

*Willamette Intl Travel featured Churchill Wild in our latest newsletter, sparking this amazing trip by Mary.*

## **UP CLOSE WITH WILDLIFE**

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### **WILLAMETTE INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL © CLIENT TRIP REPORT © 2014**

**BY MARY S.  
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Ever thought of giving a polar bear an Eskimo kiss? The folks at Churchill Wild can show you how it's done! We spent an exciting 10 days at Seal River Lodge and Schmok Lake Caribou Camp getting up close to polar bears, caribou and wolves. At the same time, we enjoyed the magnificent autumnal tundra and gourmet meals.

As we were lifting off in a helicopter from Churchill for our 30 minute flight to the luxurious Seal River Lodge, we saw our first polar bear swimming in Hudson Bay. Immediately after arriving at the Lodge, we headed out for our first polar bear encounter a short distance away. A big male was basking in the sun. After taking many photos, we headed back to the fenced-in compound connected to the lodge. There we spotted a young female polar bear feeding about 20 feet away. The big male caught her scent and what followed was a game of arctic "hide and seek" until the female was able to move downwind and lose the big male. At Seal River, we took many guided walks and saw numerous polar bears lumbering along the shores of Hudson Bay as they awaited the onset of ice formation for their annual seal hunt. We also enjoyed spotting Arctic foxes, snow geese and arctic hares going through their fall color change. What an adventure to walk through shallow rushing streams in the tundra as we moved into position to watch two young male polar bears wrestling! This "getting close to the bears" happened repeatedly as we ate our meals and watched polar bears just outside the dining room window. There was also a fun day trip through the Hudson Bay Coastal lowlands on an ATV 6 wheeler. Hanging on tightly, we rode through the mud and ruts, and at one point one of the ATV's got stuck and everyone helped push it out. This was capped by a delicious lunch on the tundra marshes. One night we asked to be awakened in order to experience the magnificent Northern Lights dancing in the sky.

We then enjoyed a two day unforgettable adventure at the Caribou Camp located in the sub-arctic of NE Manitoba just south of the Nunavut border. This rustic camp elicits the delightful feeling of being in the wilderness while offering the civilizing luxury of hot and cold running water and flush toilets! This is the time of year when the Central Canadian Barren Ground caribou are staging for migration to their southern winter pastures. The “workhorse of the bush” Turbo Beaver seaplane delivered us onto the sandy shores of Schmok Lake where the camp manager had lunch waiting and the guides were ready to move at a moment’s notice. Two groups headed out by foot and we piled into a 16 ft aluminum boat with an outstanding guide (Adrian Skok), who is a biologist, environmental field researcher and fishing and hunting guide. Before the boat had even touched the shore, we had spotted caribou and were planning our approach. Within minutes, our guide was expertly positioning us at a location to intersect the approaching caribou. One of the caribou was a big antlered bull with velvet peeling off his bloodstained antlers. This shedding occurs within only a short window and we were excited to see it. At the same time, we looked behind us to see a silver wolf also tracking the caribou. It was a magnificent day filled with seeing scores of caribou and tasting fresh blueberries and loganberries. Not only did we see many loose strings of caribou, but all day we reveled in the beautiful autumnal colors of orange willow leaves and carpets of red tundra underfoot. It was such a privilege to share the landscape in such a marvelous setting with both the caribou and their predators.

The people at Churchill Wild go to extraordinary lengths to insure their guests have a remarkable experience in this beautiful and stark northern country and they succeed beyond all expectations.