earthwatch expeditions
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Explore with Purpose



Up Close & Personal with Beluga Whales

Observe, Photograph, Listen to & Record Belugas in Canada's Churchill River

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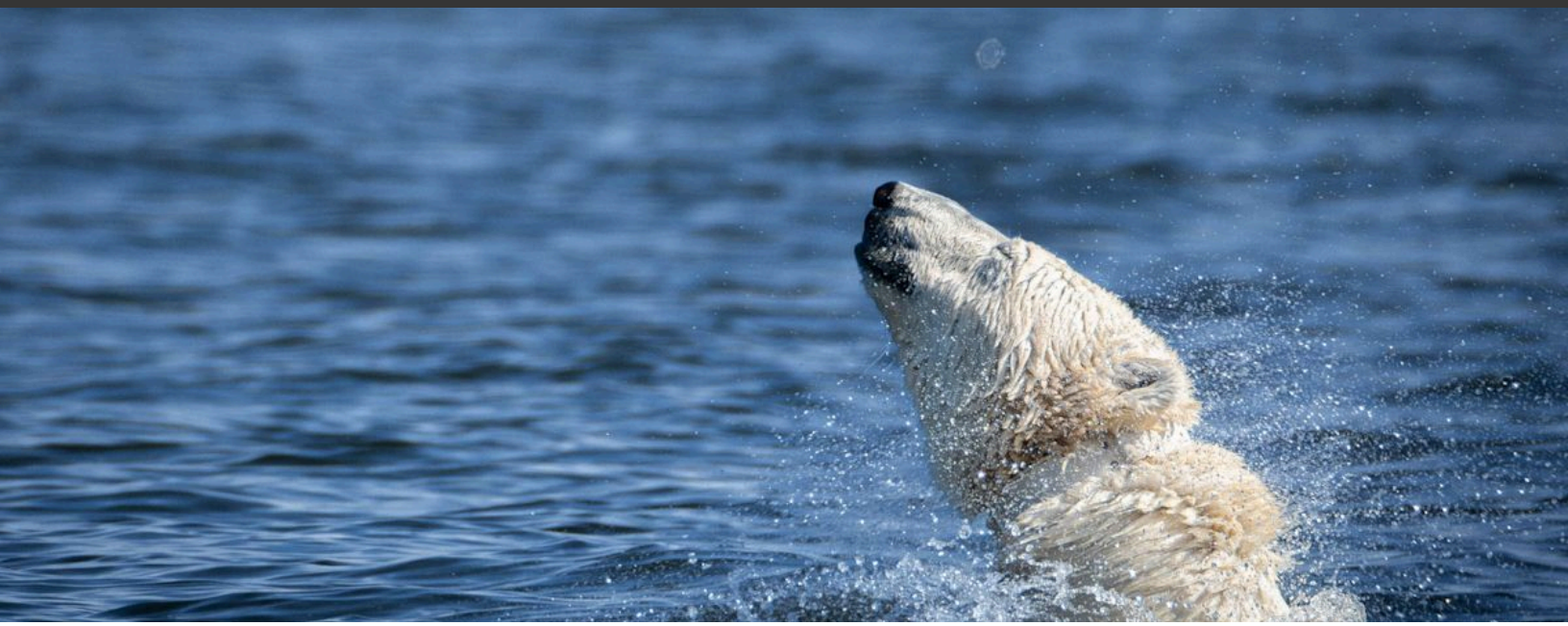
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Trip Details:

Days
7 Days / Jul–Aug

Price
From $9278 (+Air)

Up Close & Personal with Beluga Whales

Observe, Photograph, Listen to & Record Belugas in Canada's Churchill River

Each summer, some 3,000 beluga whales gather in the Churchill River estuary, filling the waters of western Hudson Bay with whistles, clicks and calls. Head out by Zodiac to meet these curious, vocal whales, watching mothers and calves swim together and photographing individuals as they surface beside the boat. Listen to their lively underwater chorus while helping researchers investigate how belugas communicate, interact and use their summer habitat. Your photographs, observations and measurements contribute to a growing scientific record of this population.

Beyond the research, explore Churchill's sweeping tundra, boreal forest and rugged coastline in search of polar bears, Arctic foxes and migratory birds. Discover the region's Indigenous heritage at the Itsanitaq Museum and ride through the forest by dog cart with a local musher. Stay at a working Arctic research station, where conversations over dinner turn to whale sightings, field notes and the next day's explorations. Experience a side of Churchill that few travelers see, from its remarkable wildlife to the people who call this northern frontier home.

Expedition Highlights

Meet Churchill's Playful Belugas

Cruise the Churchill River estuary by Zodiac, where thousands of belugas gather each summer. Watch their white backs break the surface around the boat, spot their rounded foreheads emerging from the waves and see for yourself why these inquisitive whales are such captivating company.

Discover the Secret Lives of Belugas

Photograph individual belugas to help researchers identify whales by their distinctive markings and scars. Document their social behavior and listen to the underwater calls that reveal another dimension of life in the Churchill River estuary.

Explore the Wilds of Hudson Bay

Search Churchill's sweeping tundra, boreal forest and rugged coastline for polar bears, Arctic foxes and migratory birds. Follow expert naturalists through this meeting place of land and sea, where a polar bear sighting could become the day's biggest surprise.

Research at a Glance



The Research Focus

Discover how belugas communicate, interact and use the Churchill River estuary each summer. Through photography, underwater recordings and environmental observations, investigate their social groups, individual characteristics and habitat conditions.



What You'll Do

Set out by Zodiac to photograph individual belugas, observe mothers and calves and record social behavior. Measure water conditions, help collect underwater recordings and contribute to photo identification and data analysis back at the research station.



Why It Matters

Your observations help build a long-term record of Churchill's belugas, giving scientists a clearer picture of their health, social lives and summer habitat as warming Arctic waters and increasing human activity bring new challenges.

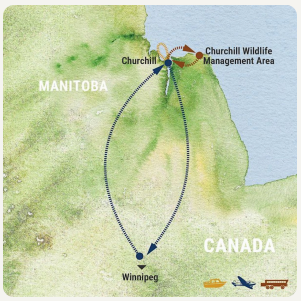


Up Close & Personal with Beluga Whales Itinerary

Observe, Photograph, Listen to & Record Belugas in Canada's Churchill River

Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1	Winnipeg
Day 2	Winnipeg / Churchill
Days 3–5	Churchill
Day 6	Churchill / Winnipeg
Day 7	Winnipeg



Day 1

Winnipeg

Gather in Winnipeg for Your Arctic Adventure

- Arrive in Winnipeg and transfer to the historic Fort Garry Hotel
- Meet your Expedition Leader and fellow travelers
- Gather for a welcome dinner before the journey north

Your expedition begins in Winnipeg, Manitoba, gateway to the remote shores of Hudson Bay. Arrive at the historic Fort Garry Hotel, a Winnipeg landmark, before gathering with your fellow travelers this evening. Over a welcome dinner, meet your Expedition Leader and the small group you'll share the week with. Ahead lies a charter flight to Churchill, close encounters with thousands of belugas and the rare opportunity to take part in Arctic wildlife research.

Day 2

Winnipeg / Churchill

Fly North to the Land of Belugas and Polar Bears

- Fly by private charter to Churchill on Hudson Bay
- Explore Indigenous art and heritage at the Itsanitaq Museum
- Arrive at the Churchill Northern Studies Center for research orientation

Board a private charter flight to Churchill, a remote northern community where boreal forest meets Arctic tundra along the western shore of Hudson Bay. After landing, have lunch at a local restaurant before visiting the Itsanitaq Museum, whose collection of Inuit carvings and artifacts offers a fascinating introduction to the region's Indigenous cultures and history.

Continue to the Churchill Northern Studies Center, your home for the next four nights. This working Arctic field station brings together scientists, students and visitors investigating the North. Step onto its observation deck and take in the sweeping tundra of the Churchill Wildlife Management Area.

Over dinner, share the dining room with others pursuing research in this remote setting. An evening orientation introduces the beluga study and the field techniques you'll use, preparing you for your first encounters with the whales.

Days 3–5

Churchill

Get Close to Churchill's Belugas and Discover Their Secret Lives

- Photograph belugas and record their behavior on Zodiac research outings
- Listen to underwater calls and help analyze field observations
- Search for Arctic wildlife on guided coastal walks, with possible beluga kayaking

Each summer, some 3,000 belugas gather in the Churchill River estuary after spending winter in Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait. Drawn to the warmer, shallow coastal waters to molt, socialize and tend to their young, they transform the estuary into one of the Arctic's great wildlife spectacles. For three days, head out by Zodiac or research vessel, watching pale backs break the surface, mothers swim with calves and curious whales approach the boat.

Turn these close encounters into scientific discovery. Photograph individual belugas, looking for scars and markings that help researchers recognize them. Document social behavior, measure water conditions and, when conditions allow, lower a hydrophone to hear the whistles, clicks and calls that earned belugas the nickname “canaries of the sea.”

Back at the Churchill Northern Studies Center, examine photographs, identify individual whales and organize field observations. A distinctive marking can connect a whale spotted today with an earlier sighting, revealing clues about its lifespan, social interactions, movements and return visits to the estuary.

Beyond the research boat, join short guided walks across the tundra and along the Hudson Bay coast, scanning for polar bears, Arctic foxes, caribou and migratory birds. If conditions and paddling proficiency permit, you may also kayak among belugas, watching their white backs surface at eye level.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-548-7555

Day 6

Churchill / Winnipeg

Ride with a Local Musher Before Returning South

- Meet a Churchill dog musher and learn about northern mushing traditions
- Take a dog-cart ride through the boreal forest, conditions permitting
- Fly by private charter to Winnipeg for a farewell dinner

After breakfast at the research station, return to Churchill to meet a local dog musher. Learn about the dogs, their training and the traditions of northern travel. If conditions allow, climb aboard a dog cart for a ride through the boreal forest, feeling the energy of the team as the dogs set off along the trail.

Then head to the airport for your private charter flight back to Winnipeg, with lunch served aboard. Return to the Fort Garry Hotel for a final evening together.

At your farewell dinner, compare favorite whale encounters, share stories from the tundra and reflect on the photographs and observations you've added to the Churchill beluga research record.

Day 7

Winnipeg

Depart Winnipeg

- Enjoy breakfast at the Fort Garry Hotel
- Transfer to the airport for your departing flight

After breakfast, transfer to Winnipeg's airport for your journey home. Carry memories of white whales surfacing beside the Zodiac, their remarkable underwater conversations and the thrill of seeing Churchill's Arctic wildlife firsthand.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-548-7555



Up Close & Personal with Beluga Whales Accommodations

Observe, Photograph, Listen to & Record Belugas in Canada's Churchill River



Fort Garry Hotel

The grande dame of Winnipeg hospitality and one of the city's most prestigious landmarks, this historic downtown hotel provides a genteel welcome before and after our northern adventures in Churchill.



Churchill Northern Studies Center

Set on the tundra outside Churchill, this research station offers communal dining and an elevated outdoor platform for wildlife viewing, with warm interiors designed for comfort in a remote subarctic setting.

For detailed descriptions, visit nathab.com/earthwatch-expeditions/churchill-beluga-whales-research-trip/accommodations.

Meet the Scientists

Up Close & Personal with Beluga Whales

Lead Scientists



Stephen Petersen, Ph.D.

Director of Conservation and Research, Assiniboine Park Zoo

Arctic Wildlife Conservation, Canada



Courtney Shuert, Ph.D.

Ph.D. Conservation Programs Manager, Assiniboine Park Conservancy

Marine Mammal Ecology, Canadian Arctic

Research & Impact

Up Close & Personal with Beluga Whales

How do scientists recognize a beluga from one summer to the next? What can its scars, social interactions and underwater calls reveal about its life? In the Churchill River estuary, researchers are piecing together these stories through photographs, acoustic recordings and close observation. Take your place aboard the research vessel, camera ready, and learn to see beyond the spectacle of thousands of whales. A distinctive marking, a calf swimming beside its mother or a change in water conditions may hold a clue. Here, the smallest details can become the most revealing discoveries.

The Churchill River estuary offers researchers a rare opportunity to study belugas during their summer gathering, when mothers tend calves, whales socialize and individuals shed their outer skin. This seasonal concentration allows scientists to observe individual whales, document social relationships and investigate how they use different parts of the estuary.

Researchers at Assiniboine Park Conservancy combine photo identification, underwater imagery, acoustic monitoring and environmental measurements to investigate these questions. By comparing observations across field seasons, they can begin to distinguish individual histories from broader patterns in whale behavior, visible health indicators and habitat use.

Conservation Impact

The Churchill River estuary is an important summer gathering place for belugas, but warming Arctic waters and increasing marine activity bring new pressures. Long-term research helps scientists track the whales' behavior and habitat use, making it easier to recognize changes that warrant closer investigation.

- **Individual identification records** that document repeat sightings and patterns of estuary use
- **Behavioral observations** that reveal group composition and interactions among mothers, calves and other whales
- **Visible health indicators** captured in photographs of scars, skin patterns and skin condition
- **Environmental measurements** that provide context for where and when belugas gather
- **Acoustic and underwater imagery records** that reveal aspects of communication and behavior otherwise hidden from view

Findings contribute to scientific publications, student research and discussions with community and government partners. Each field season strengthens the evidence available to researchers and wildlife managers working to understand and protect Churchill's belugas.

Your Role in the Research

Trade the role of wildlife spectator for a place on the research team. From a Zodiac or research vessel, learn to make careful observations that scientists can use. Watch groups form and separate, note calves traveling alongside adults and record details that might escape a casual observer. Every sighting becomes an opportunity to look closer.

You'll also help document water conditions and may assist with underwater recordings or imagery, depending on the day's research plan. Back at the Churchill Northern Studies Center, examine photographs and organize field notes, seeing how observations made on the water become part of a larger scientific record.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-548-7555

Life in the Field

Field days begin with a weather briefing and a plan for the day's surveys. Head onto the estuary with cameras and research equipment, ready for whatever the whales reveal. Some outings may bring curious belugas close to the Zodiac; others call for patient searching, careful observation and a sharp eye for identifying features.

Beyond the boat, explore Churchill's tundra and Hudson Bay coastline on short guided excursions. Scan for polar bears, Arctic foxes, caribou and migratory birds. When conditions and paddling proficiency permit, kayaking offers the possibility of watching belugas surface at eye level.

Evenings at the Churchill Northern Studies Center bring you into the rhythms of a working Arctic field station. Share dinner with fellow travelers, trade stories of unexpected sightings and hear what other researchers are investigating in this remote northern landscape.

Field Conditions

This is an active expedition in a remote subarctic setting. Summer days can be cool and windy, with spray and rapidly shifting conditions on the Churchill River estuary. Research outings involve boarding small boats, spending extended periods outdoors and handling cameras or field equipment aboard a moving vessel.

Guided walks may cover approximately 1–2.5 miles over tundra and coastal terrain. All land activities follow strict wildlife safety procedures in polar bear country. Kayaking requires suitable conditions and adequate paddling proficiency.

Weather, wildlife activity and research priorities guide the daily schedule. Expect plans to shift with conditions on the estuary and the needs of the research team.

Discovery in the Field

Up Close & Personal with Beluga Whales

1 **Get Up Close to Churchill's Belugas**

Head out by Zodiac among thousands of belugas gathered in the Churchill River estuary. Watch these famously inquisitive whales surface around the boat, sometimes close enough to hear their breaths above the waves.

2 **Photograph Whales for Scientific Discovery**

Look for distinctive scars, markings and skin patterns as you photograph individual belugas. Your images help researchers identify individual whales and build a long-term record of their health, behavior and return visits to the estuary.

3 **Listen to the Underwater World of Belugas**

Discover why belugas are nicknamed the “canaries of the sea.” When conditions allow, help lower a hydrophone beneath the boat and hear the whistles, clicks and calls these remarkably vocal whales use to communicate.

4 **Search the Hudson Bay Coast for Polar Bears**

Explore Churchill's tundra, boreal forest and rugged coastline with expert naturalists, scanning for polar bears, Arctic foxes, caribou and migratory birds. From open tundra to the shores of Hudson Bay, keep your eyes on the horizon for movement.

5 **Kayak Among Curious Belugas**

When conditions allow, slip into a kayak and paddle through the Churchill River estuary, watching white belugas surface against the dark Arctic waters. At eye level with the whales, every breath, splash and sudden appearance feels that much closer.

6 **Discover Churchill's Northern Heritage**

Visit the Itsanitaq Museum to explore the region's Indigenous heritage, then meet a local dog musher and experience a dog cart ride through the boreal forest, conditions permitting.

7 **Experience Life at an Arctic Research Station**

Stay at the Churchill Northern Studies Center, a working field station where scientists investigate the northern environment. Return from the estuary to compare photographs, review observations and swap stories from a day among the whales.

8 **Go Beyond the Tourist Trail with Just 12 Travelers**

With no more than 12 travelers, there's room to ask questions, learn field techniques and take an active role in collecting data. Spend time with the research team, examining photographs and discussing the day's sightings rather than simply watching from the sidelines.



Dates & Pricing Summary:

Price
From $9278 (+Air)

Group Size
Limited to 12 Travelers

Up Close & Personal with Beluga Whales Dates, Pricing & Info

Observe, Photograph, Listen to & Record Belugas in Canada's Churchill River

2028 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices not confirmed for 2028		
Jul 12 - Jul 18, 2028	**From $9278** +internal air	
Jul 16 - Jul 22, 2028	**From $9278** +internal air	
Jul 20 - Jul 26, 2028	**From $9278** +internal air	
Jul 28 - Aug 3, 2028	**From $9278** +internal air	
Aug 5 - Aug 11, 2028	**From $9278** +internal air	
Aug 13 - Aug 19, 2028	**From $9278** +internal air	
Aug 21 - Aug 27, 2028	**From $9278** +internal air	

2029 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2029		
Jul 12 - Jul 18, 2029	**From $9278** +internal air	
Jul 16 - Jul 22, 2029	**From $9278** +internal air	
Jul 20 - Jul 26, 2029	**From $9278** +internal air	
Jul 28 - Aug 3, 2029	**From $9278** +internal air	
Aug 5 - Aug 11, 2029	**From $9278** +internal air	
Aug 13 - Aug 19, 2029	**From $9278** +internal air	
Aug 21 - Aug 27, 2029	**From $9278** +internal air	

See https://www.nathab.com/earthwatch-expeditions/churchill-beluga-whales-research-trip/dates-fees for the latest pricing details.

Included

Accommodations, services of Earthwatch Expeditions' professional Expedition Leaders, local guides and camp staff, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through lunch on final day, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, airport transfers on Day 1 and final day, all activities and entrance fees, all taxes, permits and service fees.

Not Included

Travel to and from the start and end point of your trip, alcoholic beverages at some locations, some gratuities, laundry at some locations, souvenir purchases, passport and visa fees (if any), optional activities, items of a personal nature (phone calls, etc.), airline baggage fees, airport and departure taxes (if any), required medical evacuation insurance, optional travel protection insurance.

Internal air: All flights within the itinerary (this will be listed separately on our invoicing).

Important Information About This Trip

In summer, the tundra around Churchill bursts into life with grassy, green tussocks and a carpet of wildflowers. Animals, including caribou, are on the move, and birdlife is abundant, with the return of many migratory species. The most impressive phenomenon is the migration of some 3,000 beluga whales into the Seal and Churchill rivers, where we observe these ghost-like creatures at close range, often at arm's length. We may also have opportunities to view mother polar bears with cubs, as they remain in the area all summer long. Be aware that at times black flies or mosquitoes may be present—if you're sensitive to bites, take precautions and wear repellent.

Meals

Meals in the far north are hearty and delicious, but they also require special planning and preparation far in advance. With ample notice, we can meet dietary requirements that accommodate serious medical conditions or strict personal restrictions; however this restricted meal plan must continue to be adhered to while on the adventure. If you have a highly restricted diet, we recommend you bring along some of your preferred snacks and an appreciation that certain foods are limited in this part of the world.

Mandatory Insurance

Since the areas we travel to are remote and wild (that's why we go there!), we require that all guests have, at minimum, medical evacuation insurance for this program. This is for the safety of all guests. We require that your chosen independent insurance plan includes at least $250,000 in medical evacuation coverage. To protect your investment and to provide peace of mind while you travel, we also strongly recommend purchasing comprehensive travel insurance. Plans may cover everything from medical treatment to trip cancellations and delays and lost luggage. Please contact our office if you would like more information about the medical evacuation and comprehensive travel insurance policies we offer by calling 800-548-7555.

Getting There & Getting Home

This trip begins and ends in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Because weather delays are possible, **we recommend that you arrive at least one night prior to Day 1** to rest from your travels and begin the trip refreshed. For guests who come in early, our recommended hotel will be included in your pre-departure materials. If you plan to arrive on Day 1, you must arrive in Winnipeg by 5 pm in order to attend the 7 pm orientation dinner.

You are free to depart Winnipeg at any time on the final day.

Know Before You Go

Up Close & Personal with Beluga Whales

Whether you're preparing for your upcoming expedition or simply want to learn more about **Churchill's beluga whales and Arctic conservation efforts**, these resources offer a closer look at the wildlife, landscapes and research that define this experience. Discover why thousands of belugas gather in the Churchill River estuary each summer, learn how scientists identify individual whales and study their underwater communication, and explore how long-term research is helping us better understand these remarkable marine mammals and their changing Arctic habitat.

Why Is Churchill One of the Best Places in the World to Study Beluga Whales?

Each summer, some 3,000 beluga whales gather in the Churchill River estuary along the western shore of Hudson Bay, transforming its cold northern waters into one of the Arctic's great wildlife spectacles. Drawn to the estuary's warmer, shallow waters to molt, socialize and tend to their young, these famously vocal whales offer researchers an extraordinary opportunity to observe their behavior, social relationships and seasonal habitat use.

Scientists at Assiniboine Park Conservancy are investigating how individual belugas interact, communicate and return to the estuary across successive summers. Through photo identification, underwater imagery, acoustic recordings and environmental measurements, researchers are building a clearer picture of the whales' social lives, visible health indicators and movements. Distinctive scars and markings help identify individual whales, while underwater recordings reveal the whistles, clicks and calls that earned belugas the nickname "canaries of the sea."

By participating in this long-term research, travelers help scientists document how belugas use their summer habitat and respond to changing environmental conditions. These observations contribute to a growing scientific record that can inform conservation efforts as warming Arctic waters and increasing marine activity bring new challenges to Hudson Bay's belugas.

Quick Facts: Churchill's Beluga Whales

Location: Churchill River estuary, Manitoba, Canada
Research partner: Assiniboine Park Conservancy
Primary species: Beluga whales
Key activity: Beluga photo identification, behavioral observations, acoustic monitoring and environmental measurements
Conservation focus: Beluga health, social behavior, communication, seasonal habitat use and long-term Arctic conservation

What Wildlife Will I See on My Churchill Beluga Expedition?

Beluga whales are the signature wildlife of Churchill's summer season, with thousands gathering in the Churchill River estuary during July and August. From a Zodiac or research vessel, travelers may watch these curious whales surface beside the boat, observe mothers swimming with calves and listen to their remarkable underwater vocalizations. Beyond the estuary, Churchill's tundra, boreal forest and Hudson Bay coastline provide opportunities to encounter an array of Arctic and subarctic wildlife.

Participants may encounter:

- **Beluga whales** gathering in the Churchill River estuary, including mothers and calves, social groups and individuals identifiable by distinctive scars and markings
- **Polar bears** along the Hudson Bay coastline or occasionally from the water
- **Ringed seals** in the cold waters of Hudson Bay and surrounding coastal areas
- **Caribou** roaming Churchill's tundra and open northern landscapes
- **Arctic foxes and red foxes** inhabiting the tundra and boreal forest
- **Arctic hare** in the region's northern habitats
- **Tundra swans** in wetlands and coastal areas
- **Willow ptarmigan** among tundra vegetation and low-growing shrubs
- **Peregrine falcons** and other birds of prey
- **Seabirds and shorebirds** along the coast, estuary and surrounding wetlands

Wildlife sightings and activity vary with weather, water conditions and animal movements. Although belugas gather in large numbers during summer, no wildlife encounters are guaranteed, including sightings of polar bears.

Late-season departures may also offer a chance to see the **northern lights** as darkness returns to the subarctic sky. However, July and early August bring very long daylight hours, and aurora sightings are never guaranteed.

What Is the Climate Like During This Expedition?

Churchill has a subarctic climate characterized by cool summers, frequent wind and rapidly changing weather. During July and August, daytime temperatures typically reach the low to mid-60s°F, while overnight temperatures average in the upper 40s°F. Unseasonably warm weather can occasionally bring temperatures into the 80s–90s°F, though conditions are generally much cooler on the water.

Period	What to Expect
July	Average daytime highs of **65°F** and overnight lows of **46°F**. Cool to mild conditions, with approximately **2.5–2.6 inches of monthly precipitation**.
August	Average daytime highs of **62°F** and overnight lows of **47°F**. Generally cool, with approximately **3.0–3.1 inches of monthly precipitation**.
Wind & Water Conditions	Hudson Bay and the Churchill River remain very cold year-round. Wind and spray can make conditions on the water feel considerably colder than on land.
Daylight	Approximately **18 hours of daylight in early July**, decreasing to **16.5 hours in early August** and around **14 hours by late August**.
Overall Conditions	Strong seasonal daylight, cool nights, frequent wind and the possibility of rain at any time. Weather can change quickly, especially during boat excursions.

Weather patterns vary from year to year, and temperatures may be significantly warmer or colder than average. Participants should bring insulating layers, a waterproof and windproof outer layer, warm hat and gloves, and sturdy footwear with good traction. **Warm, weatherproof clothing is especially important for extended research outings on the water**, even when conditions on

land feel relatively mild.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need research experience?

No prior research experience is required. Scientists and field staff provide training and guidance in beluga photo identification, behavioral observations, environmental monitoring and other research techniques used during the expedition. Participants learn how to collect observations that contribute to the ongoing study of Churchill's belugas.

What type of research will I assist with?

Participants assist researchers investigating how belugas communicate, interact and use the Churchill River estuary during their summer gathering. Activities may include photographing individual whales, recording group sizes and social behavior, observing mothers and calves, measuring water temperature and clarity, and reviewing photographs to identify distinctive scars and markings. When conditions allow, participants may also help collect underwater imagery and acoustic recordings using a hydrophone.

What is the conservation impact of this research?

Data collected by participants contributes to a long-term record of individual belugas, their social relationships, visible health indicators and seasonal habitat use. Photographs help researchers identify whales across successive summers, while behavioral observations, acoustic recordings and environmental measurements provide insight into how belugas interact with one another and their surroundings. These findings support scientific research and discussions with community and government partners working to understand and protect Churchill's belugas as Arctic conditions change.

How physically demanding is the expedition?

Research activities involve boarding small boats, spending extended periods outdoors and handling cameras or field equipment aboard moving vessels. Participants should be comfortable with cool, windy conditions, occasional spray and potentially rough or bumpy boat travel. Guided walks may cover approximately 1–2.5 miles over tundra and coastal terrain, where footing can be uneven. Optional kayaking is dependent on suitable conditions and adequate paddling proficiency.

Can weather affect research activities?

Yes. Wind, rain, changing water conditions and wildlife activity can affect boat excursions, kayaking and research schedules. Field staff adjust daily plans based on weather, safety considerations and research priorities. Hydrophone recordings, underwater imagery and kayaking are undertaken only when conditions permit.

What happens in case of an emergency?

Participant safety is a priority on all expeditions. Field staff follow established safety procedures during boat outings and guided land activities, including strict wildlife safety protocols in polar bear country. If medical care is required, staff coordinate appropriate assistance and transportation.

Do I need travel insurance?

Travel insurance is strongly recommended and should include coverage for trip cancellation, interruption, medical expenses and emergency evacuation. Earthwatch provides travel medical insurance for participants.

What immunizations & travel vaccinations do I need?

Participants should consult a healthcare provider before travel and ensure routine vaccinations are up to date before visiting northern Canada. Travelers should also prepare for extended outdoor activity in cool, wet conditions and take precautions against mosquitoes and black flies, which may be present during summer.

What Should I Pack for My Churchill Beluga Expedition?

Participants should pack for cool, windy conditions, unpredictable summer weather and extended periods on the Churchill River estuary. Although daytime temperatures are typically in the 40s–60s°F, conditions can feel considerably colder on the water, particularly when wind and spray are present. Clothing should be suitable for both boat-based research and short walks over uneven tundra and coastal terrain.

Recommended items include:

- Lightweight, breathable shirts and pants for layering
- Long-sleeved shirts for sun and insect protection
- Warm insulating layers, such as fleece or wool
- Waterproof and windproof outer jacket
- Waterproof or water-resistant pants for boat excursions
- Warm hat and gloves
- Sturdy, comfortable walking shoes or boots with good traction
- Warm socks
- Brimmed hat for sun protection
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen and SPF lip balm
- Insect repellent
- Protective clothing for mosquitoes and black flies
- Refillable water bottle
- Small daypack
- Binoculars
- Camera and protective waterproof storage for electronics

Because Churchill's summer weather can range from cold and wet to unexpectedly warm, layers are essential. **Prioritize warm, waterproof and windproof clothing for research outings**, when conditions on the estuary may be significantly colder than those experienced on land.

What Will I Experience During My Churchill Beluga Expedition?

Explore with Purpose

This expedition combines remarkable encounters with thousands of beluga whales and the opportunity to contribute directly to Arctic marine mammal research. Cruise the Churchill River estuary by Zodiac or research vessel, watching mothers and calves swim together, photographing individual whales and listening to the whistles, clicks and calls that reveal a hidden dimension of their underwater world.

Beyond the research, explore Churchill's sweeping tundra, boreal forest and rugged Hudson Bay coastline in search of polar bears, Arctic foxes, caribou and migratory birds. Visit the Itsanitaq Museum to discover the region's Indigenous heritage, meet a local dog musher and, conditions permitting, experience a dog-cart ride through the boreal forest. When weather and paddling proficiency allow, kayaking offers another perspective on belugas as they surface at eye level.

Stay at the Churchill Northern Studies Center, a working Arctic field station where researchers investigate the northern environment. Here, you'll examine photographs, review observations and discover how careful fieldwork contributes to a deeper understanding of beluga behavior, communication and conservation.

What Does Daily Fieldwork Look Like?

Research days begin with a weather briefing and a plan for the day's surveys. Head onto the Churchill River estuary aboard a Zodiac or research vessel, where participants photograph individual belugas, record group sizes and social interactions, and observe mothers swimming alongside calves. Researchers also measure water conditions and, when conditions permit, collect underwater imagery and acoustic recordings to investigate how belugas communicate and use their summer habitat.

Back at the Churchill Northern Studies Center, participants examine photographs, compare distinctive markings and scars, and organize field observations. Matching an individual whale to an earlier sighting can reveal clues about its movements, social relationships and return visits to the estuary. Between research sessions, guided excursions offer opportunities to explore the surrounding tundra and Hudson Bay coastline in search of Arctic wildlife.

Research schedules vary with weather, whale activity and project priorities, providing a firsthand look at how scientists gather the long-term data used to understand Churchill's belugas and support their conservation.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-548-7555



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