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# Evaluation of Parks Canada Sites at Churchill, Manitoba Final Report



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**Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français sur demande.**

## **Executive Summary**

Hackney Research & Consulting (HRC) conducted a 3-day online bulletin board discussion group with recent visitors to the Parks Canada sites at Churchill, Manitoba. The bulletin board discussion group was held from March 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and included respondents from Canada, the US and Brazil. In total, 15 recent visitors took part over the three days (9 Canadians, 5 Americans, and 1 Brazilian). The goal of the bulletin board was to obtain rich, detailed feedback on recent experiences while visiting Churchill.

It should be noted that nearly half of the respondents in this group have traveled to Churchill at least twice in the past and some have been to Churchill 5 or more times. These respondents tend to have a very positive attitude toward Churchill and therefore findings from this group may skew somewhat more towards the “positive” than if all respondents had been first time visitors.

Many respondents first became aware of Churchill through articles or documentaries on “polar bears” and global warming and for most respondents, the ability to see polar bears in the wild was their biggest motivation for visiting Churchill. Several said they felt a sense of “urgency” and were motivated to see the polar bears before they disappear or become extinct. These respondents generally visited in the fall when polar bear viewing is considered to be at its best.

Some respondents first heard of Churchill through articles, or documentaries on “whale watching”. For these respondents, whale watching was the biggest motivation to visit Churchill and therefore chose to visit Churchill in summer.

Viewing polar bears and whales were by far the most common motivations for visiting Churchill. In fact, most respondents were not aware of the Parks Canada sites at Churchill prior to arriving. Of the few who said they were aware of the Parks Canada sites, most grew up in Manitoba and learned about Churchill and its sites in school. One respondent learned about the Parks Canada sites by doing Internet research and reading guidebooks prior to his trip.

Most respondents did not report any major constraints while planning their trip to Churchill. However, a few reported having difficulties booking rooms and/or tours because they did not make reservations early enough. Although many commented on the high cost of traveling to Churchill, none identified cost as a constraint.

Many respondents are experienced travelers and many prefer to plan their trips. These respondents make extensive use of the Internet to research potential destinations and to book accommodations, transportation, and local tours. Only a few went to Churchill on a pre-packaged tour through a specific tour company. The three tour companies mentioned include:

- Frontiers North
- John Steel Rail Tours
- Fantasy Tours (RV tour specialists)

Once in Churchill, virtually all respondents visited the Visitors Information Centre in the Heritage Railway Station, largely due to its central location and the fact that many came to Churchill by train. Respondents generally found the Visitors Centre very interesting and informative. Some attended “guest speaker” presentations and found them particularly appealing.

Most respondents visited both the Cape Merry Battery and Prince of Wales Fort while in Churchill. Many learned about these sites from local tour operators and a few said they learned about these sites from guidebooks.

For many, Cape Merry Battery is seen as a place to go to view beautiful scenery and or wildlife (particularly whales). Several respondents said they learned very little about the historical significance of the site and suggested more “information signs” would be useful – particularly for independent travelers who do not have a guide. However, other respondents did not like the idea of increasing information signs because they felt it would interfere with the natural beauty of the site.

Respondents were more likely to use a tour guide for the Prince of Whales Fort site and many said they enjoyed learning about its history. However, some independent travelers reported having similar problems as they had experienced at Cape Merry Battery (no guide, so little information available).

When asked what could be improved at Prince of Wales Fort, some suggested more elaborate displays, an increase in information signs, and staff in period costumes. However, others felt that the fort should remain simple, natural, and unspoiled.

Unlike the other Parks Canada sites, only a few respondents visited Wapusk National Park. Most said they did not visit Wapusk National Park because of its remoteness, inaccessibility and the added cost involved in getting there. However, those who visited Wapusk National Park were very enthusiastic about the beauty and isolation of the tundra, as well as the large numbers of polar bears that could be seen.

When asked if they encountered any Parks Canada staff, many could only recall encountering Parks Canada staff at the Visitor Information Centre. One respondent did not recall encountering a Parks Canada staff member at all. Those who encountered Parks Canada staff generally felt they were knowledgeable, helpful and friendly. Some said they prefer Parks Canada staff to private tour company employees because they tend to be more knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the Churchill area.

When asked about the service level of the local tour operators, respondents were generally positive. However, some return visitors commented on how tour companies have been raising prices and reducing service levels in recent years. Many blame the recent tourism boom for the increasing prices and increasing number of inexperienced guides.

The following tour companies were identified as being particularly good:

- Sea North Tours
- North Star Tours (town tour)
- Blue Sky Tours (dogsled adventure)
- Epic Adventures (dogsled adventure)

Respondents were split on their attitudes toward the “Tundra Buggies” tour company. While some first-time visitors felt that Tundra Buggies had knowledgeable and entertaining guides, those who have visited Churchill in the past generally felt the level of service at Tundra Buggies had decreased since being taken over by new owners.

When asked if there were any additional services that they would like to see in Churchill, many could not think of any suggestions and were generally satisfied with their overall service experience. However, a few suggested more “walking tours” and / or tours that focus on the unique and varied “plant life” found in the Churchill area.

Many respondents said they felt as if they had been well informed about polar bear safety and most felt generally safe while visiting Churchill. Respondents usually received safety information from local tour operators or through Parks Canada staff at the Visitor Information Centre. A few said they read up on polar bear safety before making the trip to Churchill.

Some respondents mentioned feeling “unsafe” when walking in Churchill at night and said the deserted streets provided little protection from polar bears. These respondents suggested patrols or shuttle buses be used at night for those who are out walking alone.

When asked about overall satisfaction, most respondents said Churchill lived up to and often exceeded their expectations. The most commonly mentioned “trip highlights” included:

- Polar bears
- Whales
- Northern Lights
- Friendly local residents
- Tundra Buggy experience
- Eskimo Museum
- Prince of Wales Fort

Several members of the group appear to have a strong connection with Churchill and the Parks Canada sites. This is not surprising given that nearly half of them travel to Churchill regularly. These respondents are very respectful of park rules and see them as important for protecting the environment. Most of these respondents also indicated a willingness to act for the protection of the park sites and also a willingness to volunteer time toward conservation efforts.

## **Table of Contents**

Executive Summary.....	2
Table of Contents.....	5
Part 1: Introduction.....	6
Part 2: Pre-Trip Attitudes and Behaviors.....	7
Part 3: Churchill Trip – Experiences with Parks Canada Sites.....	10
Part 4: Churchill Trip – Overall Experience.....	15
Part 5: Respondent “Connection” to Churchill.....	16
Appendix A: Moderator’s Guide	

## **Part 1: Introduction**

### **Background**

Parks Canada conducted a visitor survey for its Churchill operations (Wapusk National Park and Prince of Wales Fort National Historic Site including Cape Merry Battery) in 2007. The Churchill survey had two components; an interview of departing passengers at the Churchill airport and Heritage Train Station, with a mail back questionnaire for eligible visitors. The survey was conducted in the summer months (June to September) and in the fall months (October and November). Visitors who participated in the mail back survey were given prize draw forms that allowed them to opt into future research related to their visit.

The opt-in list includes names and contact information for 389 visitors from Canada, the United States, and overseas. This list was used to recruit participants for an in-depth qualitative research study.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the in-depth qualitative research is to help build understanding of visitors' experiences in Churchill. These interviews will be a supplement to the survey results for visitor satisfaction, interaction with Parks Canada employees, experiences with outfitters, and the visitors' sense of connection to each of the sites.

### **Methodology**

Hackney Research & Consulting conducted a 3-day online Bulletin Board discussion from March 4<sup>th</sup> – 6th, 2008. In total, 15 recent visitors participated over the three days (9 from Canada, 5 from the US, and 1 from Brazil).

### **Caution**

Qualitative research is effective for exploring new issues. Unlike quantitative research, it allows participants to express perspectives and opinions that may not be accommodated in quantitative surveys. It allows clients to “see the issue through their clients' eyes” more effectively than with survey research. However, caution must be taken when observing qualitative research results as they only represent the opinions of those who have participated in the focus groups and not all Churchill visitors.

## **Part 2: Pre-Trip Attitudes and Behaviors**

### **Travel – General Attitudes and Behaviors**

Most respondents said they enjoy traveling and reported making several trips each year. Many travel for business as well as for pleasure and some reported making as many as 40 – 60 business trips per year.

When asked what types of vacation destinations they preferred, several said they had a preference for outdoor activities (camping, hiking, bird-watching, etc.) and many take trips to parks and other natural settings on a regular basis.

Several members of the group also said they enjoy trips that include an element of “adventure”. Past “adventure” trips mentioned include:

- Hiking / trekking
- River rafting
- Camping
- Mountaineering / rock climbing
- Sea kayaking
- Bird watching
- Snorkeling / scuba diving
- Backpacking through developing countries

*We prefer destinations that offer self-propelled outdoor experiences (like Jasper National Park), flora and fauna viewing opportunities, amazing untouched scenery, no urban sprawl.*

*I am not interested in passive sightseeing; I always want to be able to be physically active, and I have to admit to a certain bit of thrill seeking.*

*I travel about once a month for business, three times a year for family vacation and once a year for adventure.*

When asked how they select vacation destinations, many said they chose places they’ve read about, seen on TV, or heard about from other travelers. Considerations that have the greatest influence on final destination decisions were:

- Attractions or experiences available at the destination (nature/scenery, wildlife, historical significant, local populations)
- Time required to make the trip
- Time of year
- Cost (more important for students / younger respondents)
- Family friendly vs. adult destination

Respondents are generally experienced travelers and many said they prefer to plan their own trips rather than using travel agents or booking tours. The Internet, guidebooks and

word-of-mouth were identified as the main resources used to select destinations and plan vacations.

*For certain we use the Internet extensively to plan travel. We also use brochures or travel guides and I like to speak to people who may have already been to the location we are interested in. Great photographs of the area can excite me about traveling there.*

*Mostly use Internet, Lonely Planet guides to plan trips. Very rarely use travel agency. Love to be an independent traveler and much more fun to plan your own trip!*

## **Churchill – Pre-Trip Awareness & Planning**

### **Awareness**

Many respondents first became aware of Churchill through articles and documentaries on polar bears and global warming (a few mentioned National Geographic articles specifically). Several of these respondents said they felt a sense of “urgency” and wanted to visit Churchill before the polar bears are gone.

Some Canadian respondents said they had been aware of Churchill since childhood and had some knowledge of its history. However, these respondents generally grew up in Manitoba or Saskatchewan and generally learned about Churchill in school.

*I would say I first heard about Churchill as a young boy in school in Manitoba. The Cree Indians, Eskimos, and the Hudson Bay Co. and the history stuck in my mind from an early age.*

*I come from a farming background in Saskatchewan. Churchill is the closest seaport for our grain so that is where I first heard of the community.*

It should be noted that nearly half of the respondents in this group had visited Churchill two or more times in the past. Some had visited several years ago and recently returned; while others said they have been visiting Churchill annually for the past 2-5 years. These respondents reported having a strong connection to Churchill with some having friends who live in the Churchill area. Others have specialized interests that keep them coming back (i.e. orchid enthusiasts).

*I was only planning to go the one time. But 2 years later I felt the call of the wild and returned and have been going back every year since. And each year it has been a different experience. Some years it's the bears, sometimes the foxes, sometimes the owls, sometimes people that I have met on the train or in the town.*

One respondent said he first became aware of Churchill from a Tundra Buggy demonstration at the Chicago travel expo in 2005.

### **Main Reasons for Visiting**

Many respondents said their main reason for selecting Churchill as a destination was the polar bears. As a result, most respondents chose to travel to Churchill in the fall during the prime polar bear viewing season.

*We had not done any research on Churchill itself before the trip, as we were mainly interested in the polar bear adventure.*

For some, the main reason they chose Churchill was for whale watching. These respondents generally traveled to Churchill in summer, although a few chose to visit in summer simply because they could not take vacation time in the fall.

Although those who visited in the summer tended to be most interested in whale watching, many said they were excited that they also saw polar bears during their visit.

### **Tour Companies**

Only a few traveled to Churchill on pre-booked package tours. These respondents generally selected tour companies that provided a specialized service that interested them.

Tour companies mentioned include:

- Frontiers North – selected because it provides access to Wapusk National Park
- John Steel Rail Tours – selected because they wanted to travel by train
- Fantasy Tours – selected because it specializes in RV tours

Most respondents said they prefer to make their own travel plans and many booked accommodations, transportation and local tours on their own prior to their trip.

Some of the local tours mentioned include:

- Tundra Buggy
- Great White Bear
- Whale Watching Tour
- North Star Tours (town tour)
- Sea North Tours
- Blue Sky Tours (dogsled adventure)
- Epic Adventures (dogsled adventure)

A few who had visited Churchill in the past did not book any tours during their most recent visit, but had done local tours in the past.

### **Frustrations During the Planning Process**

Most respondents said that planning and booking travel to Churchill was relatively easy and free of frustrations. These respondents were able to use the Internet and the phone to do most of their planning and booking.

A few said they were frustrated by how quickly accommodations and tours fill-up in the fall. One returning visitor was frustrated by how quickly hotel/motel prices have been increasing.

### **Part 3: Churchill Trip – Experiences Parks Canada Sites**

Respondents were shown a list of Parks Canada sites at Churchill – The Visitor Information Centre in the Heritage Railway Station, Cape Merry Battery National Historic Site, Prince of Wales Fort National Historic Site, and Wapusk National Park.

Many were not aware of these sites prior to arriving in Churchill. For the most part, respondents came to Churchill for the polar bears or the whales and generally learned about the Parks Canada sites once they had arrived.

Of the few respondents who were aware of these sites prior to visiting Churchill, most were either from the prairies and had local knowledge of the area, or they had done a great deal of research and learned about the Parks Canada sites online or in guide books. However, many of these respondents were not aware that Parks Canada manages these sites.

Virtually all respondents visited the Visitor Information Centre, and most visited both Cape Merry and Prince of Wales Fort as well.

On the other hand only a few respondents visited Wapusk National Park, largely due to its remoteness, inaccessibility and the added cost involved in getting there. However, those who visited Wapusk National Park were very enthusiastic about the experience.

Only a few visited “all” the Parks Canada sites during their visit to Churchill and these respondents were generally traveling on pre-booked package tours.

#### **Visitor Centre in the Heritage Railway Station**

Respondents were generally very positive about the Visitor Centre. The displays, videos, and staff / guides were all praised for being both informative and entertaining.

Those who had visited Churchill in the past said the new Visitor Centre was a great improvement and praised its centralized location.

Some respondents reported attending guest speaker events at the Visitor Centre. These respondents were very enthusiastic about the experience and several recommended having guest speakers more often.

When asked what could be done to improve the Visitor Centre, most suggested improvements related to “space and amenities” for train passengers. In general

respondents felt that when the train station is crowded, passengers can “get in the way” of the Visitor Centre’s displays and information. Therefore, additional space and or seating for train passengers were the most common recommendation.

*During our visit, there was a large school group waiting for the train along with many other passengers. The sprawl of people and luggage all over the floor made getting through the museum a hassle. Some were sitting on the railings of the displays - not a good thing, I'm sure. The museum itself was very informative and we enjoyed the films.*

Some respondents also suggested that more information on the other Parks Canada sites would be useful at the Visitor Centre. These respondents tended to be independent travelers who prefer to travel on their own rather than using guides or tour companies.

### **Cape Merry Battery National Historic Site**

Many visited Cape Merry Battery predominantly to view whales or to enjoy the scenery. For these respondents, the historic nature of the site was considered interesting but was largely seen as secondary to the natural attractions.

Those who were on organized tours with a tour guide reported learning a great deal about the historic significance of the site. However, many of those who were not on organized tours felt there was not enough historical information on site. Some of these respondents suggested more “information signs” for independent travelers.

*Along with the wall and cannon there are a couple of other features to look at. However, the signage is not that great at the site so unless you had a chance to talk to a guide during working hours, you may miss the entire history of the area. Better information boards would help enhance the visit to the battery.*

*Could use a bit more signage. Don't expect someone from parks there all the time but it could have more signs to explain significance.*

While some suggested increasing information signage, others felt this was a bad idea. These respondents felt that increasing signage would take away from the natural beauty of the site and some said they would rather see guidebooks or brochures provided at the Visitor Information Centre.

*I like it the way it is. It's remote, it's desolate (in a way) -- it gives a sense of the north the way the early Europeans might have experienced it.*

*More signs would detract from the beauty of the area. There are many books in the library and for sale for further information. If there was a brochure, that could give a brief history of the sites.*

*I agree - don't clutter it up with more stuff. It's stark and that's what so striking about it. The books and the museum have info. Make a brochure that's available at the train station. Way cheaper than more signs in every language.*

### **Prince of Wales Fort National Historic Site**

Respondents were more likely to have guided tours of the Prince of Wales Fort than the Cape Merry Battery and generally had more knowledge and greater appreciation of the Fort's historical significance. Several mentioned how they could imagine how difficult it would have been to build the fort and live there year round.

*Every time I get to the site I am in awe about the effort it took to construct such a facility "back in the day". The tour guides at the Fort are very knowledgeable and I sense they are very interested in their work.*

*I loved the site and just walking into the building gives one an eerie feeling and you really get a sense of the past and the hardships the people must have experienced at this site.*

When asked what could be improved at Prince of Wales Fort, some suggested more elaborate displays, an increase in information signs, and staff in period costumes. However, others felt that the fort should remain simple, natural, and unspoiled.

*It would be great if the tour could be given by someone from Parks Canada. They could also do some activity on site related to the Fort. Characters simulating the life of the people that had lived there would be very interesting. Something like they have at Louisburg National Park.*

*I'm sorry I will have to disagree with the 'people in period costumes' idea. The more you 'dress up' a site, the more commercial it becomes. I don't go to Churchill for commercial. I thought it was lovely to be surrounded by nature and 'peace', the sound of the wind and the guide's voice telling us a story and allowing us to use our own imaginations!*

### **Wapusk National Park**

Only a few respondents reported visiting Wapusk National Park. However, those who visited Wapusk Park were very enthusiastic about the beauty and isolation of the tundra as well as the large numbers of polar bears that could be seen.

Some were concerned that increased tourism could damage the delicate ecosystem of Wapusk Park and most said they would like to see visitation remain highly restricted and regulated.

*Visiting WNP is always an exciting adventure. I have been fortunate in having the opportunity to visit the Park on a number of occasions and I have a special place for it in my heart.*

*Visitation to the Park has to be controlled so as to preserve it for the future. The area is fragile and can be damaged easily so planning ahead is critical. Timing of visits must be considered because of disturbance and negative impacts on wildlife and the ecosystem.*

A few of those who visit Churchill regularly complained that the cost for Wapusk National Park tours is increasing, while the quality of service on Park tours is decreasing (guides are not as knowledgeable or entertaining as in the past).

*Going out on the tundra to see the bears are always the high point of my trip. Although the cost of doing so is now so high, that I am seriously thinking of not doing it this year. Also, the buggy operators are not as knowledgeable as they used to be.*

## **Part 4: Churchill Trip – Overall Experience**

### **Satisfaction**

Virtually all respondents said they were satisfied with their trip and many felt Churchill met or exceeded their expectations.

It's interesting to note that some mentioned feeling guilty because they enjoyed their trip very much, but were concerned that they were contributing to the tourism rush.

Those who have visited Churchill often over the years are concerned about the potential harmful effects of a tourism boom.

Some suggested that the unique “plant life” of the area should be more heavily promoted and more information provided to visitors.

*This is a very unique environmental habitat that few visitors would see elsewhere - there should be some discussion about the environment and the plants that are unique to this area.*

### **Highlights**

When asked to identify the main highlights of their trip to Churchill, the most common responses were:

- Polar bears
- Whales
- Northern Lights
- Friendly local residents
- Tundra Buggy experience
- Eskimo Museum
- Prince of Wales Fort

### **Frustrations**

When asked if they experienced any frustrations during their trip, the most commonly mentioned problems were:

- Travel to and from Churchill (late trains, expensive flights, weather delays, etc.)
- Difficulty finding a place to eat during the busy season (tour groups book up restaurants)

### **Parks Canada Staff**

Most respondents said they were happy with the Parks Canada staff and the service they provided. In general Parks Canada staff were described as knowledgeable, helpful, enthusiastic, and entertaining.

Some said the only Parks Canada staff members they recalled were ones seen at the Visitor Information Centre. One respondent did not recall encountering any Parks Canada staff at all.

A few respondents reported a preference for Parks Canada staff over tour company staff. For these respondents, Parks Canada staff members are considered to be more knowledgeable, enthusiastic and safety conscious than private tour guides.

*Park staff members were all very knowledgeable, professional and concerned about security. It is different for the tour operators I have seen. On the Tundra Buggy, the guy was not concerned at all about the bear that was very close to us while we were walking outside the bus.*

### **Tour Operators**

While most respondents were happy with the knowledge and service provided by Parks Canada staff, views on tour operators were more mixed. While some tour operators were praised, others were seen as being less effective.

Mike Macri of Sea North was identified as being a particularly good tour operator. Other tour operators identified as being particularly good were:

- Tundra Buggy
- North Star Tours (town tour)
- Blue Sky Tours (dogsled adventure)

- Epic Adventures (dogsled adventure)

*I felt Sea North Tours gave you your money's worth and were very well run.*

*The only tour our group does is the Fort and Whale watch with Mike Macri of Sea North. In our opinion - he is the best.*

*We really appreciated the guide on the Tundra Buggy, having had several years of experience, he knew how to position our buggy by anticipating where the bears were headed instead of chasing after them as we saw other groups doing. We got some great photos.*

However, several respondents who travel to Churchill regularly said tour operators are getting more expensive and are providing poorer service than in the past. Many of these respondents blame the tourist boom for the increased prices as well as the increase in inexperienced or unknowledgeable tour operators and/or guides.

Some mentioned “Tundra Buggy” specifically as an example of a tour company that no longer provides the same level of service as in the past.

*When Len Smith operated Tundra Buggy, the drivers were knowledgeable, talked the whole time giving plenty of information, and they served great lunches from Gypsy's.*

*I agree Tundra Buggy was way better and no silly politics when Len and Bev ran it.*

When asked if there were any services they'd like to see added, many respondents said they were satisfied with their experience and could not recommend any additional services. However, a few respondents suggested adding “walking tours”, or tours that focus on the varied and unique “plant life in” the Churchill area.

*There is much to see within walking distance of the town site - birds, flowers, habitats, whales, etc. An advertised once or twice a day walk would introduce visitors to the "natural" diversity in Churchill and may encourage them to return for further exploration.*

## **Safety**

Respondents generally felt safe while visiting Churchill. Many said the combination of signs in the town and information provided by tour guides and Parks Canada staff helped them know what to do to be safe. A few also read up on polar bear safety before traveling to Churchill.

A few respondents said they felt unsafe when walking alone at night in Churchill. These respondents reported feeling vulnerable to polar bears on the deserted streets, and suggested patrols or shuttle buses for people walking alone at night.

One respondent felt there should be more safety information for “walkers” in general and suggested adding a brochure on “walker safety” to the Visitor Information Centre.

## **Part 5: Respondent “Connection” to Churchill**

Overall, group members reported having a strong sense of connection to Churchill and the Parks Canada sites. This is not surprising given the fact that nearly half the respondents were repeat visitors.

### **Accepting of Rules**

Virtually all respondents said they respect and follow park rules. Many feel it is important to follow the rules because they are ultimately for the good of the local environment and wildlife. Many respondents voiced annoyance at those tourists who do not follow the rules.

Only a few respondents admitted to breaking any rules. For the most part these respondents unknowingly wandered into restricted areas, but left quickly once they realized where they were.

### **Willingness to Act for Protection**

Many are strong supporters of conservation and would be willing to support Parks Canada to protect the environment. Types of support mentioned include contacting politicians, attending public hearings or demonstrations, circulating petitions, and writing letters.

Many suggested promoting “eco-tourism” as the best way to develop and grow the local Churchill economy.

### **Willingness to Volunteer**

Most indicated a willingness to volunteer their time, but were not clear on how they could do this. Some from the US felt they lived too far away to be much help. However, a few respondents were quite interested in volunteering time “on-site”.

## APPENDIX A: MODERATOR'S GUIDE

### 1.0 Instructions

#### 1.1. ["Instructions" in Whiteboard]

Welcome to our bulletin board and thank you for joining us. My name is Ken and I will be leading our discussion over the next three days. This bulletin board is very easy and intuitive to use. To participate in the discussion, simply click on the question labels in the left margin (e.g. 2.1). This will link you into the questions, visuals, and postings for that particular question. To answer the question or comment, simply click on "Reply To This Question".

For each question, you'll need to post your "reply" first and then you'll see what other people have said. Once you've posted your reply, you should feel free to read the other answers and post questions and/or comments to your fellow participants. To ensure anonymity, each of you has been assigned a "celebrity name" as your handle and this name will appear each time you post a reply.

It is best to answer the questions in the order they are presented (answer 2.2 before proceeding to 2.3). Remember, you have all day to complete Day 1's questions, so take advantage of the flexibility of the bulletin board format and login when it's most convenient for you. Please click on 1.2 to continue...

#### 1.2. ["Instructions" in Whiteboard]

My postings are written with several questions combined together. Think about them together, as a theme. Try to answer each posting in its entirety addressing most or all of the parts in your reply. I'll even add a follow up question or two, so check in often to catch the latest posting.

We ask that you sign in at least twice a day for each of the three days (although we hope you will be able to login more often). If, for some reason, you can't make one of the days, please join us for the other days. Please click on 1.3 to continue...

#### 1.3 ["Instructions" in Whiteboard]

Each morning I'll post a new set of questions. Please login and answer each of these new questions first. Then take some time to read what other participants have written and feel free to respond to their comments.

You can also review the previous day's postings at any time. So I encourage you to check back for any new questions or comments you may have missed. Overall, the goal of this bulletin board is to create an extended, interactive conversation between all of us. Please click on 1.4 to continue...

#### 1.4 ["Instructions" in Whiteboard]

I want to reassure you that all your responses will be kept strictly confidential and the information you share with me is only for the purposes of this study. What's important to me is what is said, not who says it.

Please be aware that I'm an independent research consultant and do not work directly for Parks Canada. So feel free to speak your mind – you can't hurt my feelings:)

Also, I should mention that I am part of a larger research team and some my colleagues will be observing our discussion - but they won't interrupt us in any way. Please click on 1.5 to continue...

#### 1.5 ["Instructions" in Whiteboard]

Finally, I would like to thank each of you for taking time from your week to help us with this study.

I think you will find it interesting and fun.

Click on 2.1 to introduce yourself...

## 2.0 Introductions

### 2.1 ["Introductions" in Whiteboard]

The first thing I would like to do is a warm-up question to get everyone familiar with each other and get you used to how the bulletin board works. Why don't you start off by telling us the city/town and country you live in, your occupation and what you like to do in your free time?

I'll start us off. I'm in Saskatoon, Canada and I'm a marketing research consultant. In my free time I like to travel, play golf and go camping.

Now let's hear from the rest of you...

### 2.2 ["Introductions" in Whiteboard]

It's nice to meet all of you and now we are ready to begin our discussion. Please click on 3.1 to see our first question...

## 3.0 Day 1

### 3.1 ["Travel" in whiteboard]

First of all I'd like to know a little bit about the kinds of traveling each of you do. In general, how often do you travel and what kinds of trips do you take (business, vacation, adventure, visiting friends/family, etc.)?

### 3.2 ["Vacation Travel" in Whiteboard]

Now I'd like to focus on vacation travel specifically. First of all, how do you decide where to go on vacation? What types of things influence your decision and why?

### 3.3 ["Vacation Travel" in Whiteboard]

If not already mentioned, what types of "tools" (internet, travel agencies, travel guides, etc.) do you usually use to plan and organize your vacations, and why?

### 3.4

Now I'd like you to think back to your recent trip to Churchill and tell us how you chose it as a destination...

How did you first hear about Churchill? What attracted you to it as a travel destination? What type of research (if any) did you do? Did any other people have an influence on your decision? If so, in what way?

### 3.5

Once you decided on Churchill as a destination, what were your next steps? What did you need to do to prepare for your trip (make reservations, purchase equipment/supplies, plan itinerary)?

Did you book a tour? If so, which tour operator did you use and why? If not, what were your main reasons for planning your trip to Churchill on your own?

3.6

Did you run into any obstacles, or experience any frustrations while planning your trip to Churchill (i.e. unexpected costs, lack of information, poor service, etc.)? Do you have any suggestions for how the process could be improved?

3.7

In 2007, did you visit Churchill in the summer or fall? What were your main reasons for choosing that season? Do you feel you made a good choice? Why or why not?

Would you consider visiting Churchill again, but in a different season? Why or why not?

3.8

That brings us to the end of Day 1's questions. Please check in later today to see if I have posted any follow up questions.

## 4.0 Day 2

4.1 ["Welcome to Day 2" in whiteboard]

Welcome to Day 2 everyone. Today we will be focusing on your experiences while visiting Churchill.

But before we begin, I encourage you to take a minute to check back to Day 1's questions to see if there's anything you missed. Then click on 4.2 to continue...

4.2

First of all I'd like to discuss some specific Churchill sites. In the whiteboard you'll see a list of sites (Visitor Information Centre in the Heritage Railway Station, Cape Merry Battery National Historic Site, Prince of Wales Fort National Historic Site, Wapusk National Park). Which of these sites did you visit and why? Were there any sites you didn't visit and why?

4.3

If you visited the Visitor Information Centre in the Heritage Railway Station, how did you feel about it? What did you like and why? Was there anything that could be improved and why?

If you did not visit the Visitor Information Centre in the Heritage Railway Station, please proceed to the next question.

4.4

If you visited the Cape Merry Battery National Historic Site, how did you feel about it? What did you like and why? Was there anything that could be improved and why?

If you did not visit the Cape Merry Battery National Historic Site, please proceed to the next question.

4.5

If you visited the Prince of Wales Fort National Historic Site, how did you feel about it? What did you like and why? Was there anything that could be improved and why?

If you did not visit the Prince of Wales Fort National Historic Site, please proceed to the next question.

4.6

If you visited Wapusk National Park, how did you feel about it? What did you like and why? Was there anything that could be improved and why?

If you did not visit the Wapusk National Park, please proceed to the next question.

4.7

All of the sites we've been discussing today are managed by Parks Canada. Were you aware of any of these sites before arriving in Churchill? If so, which one(s) were you aware of? How did you learn about them?

Before your visit, were you aware that Parks Canada manages these sites?

4.8

Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience in Churchill? Did it meet your expectations? Why or why not?

4.9 ["See You Tomorrow" in whiteboard]

Well that brings us to the end of Day 2's questions. Thank you for all your hard work and I look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas again tomorrow.

### 5.0 Day 3

5.1 ["Welcome to Day 3" in whiteboard]

Welcome to our third and final day everyone. Today we will continue to discuss your experiences while visiting Churchill.

Before we begin, I once again encourage you to take a minute to check back to Day 2's questions to see if there's anything you missed. Then click on 5.2 to continue...

5.2

Today I'd like to start off by discussing safety. As many of you have mentioned over the past few days, polar bears pose a safety risk to humans in the Churchill region. Did you generally feel safe while visiting Churchill? Were you briefed on special polar bear safety precautions? If so, by whom?

Yesterday, we discussed "safety tips for walkers" being offered at the Tourist Centre. Is there anything else that could be improved in the area of safety in Churchill? If so, what would you recommend and why?

5.3

Some of you have mentioned park staff and tour operators in past questions, and now I'd like to expand on that discussion. Overall, how did you feel about the staff and service during your visit to Churchill? Did you find the operators knowledgeable and helpful? Why or why not?

Did you encounter any Parks Canada staff? If so, did you find them knowledgeable and helpful? Why or why not?

5.4

If not already mentioned, is there anything that could be improved in terms of Staff and service? Are there any services that could be added that would improve the Churchill experience for you?

5.5

National parks often have a lot of rules for their visitors. How did you feel about the amount of

rules at the four Parks Canada sites located in and around Churchill (too many, not enough, the right amount)? Are there any rules you'd like to see added? Why?

Were there any rules you disagreed with or ignored? If so, why? *Please don't worry about admitting to breaking rules – I won't tell anybody:)*

5.6

Part of Parks Canada's mandate is to protect and present the natural and cultural heritage of its parks and sites. This often puts them at odds with industrial/commercial developers who are working to improve and expand the local economy.

Overall, how do you feel about this issue? What are your views on "development vs. conservation"?

5.7

Imagine that a large company was planning to develop a new industry in the Churchill parks. How would you feel about it?

If Parks Canada were working to stop the development, how likely would you be to support them? What type of support (if any) would you give and why?

5.8

Would you be willing to contribute time as a volunteer to help Parks Canada protect the Churchill parks and sites? If so, in what way would you like to contribute and why?

5.9

One last question to sum up our discussion over the past 3 days...

Overall, what would you say are the "highlights" of a trip to Churchill? What do you like best and why?

How likely are you to return to Churchill and why? How likely are you to recommend Churchill to others and why?

5.10 ["Thank You" in whiteboard]

That brings us to the end of our discussion. Thank you very much for your participation - your feedback has been very valuable to us. Please feel free to go back to previous day's questions and add to your comments if you like.

You can expect your \$50 Amazon gift card to arrive in the mail shortly. It takes some time to process, so should arrive in 3 to 4 weeks.

Once again thank you very much for participating and have a great week!