



# WHITEHORSE *the Wilderness City*

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

### Economy

As Yukon's Capital city, Whitehorse is a service centre for all levels of government. Government business directly and indirectly drives a varied and prosperous local economy. Tourism attracts hundreds of thousands of travelers each year, most of which arrive via the famous Alaska Highway. Whitehorse is also home to mineral exploration companies involved in large, ongoing projects throughout the Yukon. This healthy blend of government, tourism and mining supports a diverse selection of small, local businesses.

### Arts & Culture

Whitehorse is an active and colourful city with a range of choices that far surpass expectations of a small northern town. The allure of the Yukon has attracted an enviable selection of nationally significant artists and musicians. A neighborhood bar on a Thursday night may yield a memorable musical experience. Accordingly, the dynamism of visual arts in Whitehorse adds colour and vitality to public spaces.

In addition to four movie screens, there are two community arts venues plus the well-appointed Yukon Arts Centre. The Arts Centre is a modern, spacious, multiuse auditorium and gallery. This venue supports a huge variety of performances year-round showcasing local talent and internationally acclaimed guests.

Restaurants and bars bustle with activity most nights of the week. Live music and sports entertainment drive local venues throughout the year. Restaurants have evolved to meet the cosmopolitan tastes of Whitehorse's well-travelled residents. Jamaican, Vietnamese, Middle Eastern, Indian, Thai, Chinese, Japanese and Mexican restaurants have all become local favorites.

Whitehorse also hosts some famously fun festivals. Everything kicks off in February with festival month. The Available Light Film Festival presents award winning films from around the world. Frostbite Music Festival features up-and-coming acts from around North America. The Yukon Quest runs for ten days in February covering 1600 kilometers between Fairbanks and Whitehorse in



what is known as the world's toughest sled dog race. Finally, the Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous celebration in late February features snow carving, axe throwing, flour packing, dog pulling, and dog sledding in old-time Yukon flair.

The action rolls along all summer with the Whitehorse Storytelling Festival & Solstice Music Festival in June, as well as Arts in the Park each lunch hour at LePage Park from May through July.

## Sports & Recreation

A cornerstone of the Whitehorse lifestyle is sports and outdoor recreation. There are more than 700 kilometers of maintained trails within City limits alone. The hub of activity is the exquisite new Canada Games Centre, housing two ice rinks, a state-of-the art fitness centre, deluxe aquatic centre; gymnasium, indoor running track and soccer field.

Right next door, the Whitehorse Cross Country Ski Centre boasts 75 kilometers of groomed trails and regularly hosts national and international races. Nearby Mount Sima has evolved from a small community ski hill to a four season attraction with mountain biking in the summer and skiing & ice climbing in the winter. Other local sporting attractions include two superbly maintained golf courses, open from May to September, with panoramic views and immaculate fairways and greens.

Whitehorse has become an eco-adventure destination renowned for its access to pristine rugged wilderness. Local eco-tourism companies cater to adventurous clients from around the world with a wide range of excursions into the vast Yukon wilderness. Dog sledding, canoeing, kayaking, whitewater rafting, fishing, mountain biking and backcountry hiking are all world class attractions. Starting point for the world's toughest sled dog race in the winter and the world's longest canoe race in the summer; Whitehorse hosts a number of endurance races year round.



## Infrastructure & Services

Whitehorse today is as modern and connected as anywhere in Canada. As the Yukon's capital city, Whitehorse is home to all of the programs and services needed to run the Territory. Whitehorse General is a fully accredited acute care hospital, with visiting specialists on a weekly basis. Residents can expect a high standard of care, comparable to that of larger communities in the South. Patients with special needs are transferred to full service hospitals in our gateway cities: Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver.

## Climate & Accessibility

Situated on the lee side of the rugged Coast Mountains, Whitehorse has a northern continental climate with cold, dry winters and mild, temperate summers. Despite its long winter and relatively cold climate, Whitehorse has been described as one of the most comfortable climates in Canada. Whitehorse is also the driest city in Canada based on annual precipitation.

Whitehorse is remote yet surprisingly well connected. Regular daily flights from Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver link the city to major business centers and southern transportation networks. These gateway cities are the typical departure points for Yukon residents heading out of the country. The Alaska Highway connects Whitehorse to Alaska and Northern BC while Yukon's grid of well-maintained highways service outlying communities.

## History



After the first Klondike gold reached Seattle in 1897, the rush to Dawson City was relentless. In the next two years 30,000 - 40,000 men and women arrived by ship in Skagway and Dyea, then climbed the formidable Chilkoot Pass multiple times, often in punishing weather, to bring in the required thousand pounds of food and supplies. With dreams of gold fueling their fires, gold seekers trekked on to Lake Bennett, built boats and rafts and crossed the windy Southern Lakes to the headwaters of the Yukon River. They then braved the Whitehorse rapids and embarked on a 740 kilometer journey north to Dawson City, where the real work began.

In 1900 White Pass & Yukon Route (WPYR) built a narrow gauge railway from Skagway to Whitehorse to haul passengers and freight. WPYR also built several large paddlewheelers to carry people and supplies down river to Dawson then transport ore and passengers back to Whitehorse on the return trip. This established Whitehorse as a communication / transportation centre early on. The train and paddlewheelers operated until the early 1950s when new highways were built in the Territory.

Whitehorse and indeed the entire Yukon slumbered from 1905 to 1942, when WWII brought 30000 American troops to town to build the Alaska Highway. It took a mere eight months to build 1500 miles of winding highway through swamp, mountains and muskeg to Fairbanks, Alaska. Today, that road forms our lifeline to the outside, bringing in most of our supplies. The completion of the Alaska Highway and arrival of new residents has a huge, mostly negative impact on Yukon First Nations people.

## First Nations



The current location of Whitehorse was originally a gathering place for First Nations people. Each fall, family groups camped beside the rapids to fish for salmon, pick berries, and visit with friends and relatives. It wasn't until 1896 that non-Natives began to establish a community below the rapids in what is now known as Whitehorse.

All around Whitehorse are long established First Nations communities. The Kwanlin Dun First Nation and Ta'an Kwach'an First Nation both have property holdings within the City and collaborate with Federal, Territorial and Municipal governments to design services and infrastructure, and promote economic development in their communities.

## Education

The Yukon Government supports each level of education in the territory. Whitehorse has ten elementary schools, three secondary schools, and one K-12 French Language school. The high school curriculum is based on British Columbia's but incorporates Yukon history, Northern studies and aboriginal languages.

Yukon College offers a full range of academic and trade programs. Many first and second year academic courses are fully transferable to universities in southern Canada. Bachelor Degree programs for Social Work and Education have also been recently developed. Yukon College has also become a centre for Northern research. The brand new Northern Research Institute is breaking ground in cold-climate innovation.

## Summary

Whitehorse today bears little resemblance to its rough and tumble roots and now offers all the comforts and conveniences of Southern Canada. Yet despite the City's modernity, Whitehorse retains the friendly atmosphere, closeness with nature, and intangible quality of life that has always drawn people here. The people of Whitehorse are proud of their City and hope that you enjoy your stay. If you're like many of us, you just might be back!

2010 City of Whitehorse - Tourism & Economic Development

[tourism@whitehorse.ca](mailto:tourism@whitehorse.ca)