



Yurt's so good



(Arctic) foxy lady



It's brrrisk



What's around the bend?

Grin & bear it

HOW DOES CANADA'S WINTRY YUKON TERRITORY SHAPE UP IN SUMMER? OUR ACTING EDITOR FINDS OUT, POST THAW

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Screensaver scenery



As we pull out of Whitehorse's airport, a crochet-covered DC-3 aeroplane and a knit-wrapped pick-up truck appear beside the road... then a huge dome made from bike tyres appears on a fairly standard front lawn. Eh...? "People here are biiiig on creativity," local guide Harmony Hunter explains.

And it turns out there's plenty of space for them to let those creative juices flow: the Yukon Territory – is just over twice the size of Victoria but has a population of only 35,944 (moose outnumber people almost two to one here – true story). Whitehorse, the territory's capital, is by no means a bustling metropolis, but it definitely has a buzz, with its own brewery (try the Yukon Red), artist collectives, galleries, hot springs, restaurants and laid-back vibe.

HORSE 'N' AROUND

But this isn't the Yukon I'd always pictured: all perma-frosted tundra and snowy peaks, blue-eyed huskies and Daniel Boone coonskin hats. Maybe it is like that in winter when temps fall as low as -45°C, but in summer it's an adventure-friendly 13-21°C. You

don't have to go far to find one, either: Whitehorse has 700km of mountain-biking trails weaving all around the downtown area, the surrounding ranges and nearby Miles Canyon; it's worth taking a tour with Boréale Explorers to get your bearings. The flat, easy ride lasts up to 90 minutes, passing through virgin forest and along the famous Yukon River, visiting a few historic sites on the way. Boréale also runs Yurtville, glamping-style accommodation perched on a scenic bluff above Whitehorse – a top spot to catch the northern lights (aurora borealis) in the dead of night if you can drag yourself out of bed (sadly, I was in a fresh-air coma and slept through the alarm).

PARKS AND RECREATION

In search of more adventure, we head to Kluane National Park – a two-and-a-half hour drive along the Alaska Highway from Whitehorse. Pronounced "clue-arnie", the park has more than 800km of chartered trails and mapped routes; for a moderate to strenuous hike, try the 10km King's Throne route. Within 15 minutes of leaving the trailhead at Kathleen Lake, just outside of Haines Junction, you'll have incredible views of alpine meadows, the Auriol Range and the imposing Mt Worthington. If you've got sturdy boots and strong glutes, don't miss a hike to the summit; the entire trip takes up to eight hours. Oh,

and pick up some bear spray in Whitehorse or Haines Junction before you even think about hiking here; it'll set you back about \$35.

UP THE CREEK

Ever seen *The Grey*? Spoiler alert: towards the end of the film there's a scene where a guy ends up in some rapids with his foot stuck between rocks. He panics, and slowly, very spectacularly, drowns. When I arrive at Kluane's Tatsshenshini River to try whitewater rafting for the first time, that scene's on constant replay in my head. It doesn't help that "tatsshenshini" means "waters of the valley of the dead fish" in the local Tlingit language (ominous, much?). We're attempting grade three and four rapids (grade one: easy; grade six: extreme) and by the time I'm in my wetsuit, I'm in such a fear-tizz I'm ready to bail on the whole thing. But before I know it, I'm in the raft with my partner Ben, Harmony and our river guide, Erin Oliver-Beebe, heading off on a five-hour adventure.

The 23km course is gentle at the get-go so I'm eased into the action. About 15 minutes in, I'm getting into the rhythm of paddling and bracing my core to stay upright when we round a bend... and come face to face with a grizzly bear mid-forage, about eight metres away on the river bank. He's huge. Luckily, he's as surprised as we are and quickly turns to "hide" behind a scraggly bush, standing on his hind legs to watch us pass. I'm so swept

up by the Davina Attenborough-ness of the moment I forget to be terrified, and by the time we hit the serious rapids (Rock Garden, Big C and the washing-machine-like Twin Holes) I'm actually hooting. I'm also sweaty thanks to the effort required to stay out of the drink – the river's glacier-fed and its average summer temperature is a tropical 4°C, so falling in isn't super appealing. Still, high on grizzly-spotting endorphins, I leave common sense on the riverbank and jump in "just for fun". (FYI: it's nipple-crackingly brisk).

DIVE IN, HEAD FIRST

If you're a first-timer like me – or a seasoned rafter up for a challenge – Tatsshenshini Expediting offers a range of trips, from five hours to epic two-week expeditions (it also hires out rafts, canoes and kayaks if you're experienced). For guided day trips, base yourself in Whitehorse and arrange a transfer, or stay at Haines Junction, within easy cooee of the put-in site.

After a few days of absorbing the Yukon – its wilderness, incredible wildlife and laidback locals – it's impossible not to feel creative. Sure, you might not want to build a bike-tyre thunderdome or yarn-bomb a plane, but you could crochet the shit out of a pick-up truck... *wh*

Mackintosh plans to head back to Canada for some polar bear action. In the meantime, she's (unsuccessfully) trying to convince people her name's Bev Grylls.



DO go to the Yukon Wildlife Preserve and walk the 5km circuit to see local critters like moose, musk ox, lynx, caribou, arctic foxes, bison and elk. Keep your camera handy.



DON'T swallow the toe if you're drinking a Sourtoe Cocktail in Dawson City. (Yep, a real human toe, served in a bevvy – it'll win you cred with the locals if you let it touch your lip!)



DO visit Muktuk Adventures kennels to see dog sled teams kicking back on summer holiday. Nothing's funnier than an ecstatic hound pounding a treadmill.



DON'T think the Whitehorse is hard to get to. You can fly there direct from Vancouver in about an hour and a half. Too easy, eh.



DO stay a night in a secluded log cabin to literally hear yourself think. Sundog Retreat in Whitehorse, and Dalton Trail Lodge on the edge of Kluane National Park, have top options.



DON'T look into the eyes of taxidermied animals, which you'll find in most Yukon hotels and bars. Doing so may bum you out.

MACKINTOSH WAS A GUEST OF THE CANADIAN TOURISM COMMISSION. WWW.CANADA.TRAVEL. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: ISTOCKPHOTO; GETTY IMAGES