer day! Once you near the Assiniboine River, wooden steps take you to an overlook of the dunes and then down to the vividly colored Punch Bowl.

The last visit on the tour is to the Manitoba Agricultural Museum. The museum depicts an exciting era in rural Manitoba, and this era has been brought to life in the Homesteaders Village. An impressive selection of 19th century buildings are beautifully restored and replete with period furnishings. The recreated village is shaded with large oak trees and its winding

street descends the Manitoba Escarpment. The village is authentically located parallel to the original Fort Ellice trail. Between 1821 and 1879 brigades of as many as three hundred Red River carts would wind their way across this property on which the Homesteaders Village is located. Ruts of the trail are visible at the village.

Hiking Highlights -

- Spirit Sands 10 km

Touring Attractions -

- Manitoba Agricultural Museum