

Always a Fan of

BY RITA COOK

I am not a newbie to Alberta, but every time I go I like it even more. For one, it reminds me of Texas. Indeed, flying into Calgary the folks will especially agree that there are a lot of similarities. Drive a little north and you find Canmore (my little secret), it's jewel of a place that you won't want too many folks to discover.

Don't get me wrong, Canmore has certainly made its mark since it was the home of the Cross-Country Skiing and Biathlon events of the 1988 Winter Olympics. These days folks still stay in shape winter and summer, but take the time to discover Canmore in the winter and you won't be sorry.

I only had a few days there, but I easily filled the time. Ice fishing, dog sledding and a fine dining experience took up the day, but a trip to the Canmore Arctic Center is a must and a great Nordic ski facility if you like that sort of thing. Not far outside of Canmore you can also experience ancient rock drawings and pictographs that are possibly 10,000 years old. Of course there is also the Ice Canyon Walk too, hire a guide and you will get a crash course in geology and the human history of the area. Another stop with some amazing pictographs is Grassi Lakes near the Nordic Center and, a special treat is at the end of the trail where there is a great view of an ice fall.

As for what I did fill my day, for ice fishing consider using an outfitter like I did, he will have all the equipment you need and the rest is just a matter of waiting and relaxing. Contact the folks at Mohikan Trails for more information and these guys also offer snowshoe trips and hikes.

Mad Dogs and Englishmen is really the best place for dog sledding in the area. The dogs pulled us over a frozen lake and believe me, they have more energy than I did when we were finished. Anyone who says dog sledding is easy hasn't done it, as I stood behind the basket in the musher position I was exhausted. Ice skating on the lake in the town of Canmore is also relaxing or try your hand at ice climbing if you're up for the challenge.

Keep driving north and finally, it's Banff and Lake Louise. These are popular destinations for people from around the world. Visit in the summer and this area truly does come alive. In fact, there are about 3 million people that visit the area each year. Banff National Park is a UNESCO world heritage site (and the third established National Park in the world) with an unspoiled mountain range that can be admired from afar or as you explore the deeper reaches. Outdoor adventures in the area reign supreme, but Banff is also a good place to kick back with a glass of wine at a fine dining establishment and just take it all in as you relax.



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Take in the views of the Canadian Rockies from the world-renowned Fairmont Banff Springs is a must. This 120-year-old historical landmark has been beck-

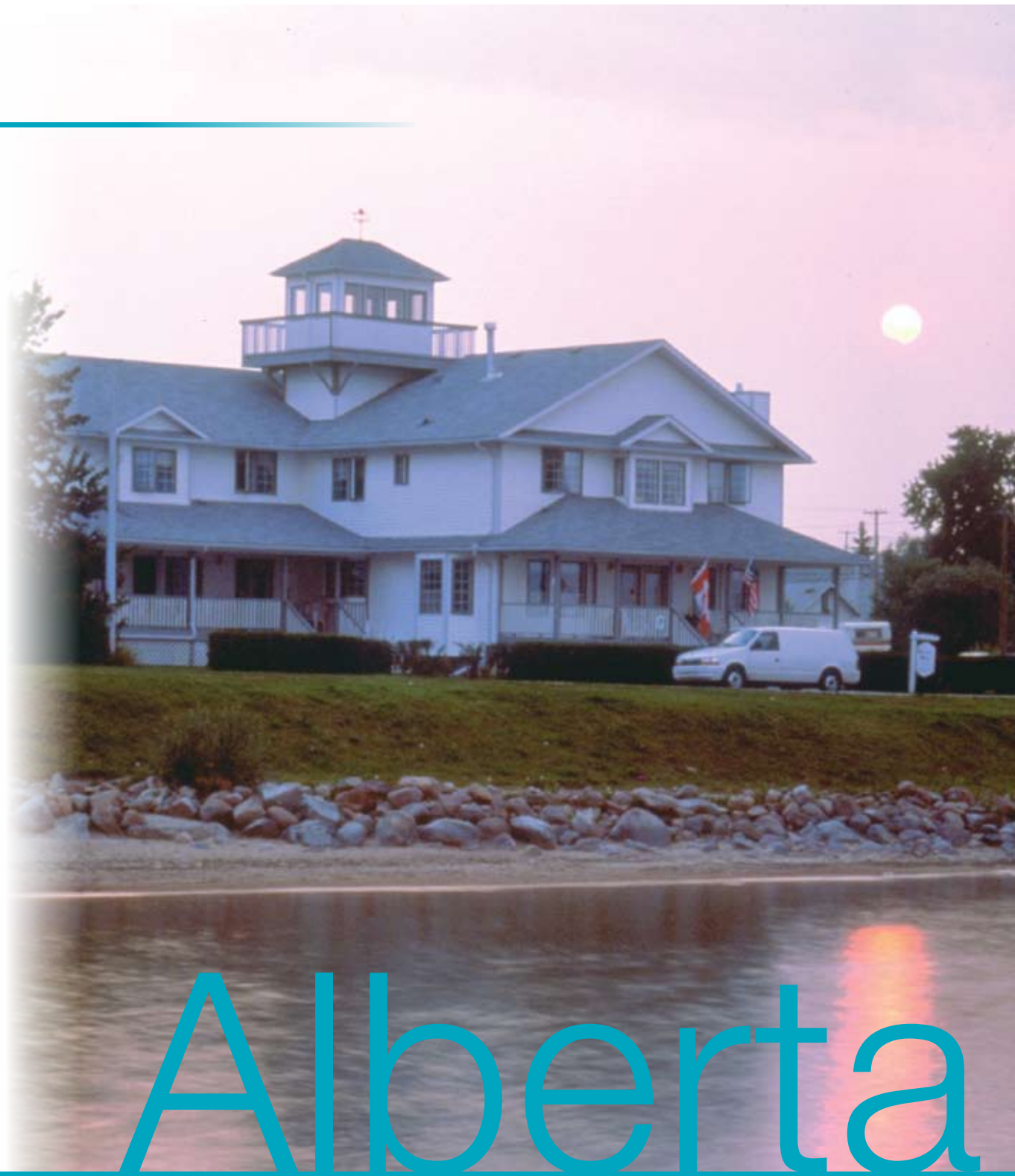
oning travelers since its inception and is built in the style of a Scottish baronial castle with a number of restaurants to choose from as you pass the time, think Italian, German or even Sushi if you like. While at the Fairmont take advantage of the spa too. Willow Stream utilizes the local hot springs in the area and you can experience various plunge pools to rejuvenate your body and soul.

But that's not all, the relaxation will only serve to get you ready for the activities ahead. In the summer hike, mountain bike, kayak or even canoe, lakes and trails abound. For the adrenaline junky consider whitewater rafting, rock climbing or even caving under Grotto Mountain an undeveloped subterranean zone that descends deep below the surface of the earth. Banff also has a great gondola and at the top you will feel as if you are truly overlooking the world.

An explorer's spirit is all you need to uncover the secrets in both Banff and Lake Louise, but watch out for the bears too. It's true the wildlife abounds so if you enjoy nature as God intended, this is the place for you.

Alberta is the perfect place to make memories no matter the season you visit. The uncanny silence of an Alberta night in Banff National Park or a moment of solitude as you wander the wilderness near Canmore indeed offers a feeling of being the only human on earth. So whether it's the natural hot springs, winter's world-class skiing or the spas and golf courses that make the destination a luxurious adventure, remember this area truly is the wonder of Canada's west.

PHOTO: TRAVEL ALBERTA



Alberta