



Canada for Adrenaline Junkies

by SARAH ROSE

When you head north — and not just across the border, but well beyond the 49th parallel — the terrain becomes otherworldly: ancient glaciers, epic rock faces, iceberg-strewn seas filled with

Arctic creatures. And because the deep north is buried under snowfall and ice most of the year, the summer months are your only shot at this unspoiled wilderness. Here's how to seize it.

1. Dive with Whales

LANCASTER SOUND
IN SUMMER THE ARCTIC sea is dotted with sun-sculpted icebergs and populated with monsters: beluga whales and narwhals, walrus, seals, Greenland sharks, and polar bears. The best way to

see the beasts is to don a dry-suit and dive right in: Whales, congregating at the floe edge, will swim beside you, eye to gigantic eye. When they're not around, there's still plenty to see: The never-ending sun-light colors the pillowy overhead ice a shocking shade of blue, and the water is alive with small, weird critters such

as nudibranches and electric jellyfish. Don't miss kayaking among the icebergs at 2 AM: The sun casts long shadows, and the glowing ice makes for a surreal experience.

GETTING THERE: Commercial flights from three Canadian cities will take you to Iqaluit on Baffin Island, Nunavut. From there, fly to one of the small Inuit hamlets, such as Arctic Bay or Pond Inlet, where dive trips depart on snowmobiles (*from \$8,000 for 10 days; arctickingdom.com*).

2. Hook a 30-Pound Salmon

FLOWERS RIVER
FROM MID-JULY TO SEPTEMBER, when the Atlantic salmon and Arctic char run, the Flowers River in northern Labrador is the greatest fly-fishing spot in the country, perhaps

the continent: remote, pristine, and stocked with thousands of leviathans. Located in the foothills of the Torngat Mountains, the river has only 20 miles of fishable territory, and the Flowers River Lodge has sole access. Keep an eye out while you're casting — the shoreline is crowded with moose, caribou, and black bear, and at night timber wolves serenade you to sleep. Few rivers have better catch rates of giant fish — hooking a 30-pound salmon isn't uncommon — though lodge policy is strictly catch and release, not keep and mount. **GETTING THERE:** Flights to Goose Bay, Labrador, leave daily from St. John's or Halifax. From Goose Bay the owner of the Flowers River Lodge will fly you to the river (he's a commercial pilot). Return flights are included (*\$6,000 per week; flowersriver.com*).



In Lancaster Sound, let sleeping giants lie.

3. Scale an Epic Wall

CIRQUE OF THE UNCLIMBABLES
THE LOTUS FLOWER TOWER — a climber's platonic ideal of the perfect buttress — is the centerpiece of this monstrous big-wall climbing mecca. The 2,200-foot face is scarred by two parallel cracks that run unbroken for 1,000 feet to the pinnacle. And while the Lotus takes the prize for sheer visual drama, the rest of the Cirque is loaded with intimidating spires, such as the 8,563-foot Mount Proboscis, a rock so brutal its simplest face has a climbing rating of 5.10. The weather in the Cirque is noto-

riously unstable, though there's plenty of sport climbing in the valley floor while you wait for a window.

GETTING THERE: Fly into Whitehorse in the Yukon, then take a floatplane to the Glacier Lake trailhead. Gravity Adventures runs a July trip to the Lotus Flower Tower (*from \$3,900 for 13 days; gravityadventures.ca*).

4. Hike a Prehistoric Ice Field

AKSHAYUK PASS
LINKING BAFFIN ISLAND'S east and west coasts, the harsh and stunning 70-mile Akshayuk Pass gets fewer than 500

visitors a year — you'll see more arctic hare, lemmings, and gyrfalcons than hikers as you cross the 40,000-year-old Penny Ice Cap. Even in summer the pass is a cruel mix of scree, ice hummocks, fast meltwater rivers, and mud. The payoff, aside from the barren beauty of a glacier-scoured valley: taking in Mount Thor, a horn-shape wall with a 105-degree overhang and the world's longest vertical drop (4,100 feet).

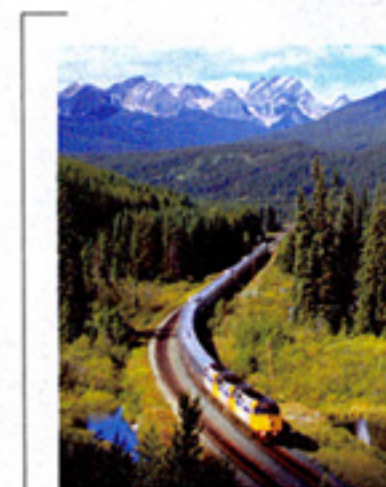
GETTING THERE: From Ottawa or Montreal, fly to Iqaluit, Nunavut, then take a puddle-jumper to Pangnirtung, a town about 15 miles south of the park. From there, boat across an iceberg-filled fjord to the trailhead. Black Feather offers 10- to 14-day backpacking trips (*from \$3,100; blackfeather.com*).



Walking a fine line in the Unclimbables

5. Raft Amid Glaciers

UPPER ALSEK RIVER
WHEN PROFESSIONAL river guides take a rafting holiday, they head to the Yukon for the Alsek. Class III-plus rapids thrash past lakes flush with calving icebergs 10 stories high, glaciers 1,000 feet thick, and unsullied wilderness. Crossing by four national parks before emptying into the Gulf of Alaska, the



Basic Training

Canada's rail system is massive — it stretches from Halifax to Vancouver and even splinters up to Hudson Bay — and all of it is accessible with the Canrail, a 12-day pass that lets you ride anywhere for 12 calendar days over a 30-day period (*\$940*). Perks like sleeping cars will run you from *\$234 extra per night (viarail.ca)*.

rafts beat through the planet's largest biopreserve, which teems with moose, grizzlies, dall sheep, wolves, and eagles. The Tweedsmuir Glacier, surging more than a half-mile per year, is poised to dam the Alsek entirely, so go while you can. **GETTING THERE:** There are daily flights to Whitehorse from Vancouver. Once there, Canadian River Expeditions takes care of the rest (*\$5,475 for 10 days; nahanni.com*).

PERFECT WEEKEND

Scuba Diving Middle America

IN AN ABANDONED MINE, AN UNDERWATER GHOST TOWN

Six hundred miles from the nearest ocean, eastern Missouri isn't an obvious choice for scuba diving. But the rural hamlet of Bonne Terre offers world-class diving just the same — in a former lead mine 60 miles due south of St. Louis. From the 1860s until 1961, the **BONNE TERRE MINE** became the largest lead mine in the world, yielding millions of tons of lead ore. After it shuttered, a billion gallons of groundwater flooded the 80-square-mile labyrinth, creating the world's largest man-made underground lake and turning the former mine into the ultimate underwater playground — a cross between cavern and wreck diving,

with eerie tunnels crusty with antiquated equipment hidden in the shadows.

More than 50 charted trails are in the mine, threading narrow tunnels littered with old magazines, rock drills, and half-filled ore carts that still sit where the miners dropped them 50 years ago, like the last vestiges of a working man's Atlantis. The most popular paths are overhung with stadium lighting, which illuminates the water's 150 feet of visibility. Wetsuits are highly recommended — the water stays a brisk 60 degrees year-round. To avoid getting lost in this industrial-size ant farm, certified divers must go in the water



Bonne Terre's liquid labyrinth

with guides from the on-site dive center, which is open on weekends and provides gear and scuba classes, as well as accommoda-

tions in a historic railroad depot restored as a bed-and-breakfast (*packages from \$210; 2dive.com*). —TRAVIS MARSHALL