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Travel

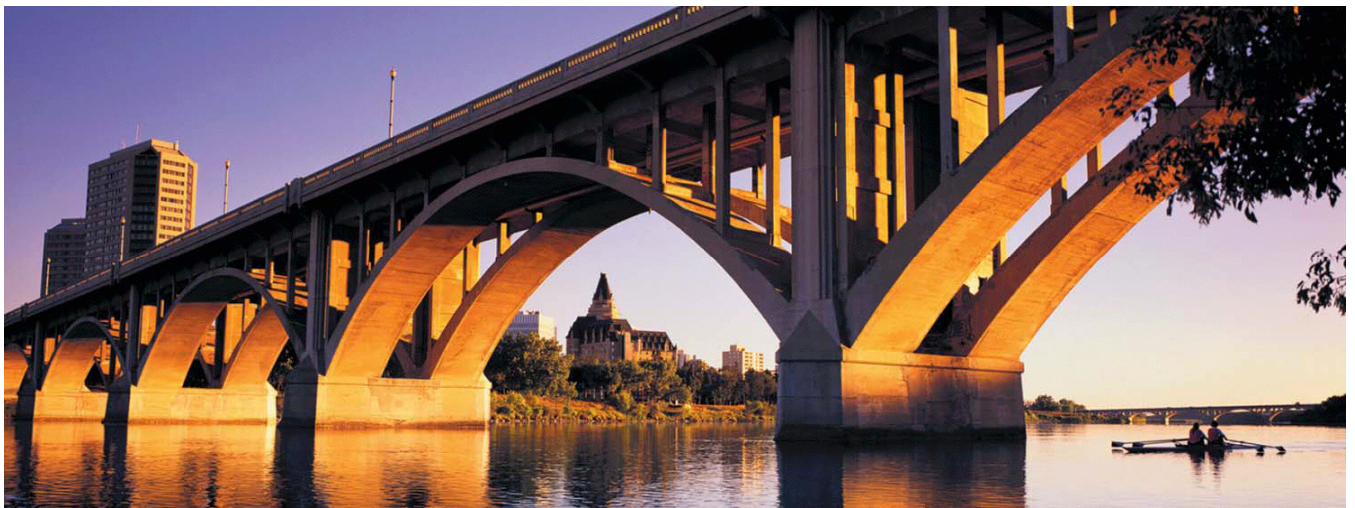
BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE — BOSTON.COM/TRAVEL

Plenty of prairie

Saskatchewan's variety defines its landscape

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Birds and badlands, dunes and dance, spas and vineyards



Broadway Bridge on the South Saskatchewan River in Saskatoon; Bessborough Hotel under arch.

SASKATOON — Wedged between Alberta and Manitoba, Saskatchewan is a massive prairie province. It is twice the size of Germany yet it has only 1 million inhabitants. It includes a diverse range of terrain and ecosystems, from Great Plains and boreal forest to isolated lakes and rocky Precambrian Shield. The best time to travel to the Prairies' middle child is in its warmest months, May to September. D. Grant Black, author of "Saskatchewan Book of Musts: The 101 Places Every Saskatchewanian Must See," recommends 10 destinations.

Paris of the Prairies

Renowned for its architecture and river valley setting, Saskatoon was first settled in 1882 by Toronto's teetotaling Temperance Colonisation Society. The vibrant Broadway District (www.onbroadway.ca) features the best day spas, independent shops, and local pottery. Sample Saskatchewan-grown barley beers at The Yard and Flagon Pub (718 Broadway Ave., 306-653-8883). For lunch, head east to Spicy Bite for inexpensive Pakistani/northern Indian cuisine (No. 4-3401 8th St. East, 306-373-4747, buffet \$14). Weczeria (616 10th St. East, 306-933-9600, www.weczeriarestaurant.ca, entrees \$23-\$28) offers fine locavore dining. Stay at the riverfront Hotel Bessborough (601 Spadina Crescent East, 888-890-3222, www.deltahotels.com, doubles \$179-\$379), a luxury former railway hotel. It's just a short walk to the free Mendel Art Gallery (950 Spadina Crescent East, 306-975-7610, mendel.ca).

Grey Owl's cabin

Prince Albert National Park, the meeting place between parkland and boreal forests, is where you'll find Grey Owl's cabin. Canada's

Thoreau was an environmentalist who posed as an aboriginal. Archibald Belaney (later known as Grey Owl) immigrated from England in 1906. In 1931, Parks Canada wardens relocated Grey Owl, his Mohawk wife, Anahareo, and their two pet beavers to the newly minted park (306-663-4519, parksCanada.ca). Grey Owl's cabin and grave, both National Heritage Sites, are a few hours north of Saskatoon on the edge of Ajawaan Lake. Each summer, a trickle of North American and European visitors set off in canoes to discover the home of Canada's first conservationist and camp under the northern lights. (*Waskesiu Marina Adventure Centre for canoe rentals and guided trips, 306-663-1999, waskesiumarina.com*).



Athabasca Sand Dunes Provincial Wilderness Park.

A boreal Sahara

Saskatchewan's boreal Sahara is the most northerly set of major dune fields in the world. Located in the province's extreme northwest, it's the largest active sand surface in Canada, stretching for roughly 60 miles along Lake Athabasca's southern shore. Scientists consider this isolated spot an evolutionary puzzle since 52 rare plant species, including nine plants unique to this area, have been located. Athabasca Sand Dunes Provincial Wilderness Park (*306-425-4234, tpcs.gov.sk.ca/AthabascaSandDunes*), which encompasses 1,200 square miles, was created in 1992 to protect this sensitive environment. Since there are no services, facilities, or roads, the dunes are only recommended for fully equipped, experienced wilderness travelers. Visitors can fly in by float plane, the only available access for guided interpretative trips on foot or by boat (*306-241-6807, northernways.ca*).

Avian mecca

If you're a bird fancier, you'll want to seek out the Quill Lakes International Bird Area. Saskatchewan is an important migratory route for dozens of North American species, including the American white pelican, snow geese, and a wide variety of shorebirds like the black-crowned night heron. A million birds visit the region annually, so three towns, Wynyard, Wadena, and Foam Lake, cooperate to host east-central Saskatchewan's premier birding locale (*quill-lakes-bird-area.com; Wynyard, 306-554-2123; Wadena, 306-338-2145; Foam Lake, 306-272-3359*). This avian mecca, managed by Ducks Unlimited Canada, spans 3,954 acres of wetlands for guided or self-guided tours, lookouts, and hiking trails, so pack a lunch and your hiking shoes. Stay at Amma's House, an Icelandic-Canadian

heritage B&B (*Highway 16, 306-554-2927, ammashouse.com, doubles \$60*) west of Wynyard. Dine at The Pepper Tree Family Restaurant and Steakhouse in Wynyard, family-run with a variety of Greek dishes (*Highway 16, 306-554-3665*).

Dead Sea of the Prairies

Little Manitou Lake, the “Dead Sea of the Prairies,” is chock-full of healing magnesium and sulphate. Bathers float in the lake’s naturally buoyant water. The lakeside village of Manitou Beach, an hour southeast of Saskatoon, is home to Manitou Springs Resort and Mineral Spa (*800-667-7672, manitousprings.ca, doubles \$125-\$170*), a full-service hotel with mud wraps offered in the funky spa. The mineral pool, which originates from Little Manitou, is pumped in, then warmed and circulated. Guests can kick up their heels at Danceland (*800-267-5037, danceland.ca*). This historic venue boasts a unique maple dance floor built on top of local horsehair. Bands perform everything from polka to punk.

La Reata (Dude) Ranch

Do you own a pair of cowboy boots? Then point your steed to La Reata Ranch (*306-375-2225, lareata.com*), a working ranch on the western shore of Lake Diefenbaker. This is where urbanites play out their long-suppressed cowboy urges while real cowboys do all the work. Guests (limited to 8 to 16 per week) bunk in all-inclusive westernstyle cabins (*\$1,295 shared; \$1,555 private*) and share mealtimes with the ranchers and other international guests. You can hang out in the saloon or slip into the hot tub to soak Day One’s case of saddle butt. Non-cowboy activities include canoeing, fishing, waterskiing, and swimming in a private spot along 125 miles of sandy beaches. The 2010 season (May 15-Oct. 16) starts during

calving season and ends at the first chill of winter.



Riders near La Reata Ranch.

Queen City

Start the day in Regina, the provincial capital, with a hearty breakfast at Nicky's Café & Bake Shop (*1005 8th Ave., 306-757-3222*). Then march over to the RCMP Heritage Centre for some pure Canadiana. Housed on the same site as the federal police training facility, this museum celebrates the men in red serge jackets, Stetson hats, and Strathcona boots. The stunning 68,000-square-foot museum, designed by Arthur Erickson, boasts interactive exhibits and multimedia displays created by Montreal's Design + Communication. Visitors (\$12) can take in 10 main exhibits, comprising 33,000 Mountie artifacts, collected from their 1873 inception to the present (*5907 Dewdney Ave., 866-567-7267, rcmpheritagecentre.com*). When Queen Elizabeth II visits her namesake city, she stays downtown at the classic Hotel Saskatchewan (*2125 Victoria Ave., 306-522-7691, hotelsask.com*). Enjoy the best sushi east of Vancouver at Michi

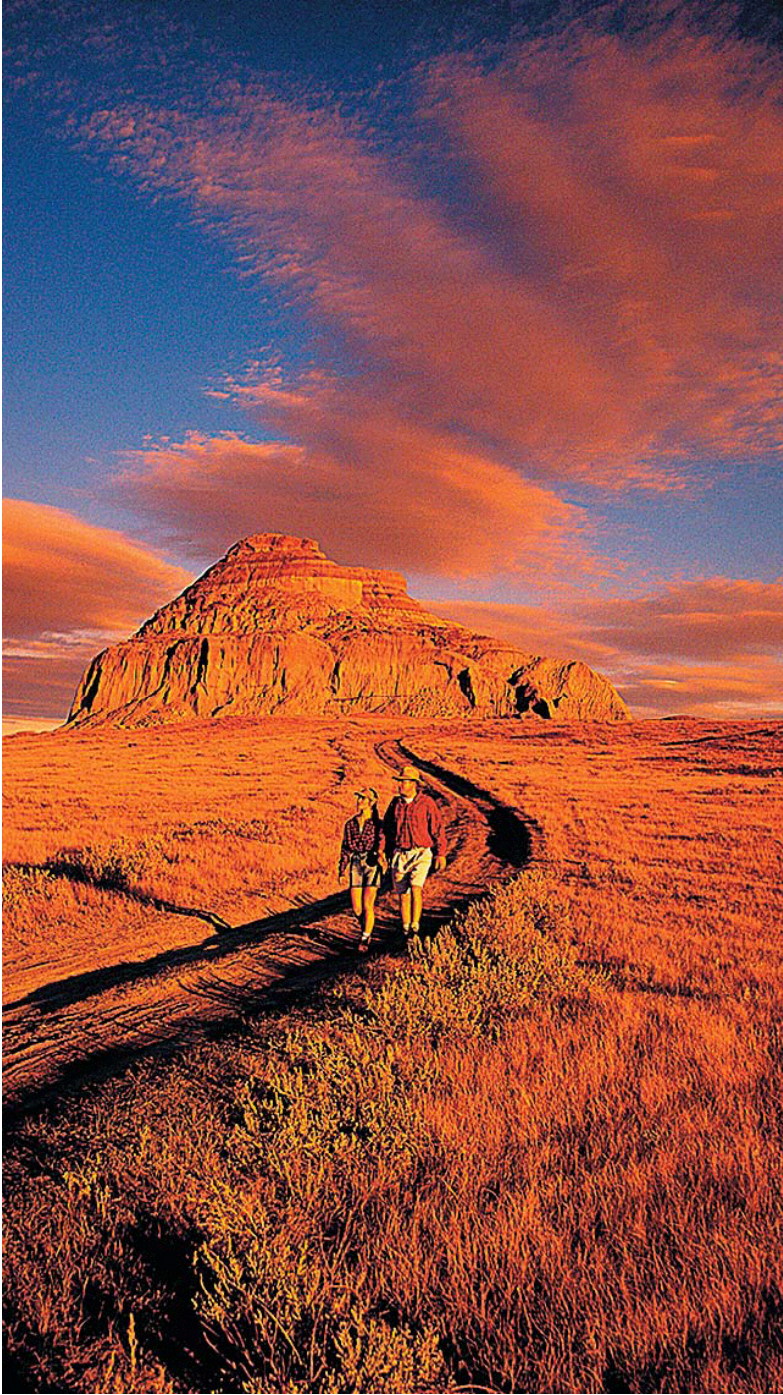
Japanese Restaurant and Sushi Bar (*1943 Scarth St., 306-565-0141, michi.ca*). Stroll around the lake at Wascana Centre (*306-522-3661, wascana.ca*), the city's 2,300-acre Central Park. Dine on local fare at the upscale Willow at Wascana (*3000 Wascana Drive, 306-585-3663, willowonwascana.ca*) while savoring a classic prairie sunset.

Moose Spa

In Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan's fourth largest city, you'll find about 20 day spas tucked downtown amid preserved Victorian architecture. The modern Temple Gardens Mineral Spa Resort Hotel (*800-718-7727, templegardens.sk.ca*) features a rooftop mineral pool (locally sourced) next to the Sun Tree Spa (\$80-\$140). Sahara Spa, a Balinese-style spa in a renovated railway station, is Canada's only Jamu spa (*341 Stadacona St. East, 306-692-1012, saharaspa.ca, packages \$145-\$275*). Yvette Moore's Art Gallery houses her Copper Café. Stop in for homemade soup and a fresh sandwich (*76 Fairford St. West, 306-693-7600, yvettemoore.com, \$9-\$14*). Renate's Tea Time (*125B Main St. North, 306-691-1090, renates.ca*) pairs authentic European pastries with more than 200 tea varieties for her afternoon tea (\$18/person). Dine at Temple Garden's Harwood's Dining Room (*306-693-7778, entrees\$18-\$36*), then don a robe for an evening soak.



Moose Jaw's Temple Gardens Mineral Spa Resort Hotel.



Castle Butte in the Big Muddy Badlands.

Hot on the Outlaw Trail

The Big Muddy Badlands, two hours south of Regina, features glacier-tilled landscape surrounded by arid, undulating ranch land. American outlaws from the 1880s to the early 1900s

used the Big Muddy as a base to rob banks and trains or steal horses in Montana. To escape lawmen in pursuit, it was only a short horseback ride across the border. Explore the Big Muddy with the Coronach Tourism Board's knowledgeable guides (306-267-3312, *bigmuddy badlands.com*, June to early September, \$45 per adult by van/\$150 per car load with guide).

The engaging six-hour tour covers up to 110 miles and includes lessons in geology, ornithology, botany, anthropology, and history. Stay at the Country Flavour B&B (306-267-4507, *bbcanada.com*, doubles \$60), a historic ranch house. Brown bag it on the Outlaw Tour and dine at R.C. Chinese Restaurant (306-267-2228, \$9-\$11), a 1970s-era prairie restaurant.

High Country Wine

Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery

(306-662-4100, *cypresshillswinery.com*) is renowned for its fruit wines. Saskatchewan's first and only commercial vineyard and winery is tucked into the hot, arid northern edge of Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park (306-662-5411, *tpcs.gov.sk.ca/Cypress Hills*). Enjoy a hosted tour followed by lunch. The Winery Bistro's patio serves artisan cheese platters and a choice of Saskatoon berry, chokecherry, sour cherry, rhubarb blend, black currant, and honey wine or a mead dessert wine. Dine at Maple Creek's Star Café & Grill (32 Pacific Ave., 306-662-2202, entrees \$17-\$28). This funky heritage restaurant features a menu tailored to the seasons. Rest up at the Cypress Park Resort Inn (306-662-4477, *cpri.sasktelwebhosting.com*, doubles \$115) in the nearby inter-provincial park with full-service cabins set among the jack pine forest.

-DGrantBlack.com-

