

GIMLI & AREA

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For Summer Fun in the Sun

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RIDING A NEW WAVE

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Beach within Reach

Now wheelchair accessible, the beach is a hot draw, but there's a lot more to explore in Gimli.

ACCESSIBLE, ECO-FRIENDLY FEATURES ENHANCE GIMLI LAKESIDE

BY KRISTIN MARAND

IT'S EASY TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE TORONTO SUN RECENTLY NAMED GIMLI ONE OF THE TOP 10 BEACH TOWNS IN CANADA. THERE ARE RESTAURANTS FOR EVERY TASTE AND PLENTY OF EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES FOR ANYONE LOOKING FOR MORE THAN JUST A BEACH VACATION. THERE ARE YURTS, CABINS, CAMPSITES AND RV PARKS NEARBY. IF YOU'RE NOT LUCKY ENOUGH TO KNOW SOMEONE WITH A COTTAGE, THERE ARE HOTELS, MOTELS, INNS AND BED AND BREAKFASTS.

“Another means of accommodation that people don't really think of is our harbour. It's a whole community,” says Brittany Isfeld, Economic Development and Tourism clerk for the rural municipality and the Gimli Community Development Corporation. The harbour is home to about 100 vessels, ranging from research ships and commercial fishing boats to yachts, house and sail boats.

The beach itself is a lovely strip of white sand in front of a long boardwalk and a grassy park, providing the perfect summer backdrop to memorable events like the Beach Bash Concert Series and the Gimli Film Festival. Gimli Beach achieved the prestigious Blue Flag designation in 2015. Awarded to less than 5,000 beaches and marinas worldwide, only three beaches in Manitoba have won the honour. In order to qualify, stringent environmental, educational, safety- and access-related criteria must be met and maintained.

Gimli is working toward making uneven lakeside terrains such as parks and the beach more accessible.

“We have the park right on the sand on the beach which we just recently got accessible diggers for so a wheelchair can go right up to it and play, which is huge. And we're in the process of purchasing Mobi-Mats. They're rolled out onto the sand and allow people in wheelchairs to have access right to the water,” Isfeld explains.

The RM of Gimli is home to just over 5,000 people. It is the proud home of the 2016 World Whiskey of the Year — Crown Royal's (elusive) Northern Harvest — and about 100 businesses,



most of which operate year-round. Gimli has all the amenities one could ask for: A new community health centre, a library, a cinema, a large grocery chain and that big Canadian coffee franchise that people can't seem to live without. It is also a globally minded community. In 2009, Gimli became Manitoba's first (and Canada's sixth) Fair Trade designated town, according to the Canadian Fair Trade Network. It's no wonder that Gimli was listed as one of the most attractive places in Canada to retire by the Globe and Mail in 2015.

Alex Kristiansen, also of Economic Development and Tourism Gimli, notes that the town has an incredibly lively arts and culture scene.

“We've got the A-Spire theatre. During the summer season they invite different groups to fill out the weekend so it'll be one production all weekend and then the next weekend it'll be something else. I'm part of an improv group there as well called The Wise Cracks, so we have that every Monday and anybody can come and participate,” Kristiansen says.

There are buskers to fill the streets with music as well as art galleries and hotbeds of creativity such as the Gimli Art Club, Isfeld adds.

“The front part (of the Art Club) is a gallery where you can buy stuff and then you can actually sign up for classes; pottery, painting. They always have a large array of things. If you go down the dock, there's the sea wall art gallery. There's a lot of local talent. It was done years ago but they often go back and touch it up and keep it alive,” she says.

Gimli has succeeded, flourished even, by embracing its surroundings and its heritage. Fishing and agriculture remain primary industries in the area. Local fare is available at the Gimli farmers' market, which takes place Saturdays near the harbour. A little way up the road is the “very popular” Arnes farmers' market, a converted family farmstead that operates Saturdays and Sundays from May to October.

“It takes farmers' markets to the next level,” says Kristiansen.

Much of the municipality's recent growth can be attributed to the hospitality and tourism sectors. Isfeld says most of the storefronts on Centre Street that were empty in recent years are now filled.

“And we've gotten more experiential tourism like the Jet Pack Adventures. We have a guy opening a 12-person Zodiac boat for touring Lake Winnipeg. We have an Escape Room,” she says.

The RM also boasts a number of intriguing historic sites, including the former air force base — the site of the famous 1983 emergency landing of the Gimli Glider — and the public school built in 1915 with its mischievous attic-dwelling elves, the Huldfolk. Along with the New Iceland Heritage Museum, visitors can't miss H.P. Tergesen General Store. Built in 1898, the eclectic emporium was named a Provincial Heritage Site in 1989.

Plan your next visit at www.gimli.ca.

