

The Place of Many Berries

Happy March All, I hope that everyone there is feeling that first stirring of spring, with the sunlight coming back into our lives. At this time of year I start getting that restless feeling that comes when you suddenly wake up from a deep sleep, fresh and ready to go. I guess you could say my sap is starting to run. This year the coming spring finds me still orienting my self to a new community. We have been here for about two months now, and I thought that I would give all of you an idea of what it is like here in Saskatoon, starting with a little bit of history and working my way from there.

I discovered from Wikipedia that in 1882, a Toronto based Temperance Colonization society, was granted 21 sections of land straddling the South Saskatchewan River. It had been their intention to establish a “DRY” community in the Prairie region. The settlers traveled by train to Regina, and then by horse and wagons to start this new community. Later in 1903, the village of Nutana on the West side of the river, was granted a town Charter. By 1906, Nutana, Riversdale, and Saskatoon had evolved to form a city of 4,500. As Saskatoon continued to grow it annexed Montgomery Place in 1955 and then a year later Sutherland. The 2011 census has the population of this city at 222,189, and it has been the most populous city in Saskatchewan since the 1980s. Common nick names for Saskatoon are Hub City, City of Bridges, Toon Town, and Paris of the Prairies.

The name for the Saskatoon, I discovered, came from the Cree words, “misaskwatominiskahk” I’m not sure just how it is pronounced, but the general meaning is “place of many Saskatoon berries.” Apparently a *very* large amount of berries grew in this area. When I asked the locals about the berries, they told me that they were similar to Ontario’s low bush blue berries, but larger and not as sweet. The bushes they grow on are much taller as well. I was also informed that they no longer grow wild any more, they are grown on farms. A friend has generously offered to take me berry picking this coming summer, at a farm where they grow strawberries as well. I look forward to this experience with great delight, since berry picking is one of my favorite pastimes.

The layout of the city is a relatively flat grid that at times sprawls over a few small hills and valleys. It is divided into east and west sections by the river, which is the lowest point in the city. I find it a fairly easy to find my way around, but there are some things to watch out for such as roads that you are unable to make a left hand turn on, because of large medians that prevent this. This often makes it necessary to plan to approach some destinations, in a way that you will be making a right turn into the parking lot. There are many pedestrian cross walks on every street, and motorists are diligent about stopping, so I find it a very relaxing city to go for a walk in. Many of the back streets have uncontrolled intersections, so imagine a situation where two cars are approaching an intersection and neither driver is being presented with a stop sign.....Ahhh! I have learned that on back streets it is best to just stop and look at every intersection. The good news is that you can park your vehicle on any street over night, unless it has been declared a snow route. The bad news is that unless it is on a bus route, they don’t plow the streets.....ever.

Seven bridges cross over the river and there are 400 acres of river bank trails and parks in the city it’s self, that are open year round. We have already spent many enjoyable hours walking through some of the trails and parks and look forward to seeing

them in their summer colours. There's the Farm Zoo, with a variety of farm, wild, and exotic animals; several museums, theaters, exhibition centers, a farmers market, several malls, countless restaurants, and the unique Broadway and downtown shopping district. Because the river is not safe for swimming in due to strong currents and undertows, there are several indoor and out door pools located in various neighborhood parks. And when you are in the mood for a night out there are numerous brew pubs, and bars that offer live music or big screen sports action. I guess that "Dry" community idea didn't become a permanent lifestyle after all, but for those who prefer a different kind of brew, there are some out standing coffee and tea houses, that feature locally roasted whole bean coffee and loose leaf tea.

Located in a Aspen parkland Biome, the temperature ranges from -30 c in the winter to 30c in the summer, with the average being -12c (11F) during January and 25c (77F) during July. On average, the population of this city and area are said to enjoy 2,380.8 hours of bright sunlight annually. The locals have told me that we are enjoying a very unusually warm winter, so don't get too used to this. I find the climate to be fairly dry, but again the locals tell me that in the summer it can get quite humid. I asked them when that happens.....summer that is. They said after April. A quick look through Wikipedia informs me that the growing season for this area is between mid May to Mid September, but crop damaging frost can happen in early June or late August. Time will tell what kind of a summer we will have this year. Last summer they had flooding in the southern part of the province so bad that many farmers couldn't even put a crop in their fields.

What is driving the economy of not only the city of Saskatoon, but the entire province is pot ash, agriculture, oil, gas, gold, diamonds, uranium, and coal. Nearly two thirds of the world's recoverable pot ash reserves are located in the Saskatoon region and pot ash, I was told, is in great demand right now. Wheat, lentils, various other grains, as well as livestock, remain a strong driving force for the economy of this area. The buzz around here is: if you don't have a job right now, you haven't bothered to look for one. A quick browse through local employment sites confirms the wealth of opportunities open to qualified job seekers.

The over all atmosphere in the city is one of optimism, so I think we will be here for a while. My husband will be traveling quite a bit because of the nature of his job, but we intend to make a point of exploring not only the city we live in, but as much of western Canada as we are able. The southern part of Saskatchewan is typical prairie grass land, with the Southwest corner by the Alberta boarder having pockets of bad lands, but the northern part is boreal forest. About one and a half to two hours of driving will take you to where you can enjoy camping, fishing, hunting, boating, and hiking. As I have heard it said.....having a great time, wish you were here.

Gladys McElrea
The Northern Gypsie
GladysMcElrea.com