

Manitoba

Winnipeg: a blend of many cultures

by Marion Morrison

Winnipeg is a city that I once knew, really knew, the way only a child can. I knew where you could get the best ice cream; where the bicycle paths in Assiniboine Park led; the shortest route to the outdoor swimming pool.

I came back after a 20-year absence, a tourist. I registered at a hotel, rented a car, picked up tourist literature and arranged a guided bus tour. What did I discover? Winnipeg is a great place to visit!

Approaching 600,000 in population. It's an exciting mixture of sophisticated culture and pioneer brashness. The weather was perfect which always helps ... sunny, comfortably warm days, coolish evenings (Winnipeg usually enjoys lots of sunlight and clear, dry air). Living far from any other community of comparable size, the people have had to create their own life style, which they have achieved with a great deal of success.

There's the Royal Winnipeg Ballet which enjoys an international reputation, a first rate symphony, a large art gallery and first rate theatre at the Manitoba Theatre Centre. During July and August, Rainbow Stage, an outdoor theatre stages popular musicals in a beautiful setting in Kildonan Park. For the sports-minded, there's horse racing at Assiniboia Downs, football with the Blue Bombers and NHL hockey with the Jets. If you'd rather participate than watch, the city has excellent facilities for golf, tennis, swimming, whatever.

Winnipeg is well known for its vigorous ethnic communities which enrich the life of the city. Folklorama is an annual mid-August multicultural celebration. Pavilions representing up to 30 national groups are set up throughout the city.

I like to shop when I visit a new city. I first visited the main downtown district which stretches along Portage Avenue where the big department

stores, Eaton and the Bay, are located. The main change since my day is the addition of a large underground mall under the corner of Portage and Main, which Winnipeggers brag is the World's coldest and windiest, in winter. There's every kind of store in the area and on a busy day you'll see people from every corner of the province.

What delighted me most was Osborne Street Village, an absolutely enchanting cluster of boutiques, specialty shops and restaurants near the Legislative Building. This area has been renovated into one of the most attractive and interesting shopping districts I've ever visited. You can buy clothing, toys, furniture, handcrafted metal work, health foods, weaving yarn, even myna birds. There's little in the way of run-of-the-mill goods, but you'll find quality at reasonable prices, often sold by the people who make the articles they sell. Whether or not they are craftsmen, the owners and their clerks take a very personal interest in what they are doing. I had a lovely Greek salad and some wine at Basil's, one of several charming restaurants.

In addition to shopping and eating, you'll enjoy visiting places like:

*St. Boniface Basilica, the oldest cathedral in Western Canada. Constructed in 1818, it has burned several times. The exterior still remains after a 1968 fire and the interior has been rebuilt into a modern chapel.

*The Legislative Building, one of the finest neo-classical structures in the world, where the statue of Golden Boy stands on top of the dome, 67.5 m above ground level.

*The Royal Canadian Mint, the most modern mint in the world with daily tours where you can see money being made.

*Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, located in the Centennial



Upper: Legislative Building, Winnipeg. Lower: Red River paddlewheeler, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Centre with its Planetarium, just north of Portage and Main. Highlight exhibit is the Nonsuch, full-sized reproduction of a 17th century sailing ship in a harbour setting.

*Assiniboine Park and Zoo, which occupies 62 ha (397 acres) with playgrounds, picnic sites, a miniature railway, duck pond, an English garden, conservatory and refreshment pavilion. It's zoo is rated one of the finest in Canada.

*Red River Cruises, either day or evening, a delightful way to tour the city throughout the summer months and to visit Lower Fort Garry National Park, just 32 km to the north. It's one of Canada's most interesting historical sites.

If you would like to learn more about vacations in Manitoba write: Tourism Manitoba, 304-200 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg, Man., R3C 0P8. □