

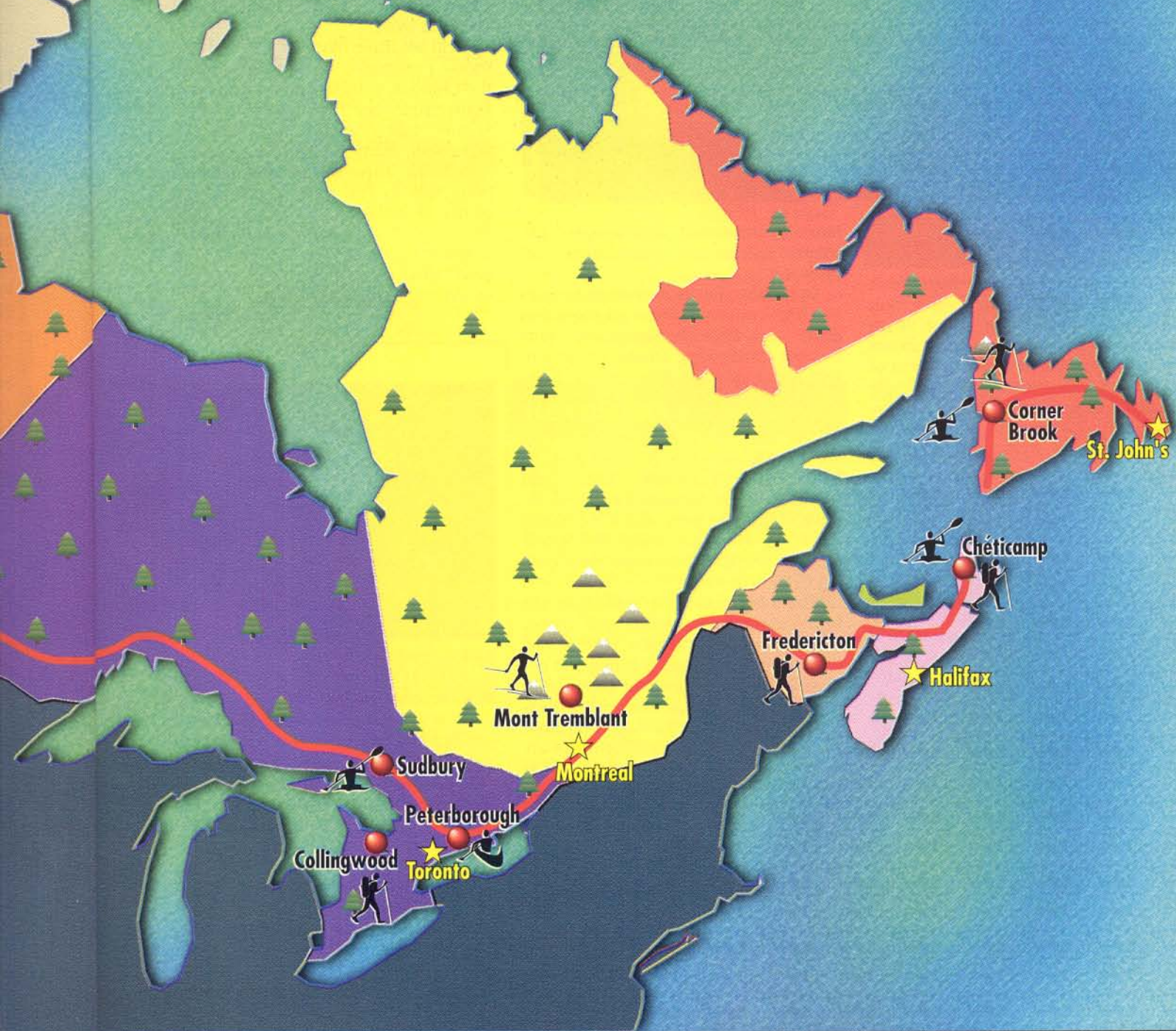


Tired of the urban rat race? Need to spend more time outdoors instead of just thinking about it? How about a lifestyle change? Slow down the pace, maybe, and relocate to a place where you know you can enjoy some great outdoor adventures. We've done the homework for you and come up with 15 of Canada's best recreational towns.

We've judged a town mostly on its proximity to first-class outdoor destinations, but also on its livability, the cost of living, job prospects, distance from major urban centres, and climate. We've avoided tourist towns such as Banff and Whistler where the crush of tourists and the high cost of living affect the quality of life. Based on our criteria, no towns in Yukon, the Northwest Territories or Nunavut made the list, but Whitehorse, Dawson City and Yellowknife would make great seasonal destinations.

Of course, most of us are tied to our existing jobs and families so a permanent move is difficult to justify. However, you could put the following towns and regions on your "must visit" list when planning vacations in years to come. You won't be disappointed with any of them.

TO LIVE AND PLAY: CANADA'S BEST TOWNS





COURTESY OF TRAVEL MANITOBA

Pinawa, MB

Coched between boreal forest and the Canadian Shield, Pinawa lies on the west shore of the Winnipeg River. The town beach provides easy canoe access to the 130 plus lakes across the river in Whiteshell Provincial Park. Just north of Pinawa are two more wilderness parks — Nopiming and Atikaki. From these flow some of the fastest rivers in Manitoba, including the Manigotagan, Bloodvein, Pigeon and Berens.

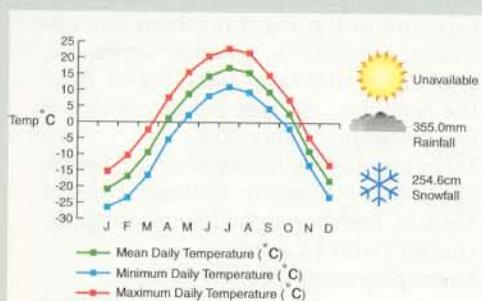
Besides paddling, extensive trail systems right outside the town are suitable for day hiking, cycling and cross-country skiing. Serious backpackers can head into the backcountry on the 60-km Mantario Trail in the Whiteshell.

Local clubs include sailing, rowing and photography, an arts and crafts guild, and the province's longest established community theatre, the Pinawa

forestry and tourism are the main employers. While tourism has traditionally been centred on sport fishing, ecotourism is becoming increasingly important.

Unemployment rate: 3-5 percent in the town itself, but considerably higher when including the Lac La Ronge Indian Band.

Robin and Arlene Karpan



Players. On a Saturday night, head to Jalapeno's Bar and Steak Pit or grab a cold pint at the Pinawa Club.

Originally developed in the early 1960s to house the employees of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited's (AECL) research laboratory, Pinawa is reinventing itself. Faced with the gradual winding down of AECL's operations, the town is building on its tourism appeal and information technologies for new jobs. With Winnipeg an hour's drive to the west, some residents even choose to commute.

Population: 1,670.

Cost of living: Low. 3-bdrm bungalow: about \$55,000, although a recent influx of residents has reduced the selection. Rent of a 2-bdrm apt: around \$400/mo.

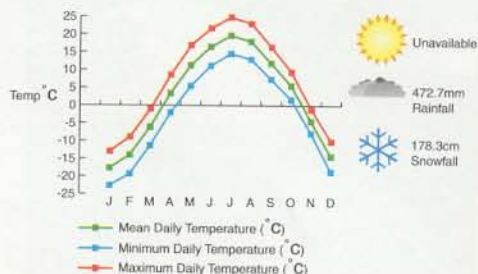
Vacancy rate: 10 percent (1997).

Typical weather: Daytime temperatures average -18 C in January, 20 in July.

Main employers: Less than 30 percent of locals are now employed by AECL, with new jobs coming from private companies.

Unemployment rate: 3.3 percent for men, 5.3 percent for women (1996).

Beth McKechnie



Crowsnest Pass, AB

Alberta's best kept secret, Crowsnest Pass, is the only section of the Alberta Rockies that is neither crown land nor part of a provincial or national park. About 270 km southwest of Calgary, the municipality is dotted with a string of small communities stretching east to west along Hwy 3. Far from the madding tourist crowds swarming through Canmore and Banff, "The Pass" has so far escaped a similar rush towards overdevelopment, maintaining its charm and quality of life.

There are hundreds of kilometres of biking, hiking, riding and walking trails to explore. Many of the routes are reminders of the region's history of coal mining, which started up around 1900. Subsequent closures after WW II turned the area into an economic backwater until the 1980s, when tourists and retirees discovered its history, scenery and recreational opportunities.

Today, the old mine works are a major tourist draw. The Crowsnest Pass Ecomuseum Trust has opened up part of the Bellevue Mine where former miners guide tour groups. Above ground are a museum and bus tours, and the Interpretive Centre at the site of the 1903 Frank Slide.

For those who wish to explore the heights of The Pass, two popular scrambles lead to the summits of Turtle and Crowsnest mountains, and the ascent of Window Mountain offers a challenge to experienced rock climbers. The Pass

boasts some of the finest fly fishing streams in North America. Streams such as the Racehorse, Lynx and Dutch are home to rainbow, cutthroat, brook and bull trout. In winter, the local ski hill, Pass Powderkeg, offers 400 metres of vertical runs and a thrilling luge run, and nearby Mount Tecumseh grooms 30 km of cross-country ski trails. The limestone peaks around Crowsnest Pass contain the highest concentration of caves in the Rockies, making it a mecca for cavers.

Population: 6,500.

Cost of living: Low to moderate. Average income per person, \$38,340. Average 3-bdrm house: \$72,000 (from \$15,000-\$150,000). 3 serviced acreages from \$50,000-\$70,000. Developed acreages start at \$200,000. Condos from \$30,000-\$50,000. Rent of a 2-bdrm apt: about \$400/mo.

Typical weather: Summer average: 11.5 C. Winter average: -7.5 C. Winters are moderated by the Chinook winds, which blow in from the Pacific and reduce the severity of winter cold snaps. July and August tend to be sunny and dry, while winters can see heavy snowfalls in December and January.

Main employers: Coal is still king. Fording Coal operates three mines in the area and employs about 1,400 people. Other major employers are in the construction, lumber, gas and manufacturing industries. There is also a growing tourism sector. Unskilled labour begins at between \$6-\$8 per hour. Skilled labour and trades start at about \$15 per hour.

Daniel Kyba