

Community CONSERVATION

The Town of Churchill, Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship, and Parks Canada work together to maintain a high level of safety around polar bears. When seasonal workers, local businesses, visitors and residents contribute to polar bear awareness, the safety net is more effective. The Churchill region is unique and prospering because of its easily accessible polar bear viewing opportunities and the considerable role citizens play in conserving polar bears. The risk of dangerous polar bear encounters can be reduced significantly if everyone plays a part to help raise awareness.

If you wish to explore the shoreline or venture away from town, it is recommended that you do so with a local tour operator or guide. Your guide has knowledge, experience and skills to keep you safe. If a polar bear becomes curious and approaches your group, guides have experience, specialized training, vehicles and equipment that can provide a safe and enjoyable outdoor experience. Hiring a guide is the easiest way to travel independently in the Churchill area. Respect your guide's decisions and follow their instructions. It is his/her responsibility to choose actions that help protect you and the bears.

Please contact Parks Canada or the Churchill Chamber of Commerce at their respective visitor centres to find more information on the current visitor opportunities in the area.

FOR MORE INFORMATION :

Parks Canada
Box 127
Churchill, MB R0B 0E0
PHONE: (204) 675-8863
E-MAIL: wapusk.np@pc.gc.ca

The Town of Churchill
Box 459
Churchill, MB R0B 0E0
PHONE: (204) 675-8871
E-MAIL: townofchurchill@churchill.ca

Manitoba Conservation and
Water Stewardship
Box 70
Churchill, MB R0B 0E0
PHONE: (204) 675-8897
E-MAIL: mgi@gov.mb.ca

Churchill Chamber of Commerce
Box 271
Churchill, MB R0B 0E0
PHONE: (204) 675-2022
E-MAIL: churchillchamber@mts.net

Polar Bear Alert Program

The priorities of the Polar Bear Alert (PBA) Program are to protect people, polar bears and property in the Churchill area.

The program works because the citizens of Churchill and visitors call the PBA Line (204-675-2327) when they see a polar bear in or near the town of Churchill.

Polar bears that approach the core Churchill area are chased out of town by Polar Bear Alert staff. The staff uses what is known as aversive conditioning, with loud noisemakers and occasionally paint balls or rubber bullets to ensure that the bears continue to be wary of humans and attractants in town.

Polar bears that refuse to stay away from town are captured and placed in the Polar Bear Holding Facility. After a period of time they are either relocated by helicopter, or released directly onto Hudson Bay once the ice has formed. This helps prevent the bears from learning behaviour that makes them a problem bear in the future.

Stay away from wildlife officers who are actively managing a bear in the control area. If you hear cracker shells it means a bear is being hazed or moved from town, and you should look for immediate safety. Please do not distract Polar Bear Alert or Parks Canada staff while they are engaged with a bear.

**Report all polar bear sightings
to the Polar Bear Alert, as soon
as possible.
204-675-BEAR (2327)**

Safety in Polar Bear Country

Visitor information and community safety



Parks
Canada

Parcs
Canada



Manitoba

“The Polar Bear Capital of the World”

When visiting Churchill, you should be aware that a polar bear may be encountered anywhere at any time of the year

Seasonal Migrations

Polar bears come ashore in mid-to-late July when the ice on Hudson Bay melts. The risk of encountering a polar bear increases from July to freeze-up. The highest risk of bear encounters is during October and November, which corresponds with the busiest time of the tourist season. The bears return to the ice to hunt seals in late November to early December when ice forms on the bay. The lowest risk of an encounter is from December to July, but there is still always a chance of encountering a bear. Whether you live and work in Churchill, or are just visiting, you should be aware of the risks of encountering a polar bear.

Polar Bear Behaviour

There are many differences between black and grizzly bear behaviour and polar bear behaviour. Unlike other bears, the polar bears of Canada's Arctic are true predators and can view humans as a potential food source. Playing dead will only put you at greater risk for an attack by a polar bear.

Polar bears often show no facial expressions or change in body language that will tell you what to expect. A “dead pan” look could mean that the bear is ambivalent, curious, protective or ready to attack. If you are close enough to see the face of a bear, you should be well within a safety zone and definitely not without protective surroundings.

Bears ambling across the ice or land are deceptively quick. Their strides are more than a metre long. They walk with their heads down, occasionally lifting them to look around. A bear moving toward a target will have its neck extended and look directly at the object/spot it is walking toward. A bear that has caught scent of you, or something of interest, will stop and lift its head, or may stand on its hind legs as it tries to pinpoint your location. Once it has acquired your

HANDLING an ENCOUNTER

If for any reason you find yourself in danger, **STAY CALM**, follow your guide's instructions and leave your camera in your pocket until you get to safety.

Before your trip, discuss possible plans of action for dealing with bears in a variety of circumstances and be sure everyone understands what to do. The actions of each individual either contribute to or detract from the safety of everyone else. Consider the following situations when avoidance is impossible.

Notify everyone in the group in a calm voice that you see a bear, be aware of your surroundings and assess the situation. What is the bear doing? Where is the escape route? What is the bear's behaviour?

If a bear does not know you are there:

- Quietly back away and leave the area either in the direction you came, or make a wide detour around the bear. **Do not run**, move quickly or make motions that might attract the bear's attention.
- Stay downwind, so the bear cannot smell you and detect your presence.
- Keep the bear in sight at all times.

If a bear knows you are there and it shows signs of being curious, such as:

- Moving slowly with frequent stops.
- Standing on hind legs and sniffing the air.
- Holding its head high with ears forward or to the side.
- Moving its head from side to side.
- Trying to catch your scent by circling downwind and approaching from behind.

then:

- Quietly back away and leave the area either in the direction you came, or make a wide detour around the bear to get to safety. Do not run, move quickly or make motions that might attract the bear's attention.
- Keep the bear in sight at all times.

If the bear has been surprised at close range or shows

Never get between a bear and her cubs.

If a female with cubs is surprised at close range or separated from her cubs she will likely attack to defend them.

- Leave the area immediately.
- Stay with your group.
- If she attacks, defend yourself and back away.



Always leave an escape route for yourself, and for the bear.

Carry deterrents and know how to use them.

Once you are out of danger,
Call the Polar Bear Alert:
(204) 675-BEAR (2327)

If there are any injuries, call 911.

to pinpoint your location. Once it has acquired your location it may move toward you purposefully or may just be curious and move toward you while stopping frequently.

Polar bears are very skilled hunters. Their prey are usually not aware there is a polar bear in the vicinity until it attacks.

An adult male polar bear can weigh up to 600 kg and females are half to two thirds of that. Cubs, depending on their age, are between 25 and 100 kg. The size of a sub-adult polar bear is comparable to that of a large black bear or a medium sized grizzly bear. They are extremely powerful, agile and fast. Their environment is often drifting and broken ice so polar bears are adept at jumping and able to leap surprising distances.

The polar bears in the Churchill area are part of the Western Hudson Bay sub-population. They are one of 19 sub-populations of polar bears that inhabit the circumpolar area of the Arctic. Their main food is the ringed seal which they hunt on the sea ice. Every summer the ice on Hudson Bay melts and this entire population of polar bears is forced ashore. They remain on land until the bay freezes again in late November.



If the bear has been surprised at close range or shows signs of being agitated or threatened, such as:

- Staring directly at a person.
- Lowering its head with ears laid back.
- Huffing and jaw-popping.
- Moving toward you.

then:

- Act non-threatening. Do not shout or make sudden movements, which might provoke the bear. Never huff or hiss as this can cause a polar bear to charge.
- Back away slowly. **DO NOT RUN.**
- Be prepared to defend yourself.
- Use an air horn or other deterrent, if available.

If the bear shows signs of stalking or hunting you, such as:

- Following you or circling you.
- Approaching directly, intently and unafraid.
- Returning after being scared away.
- Appears wounded, old or thin.

then:

- Be prepared to defend yourself! Use any potential weapon, group together and make loud noises.
- **DO NOT RUN.**
- Drop your pack or bag.
- Use an air horn or other deterrent, if available.

If a bear charges:

Stand your ground and be prepared to fight! Focus on hitting the bear in sensitive areas, especially the face and nose. Unlike grizzly and black bears, polar bears rarely bluff charge.

Parks Canada Sites

Parks Canada is responsible for four sites in northern Manitoba: York Factory National Historic Site, Wapusk National Park, Parks Canada Visitor Centre in the Churchill Heritage Railway Station and Prince of Wales Fort National Historic Site, including Cape Merry Battery and Sloop Cove.

Except for the Visitor Centre, these sites pose a high risk of polar bear encounters and should never be visited without a licensed guide or Parks Canada staff member.

In Canada's national parks it is unlawful for visitors to carry a firearm. Consider hiring a guide or a bear monitor for increased safety. Outfitters who wish to have guides considered for a permit to carry firearms at Prince of Wales Fort National Historic Site and in Wapusk National Park, should contact Parks Canada by phone 204-675-8863 or by email wapusk.np@pc.gc.ca.

COMMERCIAL deterrents

- Noisemakers including air horns, pistol and pen-launched bear bangers may scare a bear away.
- Pepper spray is effective against polar bears, but has some limitations. It must be warm enough to atomize and it must be used at close range. Also be aware of wind direction to avoid having the spray blow into your face.
- Know how and when to use these deterrents and practice beforehand.
- Note that pepper spray and firearm banger ammunition are dangerous goods and cannot be transported by public carriers as part of your carry-on or checked baggage.

Are you a new or seasonal resident?

Get to know your neighbours. Local people have knowledge about polar bears and how to deal with them. Ask them about their experiences – how they avoid encountering a polar bear and about plans of action should you encounter a bear. Polar bears can be encountered in town, where there are many places for bears to be hidden from view. Keep in mind that every encounter is different.

Workplace Safety

Acquire training and more information on bear safety from your employer. Your employer can assist you with determining the safest way for you to get to and from work. Discuss any preventative measures your company takes to avoid encounters and what to do in the case of emergencies while at work.

Each encounter is unique.

Like people, polar bears display different behaviours and react differently to humans depending on the circumstances. This pamphlet provides guidelines for avoiding and dealing with polar bear encounters. For your safety and the welfare of the bears, please read this pamphlet carefully and seriously consider the risks involved with living and travelling in polar bear country. Good judgment, common sense and familiarity with polar bear behaviour are required at all times in bear country. For further information contact Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship (204-675-8897) or Parks Canada (204-675-8863).

If You Encounter A Polar Bear:

- **STAY CALM.**
- Check that all people in your group are accounted for.
- Back away, facing the polar bear at all times.
- Get into your vehicle or a building as rapidly as possible.
- Do not run.
- Call for help by phoning Polar Bear Alert at: 204-675-2327.

Call the Polar Bear Alert Line (204-675-2327) if you:

- See a bear within or near the town limits.
- See a bear between the town and the airport.
- Observe a bear near the outlying residential areas or businesses (i.e. Goose Creek, Camp Nanuk, Churchill Northern Studies Center).
- See a bear that appears to be injured.

If there were any injuries, call: **911**

During the active polar bear season, mid-summer to freeze-up, the Polar Bear Alert phone line is monitored 24 hours-a-day. It is an emergency line. Call this line only if you see or have an encounter with a polar bear. If you would like information please call the general office line 204-675-8897.

AVOIDING Dangerous Encounters

When travelling in the Churchill region you are in polar bear country. Whether you are in Wapusk National Park, or in downtown Churchill, you share the same space with this predator.

Look outside before leaving a building. To avoid a surprise encounter with a polar bear check your surroundings before you leave a building.

Travel in groups and stay together. Do not walk alone. A larger group has a greater chance of spotting a bear. Small groups (three people or less) should use a taxi or designated driver in the fall after 10 p.m. while in Churchill.

Dedicate a group member to be the bear monitor. Be alert and aware of your surroundings by scanning your environment at regular intervals. Watch for and avoid all tracks, dimly lit areas in town, and areas of restricted visibility. Be vigilant!

Avoid areas of limited visibility. Polar bears may be hidden from view and are naturally camouflaged in the winter. If walking is absolutely necessary, stay on the main streets of Churchill – never walk in dimly lit areas.



Restrict your travel. Walking or bicycling out of town is a wonderful means of exploring the region, but not during September, October and November. Bears travel close to the shore. Use extreme caution on the shoreline in the summer and stay off the rock outcrops during the ice free period.

Ask Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship or Parks Canada staff about current bear activity. Some areas may be closed due to bear activity; obey all written and oral warnings. NEVER go beyond a polar bear warning sign. Tell someone where you are going, and when you plan to return.

Eliminate or reduce odours. Avoid using scented soaps and cosmetics and avoid carrying a lunch on a walk or hike. Be aware that scents from cooking or garbage can attract a polar bear to your location. Use sealed bags and dispose of garbage according to the Town of Churchill pick-up schedule.

Never approach a seal or whale carcass; polar bears will defend their food. Adult polar bears will often only eat the fat of beached whales, seals and other kills, but other bears may scavenge from these carcasses.

Never approach a bear for any reason. Polar bears are predators. Like other bears, female polar bears defend their cubs. Intrusion into their space may provoke an attack.

Never feed bears. A bear that finds food from a human source will associate humans with food. This results in a bear losing its natural tendency to avoid people and will become persistent in its search for food near humans. Polar bears that associate food with humans are high risk bears to human safety.

Identify a Safety Zone. Stay close to vehicles and buildings that can be used for shelter. Don't lock your vehicle doors – you may need to get back in quickly.