

PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

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By Christine Thompson

Great people, great places.

Al Capone wouldn't have taken much notice of the contrasting landscape across Southwest Saskatchewan. He was reportedly too busy running a bootlegging operation in underground tunnels. Today, the award-winning tunnels of Moose Jaw include the Passage to Fortune Tunnel, which illustrates the Asian immigrant experience in Canada, and the Chicago Connection, re-enacting the days of prohibition. Although recently damaged by fire, both tunnels are fully restored with tours operating.

Above ground, you'll relish the ever-changing scenery of forested countryside, golden wheat fields, sandhills, picturesque lakes and undulating river valleys.

In the far west, Cypress Hills Inter-Provincial Park rises 600 metres with an alpine setting of lodgepole pine and conglomerate cliffs. Rare plants, wildflowers and over 200 species of birds reside here.

Lake Diefenbaker is a gem in the region, being the largest freshwater body in Southwest Saskatchewan. Three provincial parks flank its rugged shores: Saskatchewan Landing, Douglas and Danielson – providing a tourist's paradise for sailing, fishing, water-skiing, hiking, windsurfing, golfing and camping.

Closer to Moose Jaw, Buffalo Pound Provincial Park offers camping facilities and teems with birds and wildlife at Nicolle Flats Nature Area. Birders will be equally delighted at Chaplin Lake, one of the premier bird conservation sites in the province. This saltwater lake attracts thousands of migrating shorebirds every spring.

For the nature enthusiast, the Grasslands National Park along the southern border encompasses striking dunes, badlands and native prairie. Explore hidden coulees where bison once roamed, and Sitting Bull took refuge.

Southwest Saskatchewan's colourful history is everywhere. Just east of Grasslands National Park, St. Victor Petroglyphs Provincial Historic Park features ancient rock carvings displaying figures and animals. Or go back even further – say 65 million years: Eastend's impressive T-rex Discovery Centre showcases bones of duck-billed dinosaurs, triceratops

and other ancient creatures found in this internationally acclaimed fossil-rich area.

Recent history is just as rich. At Wood Mountain Post Provincial Historic Park, east of Coronach, learn the story of North West Mounted Police negotiations with Chief Sitting Bull following the battle of Little Big Horn in 1876.

At Fort Walsh National Historic Site, guides in period costume take you back to 1880, with two reconstructed whiskey trading posts, and the Fort that served as home base for the North West Mounted Police. In Moose Jaw, follow the evolution of transportation at the Western Development Museum, and visit the gallery of Canada's legendary aerial team: The Snowbirds.

Modern city life in Southwest Saskatchewan centres around two main hubs: Moose Jaw and Swift Current. In Moose Jaw, "the friendly city," the Casino and Temple Gardens Mineral Spa Resort will appeal to your contemporary side; while historically inspired murals around town add charm, as does a tour aboard the city's 1911 electric streetcar replica.

Swift Current is nestled in rolling hills along Swift Current Creek. Meander past the city's attractions on a 10-kilometre Creekside Parkway. Stop in at the city's Mennonite Heritage Site, where culture comes alive. Meet a guest artist or take a guided tour at the Art Gallery. The Swift Current Museum displays the region's wildlife, topographical features and human influence.

Sports and events across the region range from rodeos and stampedes to fishing derbies, a film festival and "Frontier Days" (in Swift Current). The first annual Outlaw Days Festival in Coronach, July 24 and 25, is all Wild West, including a fiddler's jamboree, cowboy poetry-telling, aboriginal performances and children's pioneering games.

Other historical attraction and natural outdoor appeal are abundant in places like "The Heart of the Golden South" – Assiniboia – and the unique European-inspired town of Gravelbourg.

As for accommodation, your home on the range can be a B & B, a working vacation farm, a lakeside cabin or campsite. Hotels and motels

are plentiful – you're sure to find something that would have impressed even Al Capone.