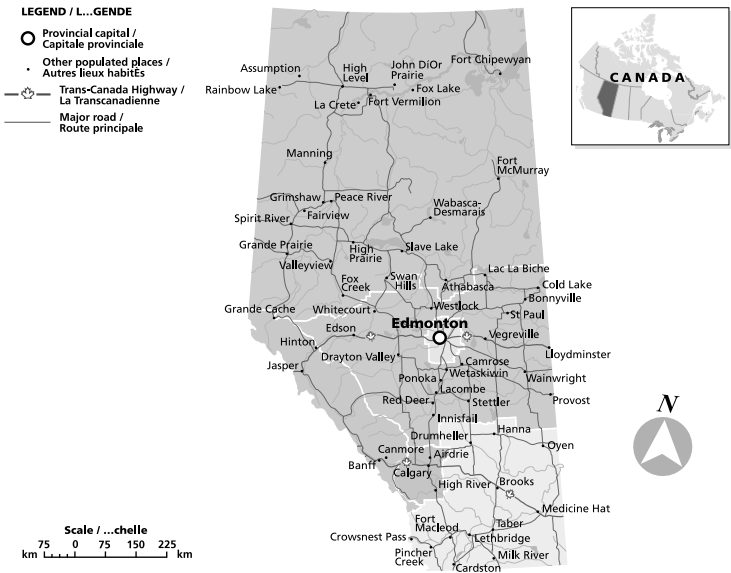




Arts and Festivals



Tapping into the Cowboy Mystique

1

The cowboy mystique is alive and well in southern Alberta where ranchers and outfitters continue to ply their trade among the grassy Prairies and rolling foothills, up to the edges of the majestic Rocky Mountains. Why not take a day or a few to become one with your inner cowpoke at one of many working and guest ranches in the area? For city folk who want to indulge in a taste of the rugged life, or for horse and nature lovers looking for an unforgettable vacation, the picks are many and offer a range of activities, lodging and rates. Most ranches are family-run outfits that offer experiences for learners, observers, weekend riders and seasoned equestrians, but some are more focused on either being a working ranch or a guest ranch.

At working ranches learn first-hand why most ranch hands are skinny (it's a lot of work keeping up with the chores), how to saddle up and how to throw a lasso, then fall into a righteously tired sleep in a bunkhouse, or in a luxury (for a cowboy) private room with its own bath. Guest ranches offer similar activities but cater more to the crowd that wants to combine horseback riding with drumming in the woods or a spa treatment, ending up with a gourmet meal or

more hearty fare.

Experienced equestrians wanting to explore natural hoof care for their mounts or how to communicate better with their horse can also find courses with certified instructors. For those of you longing for a real trail experience, there are opportunities for real spring or fall cattle drives, including all of the work and unpredictability of running a herd. You'll appreciate the hearty meals and breathtaking views as you ride through the foothills up to secluded mountain meadows even more after a hard day's work. Another option is to go on a pack trip and let the crew do the work while a guide takes you on a ride, hike or to a special fishing hole.

Details: *All those options and more can be found on albertacountryvacation.com and thecowboytrail.com/ranchvacations. Git along, lit'l doggies.*

2

Going Big in Alberta

Alberta likes big; big sky country, big ideas, big malls, big festivals and big-mouthed politicians. Towns in the province also are big on big. We've got giant wagon wheels, baseball bats and balls, ducks, geese, beavers, pigs, vegetables and food, oh do we have giant food.

Take the humungous fibreglass and steel pyrogy at the entrance to the village of Glendon, just southwest of Cold Lake. The fake dumpling, cunningly pierced by a huge fork, is 7.6 metres (25 feet) high and weighs 2,727 kilograms (6,000 pounds). Townsfolk say it would feed 10,000 people if it were real.

Or try on a hungry Tyrannosaurus rex, such as Drumheller has guarding the town. The 25-metre statue is the biggest darn dino in the world, five times larger than the real thing, and hollow inside so you can climb up its absent bowels to survey the town and badlands through its teeth.

Even the remote village of Rainbow Lake, tucked in the northwest corner of the province, boasts a biggie, although you might want to come prepared for the prototypes of Mozzy the Mosquito.

The list of biggies itself is big, so here are just a few of the more noteworthy roadside attractions.

Falher, 161 kilometres northeast of Grande Prairie, commemorates its status as the honey capital of Canada with a statue of a bee the size of a compact car. If the insect flew south, it might land on Pinto McBean in Bow Island, near Medicine Hat. Then there's the world's largest Easter egg in Vegreville. The Ukranian aluminum pysanka turns like a weathervane in the wind, even though it's almost 26 feet long and 31 feet tall.

And closing with a personal favourite, the six-ton keilbassa sausage outside of Mundare. The 42-foot statue is a tribute to Stawnichy's Meat Processing, which has been churning out sausages since 1959.

Edmonton's Fringe

3

The Edmonton Fringe Theatre Festival is a must-see, must-do, and great fun for the 11 days in August where it literally transforms the city to a stage. You can afford to be fussy, but get caught up in the buzz and try seeing as many of the 1,200 shows performed during the Fringe as humanly possible.

Anything can and does go during North America's oldest and largest fringe festival, where more than 200 performers from around the world act out from noon to midnight in Old Strathcona. Half a million people flock to the unruly and uncensored live theatre event that brings acts silly and profound to the intimate venues set up by the Fringe.

There's even a designated kid-friendly Global Family Stage 12 and KidsFringe at the Polynesian Park at the north end of the site for the budding theatrical set. Street performers, crafts and food vendors add to the friendly chaos that characterizes the Fringe as much as the lurid posters hawking different plays.

The festival, the largest in the world after the Mother Fringe in Edinburgh, lets playwrights and actors shake their creative tailfeathers without restrictions. Of course that means some Fringe acts are true duds, and one way to find out which is to eavesdrop on conversations at the beer tent, read the *Edmonton Journal* for reviews, and/or go to festival Ground Zero between 103 and 104 Streets from 83 Avenue to 85 Avenue.

This is the launching point for Fringers and it is here they will find performance listings, a review board, a box office, food, beer and the essential Fringe program. Do not underestimate the importance of this guide to all things Fringe. Not only does it provide descriptions of each play and a schedule; the maps lead you to more beer tents and the loos. Buy One, Keep It Very Close.

Details: For more information, log on to www.fringetheatreadventures.ca or call (780) 448-9000.

It's not hard to get the blues in Edmonton, particularly in August when the Labatt Blues Festival kicks in. The three-day blues and mo' blues festival has been sending crowds into indigo nirvana since 1999 with its roster of venerable and new-coming artists like Charlie Musselwhite, Shemekia Copeland, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Pinetop Perkins and

TAKE 5 HOLGER PETERSEN

A MUSIC LOVER'S MUST LIST

Holger Petersen has been part of the Alberta music scene since he was a fledgling drummer in high school. He founded and runs Stony Plain Records, a label that's won 10 Juno Awards and has been nominated for four Grammys. Holger is a founder and ex-Artistic Director of the Edmonton Folk Music Festival. As a broadcaster, Petersen has hosted Natch'l Blues on CKUA since 1969 and Saturday Night Blues on CBC Radio since 1988. He has received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Athabasca University and in 2003 became a Member of the Order of Canada for his contributions to Canadian culture.

1. Edmonton Folk Music Festival. We're blessed in Alberta to have many great summer music festivals. This first choice is a toss-up among several, but it holds a special place for me. Nowhere is music, culture and friendship celebrated more than at this laid-back, eclectic event in Edmonton. The daytime session stages are the heart and soul of the festival. And the late-night volunteer parties often include the festival's stars performing relaxed and inspired sets.

2. CANTOS Music Collection Tour, Calgary. This non-profit foundation has assembled one of the world's most distinctive keyboard instrument collections. Items range from an early harpsichord (ca 1679), to Sir Elton John and Bernie Taupin's songwriting piano, and the Rolling Stones Mobile Studio — used to record classic albums not only by the Stones but Led Zeppelin, Dire Straits and Bob Marley. If you really want a treat, ask somebody if John is working today - John, who used to be with Iron Butterfly, and you don't need any better creds than that.

Buckwheat Zydeco. And the festival rocks down on the placid setting of Hawrelak Park, just down the hill from the University of Alberta and across the river from some of the ritziest homes in the city.

The brainchild of promoters Carrol Deen and Cam Hayden (also a fixture on CKUA radio), the Edmonton festival stands out for its dedication to all kinds of blues, from swinging Chicago to muddy Delta blues. They also instituted that rarity among open-air festivals; the full-length, 75-minute set. Listening in on the festival is one of the cheapest thrills in town, too, at \$75 for a three-day pass, and \$35 to

3. **CKUA Radio, Edmonton.** While in the province, check out Canada's first public broadcaster. Started in 1927 (predating CBC) CKUA provides unique 'non-mainstream' programming. It's the glue that holds the province's cultural community together. Heard throughout Alberta on AM and FM, it was the first Canadian broadcaster to go online. Tours are offered during seasonal fundraisers. The music library is spread over four floors and includes more than 90,000 albums, almost 70,000 CD's and 20,000 78's.

4. **The Cowboy Trail.** Listen to Ian Tyson, Wilf Carter, Corb Lund or Tim Hus while driving down the Cowboy Trail along the foothills of the Rockies. Take Highway 22 down to Longview and check out Ian Tyson's Navajo Mug for some coffee and the best beef jerky you've ever had.

5. **Recordland, Calgary.** Worth a stop if you collect vintage vinyl, eclectic music and know what you're looking for. Recordland in Inglewood has the biggest assortment of vinyl in Canada. Mostly overpriced but you can still find the odd bargain. The province has many thriving used record shops run by knowledgeable collectors. I also recommend Freecloud Records in Edmonton.

\$45 single tickets, depending on the day.

It's also a great place to pick up CDs and other mementos at the on-site Blues Store, get them signed at the autograph table, then go quaff some suds or snarf a veggie wrap. The festival is a cash-only event, though, so bring green or risk having to wait in line for an ATM that probably runs out of money just as it's your turn.

Details: *Hawrelak Park is located at 9930 Groat Road. There is limited parking on site, but Park 'n Ride buses from Stadium Parkade at the university service the event. Tel: (780) 708-7230; www.bluesinternational ltd.com.*

Northern Light Shows

5

A Kiwi friend of mine thought the world was being invaded by aliens the first time she experienced northern lights. She and her friends were relaxing by Lesser Slave Lake on one of the native New Zealander's first camping trips in Canada when the evening show started.

And that's truly what the aurora borealis is – a gob-smacking, jaw-dropping show of undulating streams of white, red, green and purple flowing in the sky. There are lots of places in the province where the borealis gazing is good, but for easy access and popping colours because of a higher mean temperature, Fort McMurray really has it all.

There are three local outfits which offer excursions outside the city that include explanations of the night sky, constellations and how to best photograph the northern lights. One tour starts in Edmonton so you don't even have to drive the 430 kilometres north.

Before shrugging off a guided tour of northern lights as cheesily tourist, consider the time you tried to take a photo of the lights and failed miserably. The wilderness surrounding Fort Mac provides prime sites for viewing aurora borealis because of the relative lack of light pollution bleeding out beyond the city's borders.

According to experts at the University of Alberta, the epicentre of Canada's oil sands region also lies within the southern portion of the zone of "maximum auroral occurrence" at night. Caused by the interaction of solar wind particles with the planet's magnetic field, aurora borealis is more prominent in higher latitudes near the magnetic poles, and best seen in the fall and winter. Scientists at the U of A also have developed a system to predict the likelihood of a celestial display in the Edmonton area.

Details: *Check out www.aurorawatch.ca for the next best show. For tour information contact Alta-Can Aurora Tours at (780) 452-5187, Aurora Adventures (780) 743-0766 and Aurora Tours (780) 334-2292.*

6

WordFest

Literary buffs and authors alike perk up in the fall knowing they'll be able to rub shoulders with some of Canada and the world's best talent at the Banff-Calgary International WordFest. Taking place in Calgary's theatre district and the glorious mountain settings of Banff, this six-day treasure of literary indulgence ranks among the top three festivals in the country. About 12,000 people a year attend the festival and they are treated to literary icons like Mavis Gallant, Greg Hollingshead, Margaret Atwood, Nino Ricci and Roddy Doyle.



WordFest pulls together an eclectic mix of authors, novelists and poets into interactive events ranging from readings of new works, to events for kids in local schools, to hilarious panel discussions on how to survive as an Albertan at Toronto cocktail parties. Being able to hear a favourite author read from her or his latest offering is a major draw of the festival, something made even more enticing because you are likely to have a chance to chat with them.

Never one to shy away from innovation, director Ann Green recently added programming around new trends in storytelling, like blogging and making the leap to film. Having a house band and venues ranging from boozy actor hangouts and art galleries to the renowned Banff Centre of Arts aren't bad selling points, either. While writers need an invitation to take part in WordFest, the public can buy a ticket or pass for a reasonable price.

Details: For more information, telephone (403) 237-9068 or go online at www.wordfest.com.

Edmonton Folk Music Festival

7



Provincial capital Edmonton and southern powerhouse Calgary have enjoyed a mostly-friendly rivalry since one was chosen over the other to seat the legislature. However, no such rivalry exists for festival talent since both share booking information.

The folks in Edmonton and the Edmonton media knows it's the biggest. And they know too that it was labelled the best folk music festival in North America by *Rolling Stone Magazine*, something it occasionally points out to the folks in the other city to the south.

During the second week of August, the four-day event attracts some 21,000 people a day to its downtown Gallagher Park site to listen to headliners like Steve Earl, Sarah McLachlan, Niko Chase and Broken Social Scene, as well as groove to roots, blues, world, and you guessed it, folk.

The Edmonton Folk Music Festival is a world-class event that promotes all incarnations of folk, from throat singers to punk soulsters, attracting to the festival a huge, multi-generational audience. When not rushing from stage to stage (it's truly a schlep from the beer gardens – I mean, Stage 1 on the east end of the park to Stage 6 on the west end), people just veg out, dance, eat and otherwise socialize at Edmonton's folksiest best.

The festival has the luxury of taking place on an inner city ski hill where no other events take place in the summer, allowing the festival two and a half weeks to set up its eight stages. It also sets up the largest mobile kitchen – the hearth of the festival – in Canada where 2,200 volunteers and all performers and their entourages eat.

Details: Buy weekend passes early, as in June, since they sell out quickly. And take the bus since the no parking on site rule is strictly enforced. It happens on the second weekend in August in Gallagher Park, 97th Ave and 94 Street. Call (780) 429-1899 or check it out online at www.efmf.ab.ca.

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Calgary Folk Music Festival

The fourth weekend of July is a good time to stroll to Prince's Island Park in downtown Calgary and enjoy the cool breeze off the Bow



River, the shady trees, and the highlight of it all ... the sweet sound of folk-roots-funk-world-alternative on offer at the Calgary Folk Music Festival. The four-day event is known as the edgiest folk festival in the province, bringing in the likes of Beija Flor to John Wort Hannam, Ridley Bent to Dick Gaughan, Sarah Harmer and Mavis Staples.

Flush with young folk looking to get closer to up-and-coming independent acts as well as established stars, the festival lays to rest "folk" as kumbayah drones. Of course, the festival's foundation also presents stellar traditional North American, British (big UK fans in the south of the province), blues and world music, in an eclectic, vibrant mix.

Main stage is where headliners strut their stuff, but regulars can tell you it's at the six side stages where the magic happens. That is where you can get a band of itinerant musicians from India jamming with a Hungarian gypsy band, a trance DJ and a couple of Celtic bagpipe players in a set that has the audience up on its feet. Calgary also offers Folk Boot Camp; three-day sessions by festival musicians featuring songwriting, guitar, vocal, and banjo workshops.

Since the island can only take about 12,000 people at a time, Calgary's folk music festival has a more intimate allure (and spurring many an "island" romance) than its older sister up north. Musicians love the shady retreat and the shorter distances between stages and the public love it all.

Details: *Be prepared for every type of weather – one year it hit 30 degrees Celsius then hailed, all in one afternoon. It happens over the fourth weekend in July at Prince's Island Park – access the main gate from the east side of the island behind Eau Claire Market. (403) 233-0904; www.calgaryfolkfest.com.*

Driving back roads in Alberta doesn't mean being stuck listening to bad music or polkas on the radio. Motor along almost anywhere in the province and you can tune into alternative, folk, rock, jazz and classical music, courtesy of CKUA and its network of 17 radio transmitters beaming out its unusual mix on AM and FM dials.

Canada's first educational and public radio started broadcasting in 1927 from the University of Alberta. Since those halcyon days CKUA has maintained its innovative drive, becoming the first radio in Canada to go online in 1996. Listeners are so loyal that when the station was suspended suddenly in 1994, they rallied and created a foundation to help keep the radio and their favourite programming on air.

From Baba's Grooves to Fire on the Mountain, Future Funk to Wide-Cut Country, CKUA's distinctive programming is a welcome gem among radio stations. Indeed, just about everything I know about Alberta and Canadian music comes from listening to CKUA and its dedicated crew of DJs, who make a point of giving air time to emerging as well as established Canadian artists. I first experienced k.d. lang, Corb Lund, Tegan and Sara, the Polyjesters and Wendy McNeill on CKUA.

And the mighty station goes further afield, spinning world music, giving out Celtic cuddles, vocalizing jazz, and belting out Canada's longest running blues program. Farmers and politicians get their say, as do playwrights and poets. The station also produces award-winning history and science spots.

Details: Tune into CKUA at 580 AM province-wide, StarChoice satellite channel 828 across Canada and on ckua.com around the world on the web.

Alberta is a fishers' paradise and features more scenic rivers, creeks, lakes and ponds than you can shake a rod at. There are 600 lakes (300 stocked by our friends Alberta Fish and Wildlife), 245 rivers and 315 spring-fed creeks and ponds in the province to wade into.

Starting up north, you can either drive to a body of water like Lesser Slave Lake, where North America's biggest walleye tournament happens every year, or fly into a more remote lodge or camp,

sometimes for a lot less than you might expect.

Margaret Lake, up by High Level in the northwest corner of Alberta, is a favourite among some anglers, where you can find abundant pike, Arctic graylings and walleye. Many northern fly-in camps and lodges fly out of Fort McMurray, where you can contact a swath of outdoor adventure companies for guides, pilots and accommodation.

In the south, fly fishers wax eloquently about the majestic scenery (either mountains or the not-so-distant towers of downtown Calgary or serene Prairies), clear rivers and brown and rainbow trout rising to the bait. Famed guitarist Amos Garrett, who has played with Stevie Wonder, Maria Muldar and Bonnie Raitt, once said he moved to southern Alberta for the peace and the trout.

He's not the only one – a whooping 300,000 recreational anglers ply Alberta waterways in boats, rafts and hip waders each year, contributing more than \$350 million to the provincial economy.

Don't let cold weather get in your way, either. Ice fishing (also known as vertical jigging) is a traditional outing for hardy folk with a hankering for a winter feed of fish, and goes hand in hand with other winter activities like snowmobiling and cross-country skiing.

Details: Before you go, any time of year, log on to the Alberta government website srd.alberta.ca/fishwildlife/fishinghunting/default.aspx for information on licenses and regulations. Or call toll free (877) 944-0313.

Folk Festivals Not In Calgary or Edmonton

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With such a short summer season, folk and world music groupies can spend the entire summer going from one stellar festival to another in Alberta. Each one is unique, not only in performer line-up, but in location as well.

The season kicks off with the venerable (1978) old-style North Country Fair, held in the Driftpile Valley, 240 kilometres northwest of Edmonton. This music and camping festival happens the third week of June when days start blurring with



nights. Rustic would be the word for the lack of facilities, but intimate, jumping and chartered bus are the real buzz words.

The first weekend of July heralds the Rombs Country and Bluegrass Jamboree in Fairview, about 553 kilometres northwest of Edmonton, a small festival that has slowly gained devotees since launching in 2004. More grey hairs and baseball caps than long hairs and tie-dies attend this lively Peace Country celebration, but the friendly spirit is the same.

Spend the next week resting up, then head south the third weekend of July. The South Country Fair sells itself as a peace-oriented camping, music and arts festival. Located just outside Fort Macleod, about 168 km southwest of Calgary, its mix of local and exotic fare set against the wide Prairies and the edge of the Old Man River attracts about 2,500 people a year.

A week later the Calgary festival kicks off, then grab your banjos and head back north to the Blueberry Bluegrass and Country Music Festival. The central Alberta bluegrass bonanza is held in Stony Plain the last weekend of July and delivers straight up bluegrass, from modern players like Marty Stuart to locals Down to the Wood. Up to 4,000 people enjoy the festival, some camping, some not, which has been called the best organized bluegrass event in North America.

Then it's back south again for the longest-running folk festival in the province, the Canmore Folk Music Festival. Besides being set in the shadow of the Three Sisters mountains, what other festival pipes you on to the grounds? Expect the unexpected, eclectic and boisterous, traditional and avant-garde, blues and world music at this mountain getaway which attracts about 14,000 folks a year.

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Bird Watching

More than 400 species of birds live and migrate through the province, from pelicans to majestic golden eagles, and there are plenty of places to watch them soar. Because of its unique combination of ecosystems from prairie to boreal forest and mountains, Alberta plays hosts to a wide and diverse range of our feathered friends.



North:

Birders flock to Alberta's northeast and the Peace-Athabasca Delta, one of the largest inland freshwater deltas in the world and the landing site of

hundreds of species of migratory songbirds and waterfowl. Visit the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation – the only research and educational facility of its kind in the world – and the nearby Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory, both of which offer a number of educational and interpretive programs. See also www.borealbirdcentre.ca, or www.lslbo.org.

Central:

Beaverhill Lake, about 70 kilometres southeast of Edmonton, near Tofield, is a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. Hundreds of thousands of geese, ducks and shorebirds visit the large but shallow Beaverhill Lake in the spring and fall, making it one of the favoured stops for wandering birders. See sandhill cranes, red-necked phalaropes, pectoral sandpipers, plovers and American avocets spring and fall. Check out the Beaverhill Bird Observatory.

For more information, go to www.beaverhillsbirds.com.

Mountains:

More than 260 bird species have been recorded in the Banff-Lake Louise corridor where the birding is easy even in winter. In Kananaskis Country, check out the golden eagle migrations in spring and fall at wheelchair accessible Mt. Lorette Ponds.

South:

Check out American white pelicans and American avocets at Lake Newell near Brooks in the summer. Further south, outside of Etzikom, take Highway 885 to Pakowki Lake, to some of the province's best marsh habitats. Swans, cormorants, bitterns and ducks are a common sight at the lake, and you just might get lucky and spot a snowy egret or ferruginous hawk.