A WILD RIDE THROUGH THE SOUTH SLAVE

Towering waterfalls, giant wildlife and pristine landscapes beckon in the southern reaches of the Northwest Territories.



Get used to big thrills on a road-trip through the South Slave region of the Northwest Territories. That's because everything here is big—the waterfalls, the wildlife, the waters and Wood Buffalo National Park, the largest national park in Canada. Wood Buffalo is a haven for nature-lovers, paddle-junkies and wildlife-enthusiasts, and it's less than a day's drive from the NWT-Alberta border, making it the ultimate road trip destination. A unique ecological marvel, the park features an otherworldly salt plain, some of the best whitewater on the planet, and herds of its hulking namesake wildlife, which commonly stop traffic as they graze along the highway's shoulders. Explore the park's varied, unspoiled landscapes, home to the last natural wild flock of whooping cranes, using the town of Fort Smith as a base. And getting there is half the fun. Stand in the spray of Alexandra Falls, where the Hay River tumbles 32 metres, and then stop in for a Saturday brunch, featuring fresh caught fish, at Hay River's farmer's market.

SPECTACULAR NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
DESTINATION: SOUTH SLAVE

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NWT-ALBERTA BORDER, GNWT ITI PARKS / NWTT



LOUISE FALLS, GEROGE FISCHER / NWTT



HAY RIVER, HANNAH EDEN / NWTT



SLAVE RIVER NEAR FORT SMITH, DARREN ROBERTS / NWTT



WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK, HANS PFAFF / NWTT

GAS CAMPING

1. NWT-ALBERTA BORDER

Heading north on Alberta's Highway #35, a giant road sign will appear on the horizon. Pull over for a picture—you will have officially arrived North of 60. Stop in at the Visitor Centre for a coffee with friendly staff and hear about all the latest goings-on in the South Slave region.

2. TWIN FALLS GORGE TERRITORIAL PARK

This absolute gem of a park features two world-class waterfalls within mere steps of the highway. Roll out a picnic basket and have lunch beside roaring Alexandra Falls, where the mighty Hay River plummets more than 30 metres. Later, take a short, downriver hike along an interpretive trail to scenic, tiered Louise Falls. You can spend the night here at the campground, which boasts 28 powered campsites, showers, multiple clean washroom facilities, and stunning lookouts over the Hay River Ravine.

3. ENTERPRISE

This small hamlet of roughly 120, affectionately called "the handshake of the North," sits at the junction of NWT highways #1 and #2. Drop into Winnie's Dene Art Gallery to browse a wide array of NWT-made moccasins, jewellery and more—including dazzling fashions created by renowned designer and Enterprise-based D'Arcy Moses.

4. PARADISE GARDENS

On NWT Highway #2 to Hay River, visit this fertile crescent along the Hay River that hosts a private campground and late-summer berry picking. The Northern Farm Training Institute, a live farm, and the Hay River Golf Course are close by.

5. HAY RIVER

Dubbed "the Hub" due to its history as a nexus of rail, road, water and air transportation, Hay River is a community of 3,500 with restaurants, hotels, groceries, gas, garage and more. It's also home to arguably the NWT's best beach, which sprawls along the southern shore of Great Slave Lake, next to a campground with 43 powered sites. With the weekly farmer's market at Fisherman's Wharf in the summer and the NWT's largest pond hockey tournament in March, Hay River has a lot to offer the road tripper whatever the season.

6. K'ATL'ODEECHE FIRST NATION

Be sure to visit the K'atl'odeeche First Nation, a small Dene community on the eastern shore of the mouth of the Hay River, where preparing dryfish is a local speciality.

7. LITTLE BUFFALO RIVER CROSSING TERRITORIAL CAMPGROUND

East on NWT Highway #5, stop for the evening at one of 20 powered sites at this campground beside Little Buffalo River. Fish for pickerel, take advantage of the boat launch and use this as a base for exploring Fort Resolution.

8. FORT RESOLUTION

At the end of NWT Highway #5, you'll find Fort Resolution, home to 500 residents. Fort Res is the oldest continuously occupied community in the Northwest Territories, founded in 1791 as a Northwest Company fur trading post.

9. FORT SMITH

Fort Smith, gateway to Wood Buffalo National Park, is a tight-knit town of 2,500 with a thriving arts and festival scene. Slave River Paddlefest, held every August long weekend, attracts international paddlers of all skill levels, and the Thebacha and Wood Buffalo Dark Sky Festival in late-August takes advantage of the park's standing as the planet's biggest dark sky preserve, providing a weekend's worth of activities for star-gazers.

10. WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK

Home to whooping cranes, massive wood bison, surreal salt plains and exhilarating whitewater, Wood Buffalo National Park is a must-see for any outdoorsperson. Make Queen Elizabeth Territorial Park campground, located outside Fort Smith, with its 24 powered campsites, showers, clean washroom facilities, playground and hiking trails, your base to explore Wood Buffalo.