

Northern Ontario

Big by Nature

The vast region of Northern Ontario represents nature on a whole new scale. The area stretching from Killarney in the south to Hudson Bay in the north and from Kirkland Lake in the east all the way west to Rainy River is bigger than many countries.

Given its size, it should come as no surprise that Northern Ontario contains a great deal of natural diversity. Along the southern edge of the region are maple-beech deciduous woods that blaze with colour in the fall. Further north are deep spruce woodlands inhabited by elusive woodland caribou, while around Hudson Bay and the northern edge of the boreal forest are boggy lowlands and the thinly treed taiga – areas where land and water meet and solid ground is a luxury.

Great rivers crisscross the entire region, including the Missinaibi, the Albany and the Nipigon, along with countless streams and creeks. The ancient granite of the Canadian Shield is also pocketed with thousands of lakes, ranging from hidden gems to the biggest of them all – mighty Lake Superior.

The coast of Lake Superior is breathtaking – a combination of high granite cliffs, cobble beaches and white sand crescents that dip below waters clear and cold as ice. On many of the lake's headlands, tiny arctic plants cling to exposed rock, while inland delicate orchids bloom in the deep-moss carpet of the boreal forest.

The deep green of these forests is dotted with colour every spring with the arrival of neo-tropical songbirds, which find insect-rich feeding grounds in these forests. The sweet songs of warblers, flycatchers and finches at dawn may be followed after dusk by the rising howl of wolves or the soft hooting of a great grey owl.

On the region's western edge, the landscape changes again. The shorelines and islands of Lake of the Woods contain a strong taste of prairie, complete, in some places, with Franklin's ground squirrel. White pelicans have formed breeding colonies in the northwest all the way to Lake Nipigon and sandhill cranes, a truly ancient bird, have also taken up residence throughout the region.

The sheer size of the Northern Ontario landscape has contributed both to its diversity and to its resilience. This area still contains healthy populations of wild species, including wolves, bear, moose and lynx.

Forestry and mining have been an important part of northern communities for more than a century. In recent years, the volume and area cut annually has increased and a network of roads built for logging has expanded north, bringing access to lakes and rivers once considered remote.

Today, a growing number of visitors travel to enjoy the natural beauty of Ontario's north. Tourism is a large and growing component of the economy, a factor that is changing priorities for northern development.

There are many First Nations communities in the northern region, and they add their own special appreciation of nature and the bond through traditional knowledge and perspective.

All northern communities have world class natural areas nearby and pride in their outdoor heritage.