

IT'S ALL ABOUT THAT BASE

Are you dreaming of desolation? Yearning for
the dream Canadian Arctic adventure? Park
Canada's Imniarvik Fly-in Base Camp is accessible,
affordable and utterly unforgettable

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DREAMTRIPS

CANADA





Created in 1984,
Ivvavik National
Park protects part of
the calving grounds
of the porcupine
caribou herd.

Travellers reach the remote Imniarvik Fly-in Base Camp aboard a chartered Twin Otter.

THE DREAM?

Fly over the Mackenzie Delta into the very heart of the British Mountains.

Listen to the spellbinding tales of your Inuvialuit hosts. Explore the breathtaking mountain wilderness of Ivvavik National Park and kick back under the midnight sun in a cosy base camp. Canadian Arctic adventures don't get any more iconic.

THE REALITY?

Read on, beautiful dreamer...

AS OUR TWIN OTTER AIMS to touch down on a rock-strewn tundra strip marked by old fuel drums, everyone aboard braces for a bumpy landing.

We've flown from Inuvik in the Northwest Territories over the labyrinthine Mackenzie River delta and through the heart of the British Mountains to reach Parks Canada's Imniarvik Fly-in Base Camp in the heart of Ivvavik National Park. An iconic Arctic adventure awaits...

A PLACE OF BIRTH

Comprising of over 10,000-square-kilometres of pristine wilderness tucked up in the northwest corner of Yukon bordering the Beaufort Sea and adjacent to Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Ivvavik, which means 'a place for giving birth' in the language of the Inuvialuktun First Nation, protects the traditional calving grounds of the porcupine caribou herd.

Each June over 150,000 caribou migrate here from their Alaskan wintering grounds. The Inuvialuktun and Gwich'in people of northern Yukon, who have called this land home for centuries, depend on these caribou for food and other traditional uses.

The largest of north Yukon's five wilderness parks—and the first Canadian National Park to be created as a result of an aboriginal land claim agreement—Ivvavik receives fewer than 100 visitors a year.

Accessible only by air, it was a prohibitively costly destination until recently, because groups had to book their own charter flights and handle all of the trip logistics. Then, in 2012, Parks Canada began offering package trips to Imniarvik Base Camp, which made



Parks Canada's Imniarvik Fly-in Base Camp includes tented accommodation ringed by a bear-proof fence.

visiting Ivvavik substantially more affordable and accessible.

Today, you can book a single Twin Otter seat for a five-day fully-catered excursion and have a Parks Canada guide with you on your day hikes. An Inuvialuktun cultural host will also come along to share stories and talk about their people's generations-old connection to this ancient land.

"Inuvialuit culture is very important to us and people wanted to know more about that culture and have it as part of the experience," explains Parks Canada's Helena Katz, who helped create Ivvavik's Base Camp experience.

"Each trip now has a cultural host who brings something unique about their culture. For example, one host may be a traditional drummer; another might have traditional needlepoint experience they can share."

NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Stepping out of the plane and onto the taiga, where Canada's most northern tongue of boreal forest meets the tundra, I'm stunned by a gorgeous midsummer Arctic palette of green, brown and copper. Shaded river valleys are blanketed by stunted trees, moss, lichen, wildflowers and cranberry, blueberry and cloudberry bushes.

Ivvavik is part of the Beringia Refugium, an unglaciated area that extended between North America and Siberia, where plant and animal life were able to flourish. The British Mountains that cover more than 90 percent of the park make up the only non-glaciated mountain range in Canada. They are home to the country's most northern populations of moose and dall's sheep.

There is no doubt: this is an untamed land of epic proportions, it is virtually untouched by humanity. >



Ivvavik means 'a place for giving birth' in the Inuvialuit language.

WELCOME TO BASE CAMP

From the airstrip we hike down a winding trail to Imniarvik, which was formerly called Sheep Creek Station. Built in the 1970s as a gold mining camp, it now includes a spacious tented zone, a deck equipped with screen tents and picnic tables, secure food storage, a fully-equipped cookhouse and a screened indoor common area. The best part—which edges Imniarvik toward a ‘glamping’ experience—is the recently-installed flush toilets and hot showers,

which make roughing-it in the bush considerably more comfortable.

We’ve brought along a veteran backcountry camp cook, a 50-year-old Inuvialuktun woman from Aklavik named Judy Selamio, who whips up hearty multi-course meals and endless nutritious snacks throughout our stay, including daily packed lunches that keep us well-fueled during several long hours of strenuous hiking. Her friend and our cultural host, Cynthea Gordon, is also along to share tales of

life in nearby Aklavik and to teach us the intricate art of Inuit beadwork.

Judy, Cynthea and our Parks Canada guides are here to ensure that we have a memorable Arctic experience. But clearly, one of our group of five already has. Toronto visual artist Patrice Carmichael has decided to stay on after spending the previous week exploring Ivvavik.

“You’re extremely remote and it takes some work getting here, but once you’re here it’s incredibly accessible,” she says, explaining that she wanted to continue exploring for another few days. “And travelling alone, I could take it all in and still feel safe in this environment,” she adds.

BEAR NECESSITIES

Safety, of course, is a real concern up here in the heart of grizzly country—and we need to maintain constant vigilance because hungry bears occasionally wander into camp. Trained in the use of firearms, our Parks Canada guides carry bear spray, horns and bear-bangers at all times.

At our initial safety briefing they inform us that an electric fence ringing the tents was installed just a couple of weeks ago to thwart the bears that were trashing the camp in search of food. It’s comforting to know that my sleep won’t be disturbed by any ursine incursions.

Bear facts in mind, we set out from Imniarvik on our first hike that afternoon. As the frothing Firth River roars below, we advance along a ridgeline toward an alpine meadow called Sheep Slot, which is situated high above the rapids where



At the heart of the park lies the Firth River, an exceptionally beautiful world class white-water rafting destination.



the canyon walls narrow. Scattered remains of gold miners' camps from the 1930s can still be found here. This is where gold prospecting began in 1898, and where a minor gold rush occurred in 1947.

Since the sun never totally sets in midsummer at this latitude, we could potentially keep hiking all night... But thoughts of Judy's hearty dinner trump any notion of turning our initial excursion into a midnight sun stroll like the one Patrice says she did to celebrate the summer solstice. We return to homemade pizza and fresh arctic char, followed by Judy's specialty: thick, decadent Eskimo donuts.

Stuffed and serene, I lay in my tent after dinner struggling to fall asleep. That's a challenge here in the Arctic's midsummer, when it's nearly as bright at 3am as it is at midday. At least none of us will get lost in the dark taking a nocturnal bathroom break.

HIKING TO HEAVEN

Luckily, we're blessed with mostly sunny, mild weather for our entire trip, which makes hiking over the next three days simply spectacular in this pristine Arctic park that has no marked trails.

Armed with industrial strength bug spray to ward off the hordes of ravenous mosquitoes, black flies and horseflies, we first strike out for the aptly-named Inspiration Point. Crossing Sheep Creek, we tramp through thick bush and across sloping tundra to reach this lofty ridge with its stunning views of the Firth River Valley. Ahead lies a final uphill push to a majestic cluster of rocky pinnacles

called Wolf Tors. Soon though, gathering afternoon thunderstorm clouds prevent us from venturing further.

Back at camp we hungrily tuck into turkey, stuffing and all the fixings. Clearly Judy already understands that our group, like any army, travels on its stomach.

When she's not cooking, our wilderness chef slips out into the nearby woods to collect spruce sap that she keeps boiling in a large iron pot. This homemade 'spruce juice', Judy assures us, can cure all sorts of ailments, including cancer. At first it tastes incredibly bitter, but it becomes more palatable as I drink—although not nearly enough to tempt me to smuggle a tumbler of it back home.

Over the next two days we explore high ridgelines as golden eagles soar overhead. We traverse grassy tundra meadows—an important foraging habitat for dall sheep.

Saving the best for last, we devote our last day to the challenging 11-kilometre round-trip 'Halfway to Heaven' hike. Ascending a steep path behind camp, we eventually reach an exposed plateau surrounded by unglaciated hills and multicoloured peaks. After scaling a steep, spiky outcrop called 'Dragon's Tor' that rises dramatically out of the purple shale, I stop to rest and admire the incredible view.

If, as my guide says, we're "just about halfway to heaven", it certainly feels like the better half on this perfect day in Inuvik National Park. 🌟

- The Parks Canada Inuvik Base Camp Experience includes a seat on a chartered Twin Otter flight from Inuvik, which lies about 200 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle in the Northwest Territories. Canadian North and First Air fly there from Edmonton and Yellowknife. Air North offers departures from Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Whitehorse. Or you can drive the iconic Dempster Highway up to Inuvik.
- The optimal hiking season is from the floral bloom of mid-June into the latter half of August, when the autumn colours are at their peak. Hikers in July should be prepared for biting insects. Travellers planning to go later in the season should be prepared for the possibility of cold snowy conditions and delays in charter flights due to weather.
- Parks Canada staff lead day hikes of varying lengths and difficulty. There are no marked trails and the terrain varies from fairly flat to hummocky, with some steep sections. Good hiking boots with strong ankle support are recommended for your comfort and safety. Hike an easy three-kilometre round-trip to Sheep Slot. Inspiration Point is a moderate five-kilometre route, while Halfway to Heaven is a strenuous 11-kilometre return trek. It is recommended that you have the ability to hike over uneven terrain for a half to a full day.
- A five-day catered Imniarvik Fly-in Base Camp trip starts at \$3,375 per person. The following is included: transportation between the Parks Canada office in Inuvik and the airport; charter flights from Inuvik, NT to Inuvik National Park, YT and return; use of Imniarvik base camp facilities; use of a camping mattress; accommodation in prospector or mountaineering tents; guided hikes, the services of an Inuvialuit cultural host, Northern Backcountry use fee and three meals a day, snacks and beverages prepared by the cook and served buffet-style.
- For more information visit pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/yt/ivvavik/ne/Camp1.aspx.