

Discovering the Earthly Wonders of Saskatchewan

Six NTA members took advantage of Tourism Saskatchewan's Product Development Trip Aug. 30–Sept. 4 to discover and develop new product ideas in the beautiful Canadian province. Here are descriptions of some of their favorite experiences.

ON A WARM SUMMER AFTERNOON, we arrived in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, a bustling city squarely in the middle of the Canadian prairie. We gratefully received warm welcomes, a great meal and enjoyed a restful night before our adventures began the next day. The transition was strikingly dramatic as we traversed the short distance from urban environs to aspen parkland to boreal forest.

We stopped for lunch at a restaurant featured in *Fodor's Canada* and *Lonely Planet*. And then it was on to the comforts of Elk Ridge Resort, a top-rated lakeside property at the edge of the wilderness. The resort offers a golfer's paradise, a variety of relaxing treatments in the Salacia Spa, both fine dining and casual pub fare, and an indoor saltwater pool and hot tub.

Our visit was in late summer, but had we arrived in winter, we might have experienced the snowmobile or cross-country ski trails, tried snow tubing or even given curling a try—a game with roots in ancient Scotland. But our next day was filled with an exciting mushing experience. Brad was our guide and trainer as we prepared for and went on a dog-sled ride at Sundogs Sled Excursions. We easily could imagine ourselves in the midst of an exciting race as we experienced the controlled chaos of the eager and friendly dog-sled team.

Our next destination was the Waskesiu Marina Adventure Centre in Prince Albert National Park. The marina rents fishing boats, kayaks and canoes, or you can select one of several guided boat excursions. We chose the pontoon boat tour of Hanging



MICHAEL MISHKO

Stops at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Sturgeon River Ranch, Elk Ridge Resort and Waskesiu Marina Adventure Centre in Prince Albert National Park were among the highlights of the NTA Product Development Trip hosted by Tourism Saskatchewan.

Heart Lakes. Our tour was led by a certified guide, and underwater cameras and microphones aided our observation of aquatic wildlife. On this relaxing cruise, we spotted eagles, kingfishers, Great Blue Herons and river otters and were serenaded by loons. Our guide informed us that the lakes are a gathering place for millions of waterfowl throughout the year. There also are guided hunting and fishing outings available, and walleye are the prize most fished for.

Our next day's adventure took us to Sturgeon River Ranch, where Gord, the ranch boss, met us with our horses—there was a match for every customer's personality and experience level. We headed out on a three-hour trail ride and enjoyed fantastic views of the miles and miles of forest and lakes. Horseback seemed the easiest way to observe the gorgeous scenery, although we passed hikers walking to and from the summit. We took our lunch break and let the horses rest at the top of the mountain before descending back through the forest.

Other high points of our visit were the Saskatchewan Western Development Museum with its collections and displays of life in turn-of-the-20th-century Saskatchewan and beyond; the Barn

Playhouse, where we saw an excellent production performed by local actors; and an opportunity to dine on foods the early immigrants from the Ukraine and Norway brought.

One of the most interesting side trips was to the Wanuskewin Heritage Park. For more than 6,000 years, First Nations people gathered on this beautiful site. Today, visitors can hear stories of the people who came here to hunt bison, gather food and herbs, and escape the winter winds. A First Nations curator skillfully wove the story so that we could learn of the celebration of renewal with the natural world and of the deep spirituality of this site.

On our last night in the Land of the Living Skies we drank in as much of the earthly wonders of Saskatchewan as we possibly could as we cruised and dined aboard a showboat on the Saskatchewan River.

—Evelyn Huffman,
America's Back Roads Travel

PRINCE ALBERT NATIONAL PARK offers so much including plenty of wildlife: pelicans, loons, belt kingfisher, eagles, roaming buffalo, wandering elk

and deer. Numerous activities are available in the park with three marina locations that have a full line of watercraft rentals including houseboats with very comfortable seating for observing wildlife. There are hiking trails, and sled dogs operate year-round with tours of their kennels and, of course, there are rides on a buggy pulled by six to eight dogs that look small but are extremely powerful and love to run.

The town of Waskesiu has a small beach, pier, shops, cafés and a couple of hotels. The highlight for me was horseback riding on Sturgeon River Ranch as individuals were paired with a compatible horse to fit their comfort level allowing individual riders to go at their own pace and not in a tail-to-head procession. My horse, Coco, loved to run, even gallop up inclining hills; she had no patience for the slow climb. What a hoot!

Another highlight was the evening cruise on the South Saskatchewan River, departing at dusk, on a one-deck enclosed sightseeing

boat. We were served a choice of cocktails, wine or beer to start. Dinner was sesame bread rolls, salad, roast beef with potatoes and carrots followed by chocolate cake. After giving the required safety instructions, the speakers were silent, allowing us to view over dinner as we passed under four of Saskatoon's seven bridges, each lit up differently. To me it felt much like an evening cruise in a European city. For the finale, guests gathered on the rear deck of the boat to get the best view of the annual fireworks festival.

—Fred Standeven,
A.C.T. Tours/Frederick Travel Inc.


THE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT trip was wonderful and full of unexpected surprises. In addition to the beautiful scenery, the many delicious meals and the very friendly and amazing people we met, I was really impressed with Wanuskewin Heritage Park near Saskatoon. Wanuskewin is a Northern Plains Indians cultural and visitor center and a national

historic site where First Nations peoples have gathered for more than 6,000 years. We had a wonderful guided tour and delicious bison pizza/bannock for lunch.

One of the exhibits in the Great Hall had five display cases; each held an elk hide with the story of Custer's Last Stand in bead work, which had been done about 90 years ago. I love bead work, but I have never seen anything to match this. There were a dozen or so Native Americans and cavalry on each hide done completely in bead work—it was incredible!

In the art gallery there were 20 pieces of hand-painted glass panels depicting different animals, birds and fish, making a complete glass forest. It was just beautiful!

There is something for everyone in Saskatchewan, whether you're interested in cultural sites and museums, culinary tours, theater, spas or outdoor activities such as hiking, boating, fishing, horseback riding, hunting, and dog sledding.

—Sandy Gibson,
Around and About Tours 

Our 2011 Outstanding Visitor Experience Awards

Restaurants

- Brunch on the Queen Mary, Long Beach, CA
- Lawry's The Prime Rib, Chicago
- ★ Antonia's, Key West, FL
- [New Orleans School of Cooking](#)
- Thoroughbred's, Myrtle Beach, SC
- Brunch at Hotel Hershey, PA
- [Hawaiian Vanilla Company](#)
- ★ Turquoise Room, La Posada Hotel, Winslow, AZ

Attractions

- ★ [Fabulous Palm Springs Follies](#)
- Alesia's Ukrainian Linens, Omaha
- Yogi Berra Museum, NJ
- ★ Pageant of the Masters, Laguna Beach, CA
- Branson Veterans Museum
- [Johnny Mathis in Concert, The Mansion, Branson](#)
- Arches National Park, UT
- Yosemite National Park, CA



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Say "Hi" to Mark Hoffmann, Clayton Whitehead, Kevin Murphy, Scott Angeletti, Ramona Goodge and RoseMarie Holt in Las Vegas at this year's NTA Convention

Accommodations

- [Red Cliffs Lodge, Moab, UT](#)
- Marriott Albuquerque
- Pavilion Lodge, Catalina Island
- Mills House Hotel, Charleston, SC
- [Beau Rivage Resort, Biloxi, MS](#)
- [Apple Farm Inn, San Luis Obispo, CA](#)
- Crowne Plaza La Concha, Key West
- [Elizabeth Street Inn, Newport, OR](#)

Destinations

- Catalina Island, CA
- [Branson, MO](#)
- [New York, NY](#)
- [New Orleans, LA](#)
- [Palm Springs, CA](#)
- ★ [Key West, FL](#)

These are the best of the best, as chosen by our travelers. Thank you to all [NTA members](#), particularly [DMO members](#), who work to make our packages the best. We appreciate your support.

★ Indicates second consecutive year on the list!

