



Think you know Alberta?

You may think you've seen and done it all, but we bet you'll find something totally new in this list of unique Alberta adventures.



Me, Myself and Chili: Down in Medicine Hat – they like things hot. White-hot. Especially from noon until 3 pm on July 24 – the day of the great Chili Cook-off. For 21 years, people on a gluttonous quest for the very best, have queued up downtown – eager to dig into dozens of types of chili. Be sure to tuck into the fare from a local funeral home (they call their booth "You're Gonna Die"), not so far from the 911 gang that dole out their fiery wares near a stretcher that reads "in case you couldn't stomach our chili." Peter Bogelaar, the sand sculpture king, will be providing entertainment as will numerous bands. (403.866.5997)



Brew Ha Ha: If you live in the historic Edmonton neighbourhood called Highlands you've smelled this place. That smoky, almost grassy smell is the toasty scent of coffee beans that hail from far-off spots like Bali, Papua New Guinea, Yemen and India. Whisker Twister and Perfecto Domingo are two roasts that seem to perpetually nuzzle this funky northeast neighbourhood, hanging amongst its bookstores and nearby boutiques. You won't get a typical cuppa jo at Catfish Coffee Roasters but you can buy a bag of organic beans and learn about the small farmers they buy from. (catfishcoffee.com; 780.491.0771)



Why am I here again? So you may ask the thousands of faithful fans who visit the Birds of Prey Centre in Coaldale every year. Religiously. Is it the chance to get their photo taken wearing a leather glove and a Great Horned Owl? Or do they just love to ooh and aah over the swoop of those regal eagles, hawks and other hunters at the flying demos? The answer? Neither, it's the ridiculously cute 60-odd white Pekin Ducks that waddle about, sidling up to visitors, coaxing them to buy a bag of feed. No. 1 crowd pleaser – no word of a lie. (burrowingowl.com; 403.345.4262)



Golf the Dunes: By the end of 18 holes, you'll have likely met The Fox, survived the 473-yard, par 4 monster at hole No. 6 and learned why the Dunes Golf Club hosted the Alberta Junior Provincial Championship last summer. Fun stuff, but nothing compared with the course's prime summertime thrill: golfing until 11 pm on a feisty, forested course built on sand dunes, two minutes south of Grande Prairie. No wonder the Ladies Challenge is playing here July 17–18. (thedunes.ca; 1.888.224.2252)



How's your overhand? You've seen the velvety tumble of the foothills south of Calgary in a thousand postcards. But play disc golf on a 23 acre-swath of native grassland and you'll see Mother Nature from angles regular golfers miss out on. Targets vary from old washtubs and whisky barrels to window frames – even an old outhouse. Set on an 1896 homestead, the gorgeous property is studded with interpretive plaques, antiques and immense views of the Rockies. This getaway has family all over it but it's also a popular corporate activity as well, that can include catering from the nearby Canadian Rocky Mountain Ranch. (wjhomesteaddiscgolf.com; 403.827.0120)



Calling all Country Fans: Enjoy a cuppa on their homey front porch and watch the trains roll by (38 times a day). Just a 40-min drive west of Edmonton, through lush rolling ranchland lies the teenie hamlet of Carvel, pop. 17. Besides the Ukrainian Catholic Church and six homes is a charming 1918 General Store. Shelves are full of hand-picked items from April Cornell linens and clothes to Bridgewater candles, even tins of Barefoot Venus Mustard Baths and funky locally made birdhouses and jewellery. Looking to scoop up a souvenir? Buy a bar of Old Goat Soap (most sought-after item). Two special events on July 17 give you even more reasons to take a drive to Carvel: The Country Soul Stroll is on, as is Carvel's annual Street Sale. (carvelgeneralstore.ca; 780.963.1156)



Be Mindful on the Mountain: The path to enlightenment is so much easier by helicopter. Doing sun salutations and downward dogs on a spectacular rocky ridge under the mindfulness of hatha instructor/certified mountain guide, Martha McCallum, is the perfect antidote to stress. Using Icefields Helicopter to effortlessly wiz her guests to places in Kananaskis and the Cline River area translates to more time to hike, watch for wildlife and practice yoga. Oh, and did we mention that Martha used to own a very funky restaurant in Canmore? The gourmet lunches she provides only serve to ratchet up the bliss factor. (marthashelihikes.com; 403.609.0824)



Get Nose to Nose with Millions of Fish: Right smack in the heart of Calgary lies a watery world full of hands-on exhibits, displays and wetland walkways. Always a hit with the small fry is the Bow Habitat Station where you can get your bearings at a new visitor's centre full of jaw-dropping exhibits from the electronic tabletop map to the beaver dam (that you can crawl into) as well as a bouncy bog. Be sure to wander through the Sam Livingston Fish Hatchery where two million trout begin their lives here every year. Then end your family outing with an amble through the Pearce Estate Park Interpretive Wetland. (bowhabitat.alberta.ca; 403.297.6561)



Train hard – train very, very hard: The punishing 125-km running race, known as the Canadian Death Race, has never actually killed anyone... but it's no walk in the park. This gruelling endurance test through the Rockies pushes elite athletes and weekend warriors to the edge of their physical and mental vaults with not only distance but elevation change – some 17,000 ft. Each of the 1,000 or so entrants is given a freshly minted coin that they must carry with them through the rugged terrain surrounding Grande Cache. Racers need this precious coin to cross the Smoky River near the end of their trek. No coin. No crossing. Just think of the bragging rights – but don't let your eye off the prize. (canadiandeathrace.com)



How Sweet it is – to be loved by your kids. Take all sweet tooth to Candy Nation at Capital Ex (July 23–Aug 1) and hearts will be beaming out of eyeballs. In the heart of Family Fun Town, is the 22 ft tall Rock Candy Mtn with its Wonkaesque candy factory – full of animated lollipops and oversized gumdrops. Don't miss the candy railroad as it chugs through tunnels of chocolate bars above the factory. Besides the chocolatey, gooey confections you'll actually discover the history of some of the world's candy makers and learn about North America's most popular brands through the sweetest of ages. Don't miss the free samples and demos in the Candy Kitchen. (capitalex.ca; 780.471.7210)