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March 2010

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500 Reasons: “Fabulous in Winnipeg” this Spring



Winnipeg's Exchange District architecture is always worth looking up for. Photo: Kevin Spragg

For one week this spring, Winnipeg will be the gay destination in Canada. It's a great spot all year long, but from **May 21 through 24**, hundreds of gay and lesbian musicians will converge in the middle of the prairies for the **GLBT Unison Canadian Choral Festival**.

If you're not a singer, this will be an unparalleled opportunity to go flirt with them. But from a pure travel perspective, it's a great chance to experience the gay-friendly city of Winnipeg at a time when it's full of homos from across the country, many of whom will have partners and friends in tow. Here are 500 reasons why this is the time to go (of course, six of the reasons will always be available).

Reason #1-494: The Fourth Quadrennial Unison Festival www.unisonfestival.ca

It's been four years since the gay and lesbian choruses of Canada gathered in Vancouver, and I was lucky enough to attend. The festival is a lot of fun, bringing together **nearly 500 gays and lesbians** with a common goal: singing! Under one roof, you'll be able to hear singers from major cities, like the *Vancouver Men's Chorus* or Toronto's Forte, and musicians from smaller places like Halifax's *The Women Next Door* or Regina's mixed (gay and lesbian) *Prairie Pride Chorus*.

The Winnipeg event, subtitled “Be Fabulous in Winnipeg,” is being hosted by their local chorus, *Rainbow Harmony Project*. Music performances will be in historic Knox

United Church, an excellent example of Late Gothic Revival architecture, located in downtown Winnipeg.

For travellers, the “host” hotel—the Delta Winnipeg—is the place to be, since that's where most of the festival participants will stay. A couple of major social events will also take place at the hotel, including a big dinner and dance on Sunday, May 23. (www.deltahotels.com.)

But there are other great places to stay in Winnipeg. I particularly enjoyed a stay at chic Inn at the Forks (www.innattheforks.com), with uber-groovy glass countertops in the bathrooms. It's located in the area called, well, The Forks. Winnipeg doesn't have a gay-specific B&B, but West Gate Manor (www.westgatemanor.ca) has a good, gay-friendly reputation.

495: Beefcake Sculpture fit for a Queen(s).

Fans of the nude male form will find some mighty fine sculpture in the 'Peg, at a surprising location: the Manitoba Legislative Building. The crown jewel is "Golden Boy," a 17-foot-tall naked statue of the Roman god Mercury, perched 250 feet above the ground, atop the circa-1920 neoclassical building's dome. The statue was regilded in 2002, and rededicated by Queen Elizabeth II.

In addition to Golden Boy, the building is full of interesting sculpture and symbolism, and including other nudes—look above the doorways. The building is filled with *au courant* concept of Hermetic Code symbolism, a la the da Vinci Code. Specialized tours of the building, focusing on this concept, are occasionally available through Heartland Travel (www.heartlandtravel.ca).

496: Glitz and Glamour: the Costume Museum of Canada.

Fashion whores, this is for you. Actually, it's a great museum for many fashion tastes. The museum is located in the Exchange District, and has a permanent collection of more than 35,000 items, including a recently acquired Canadiana collection. During the Festival period, the museum will be featuring a special exhibit on silk, and another titled, "Women of Style." How will you measure up? (www.costumemuseum.com).

497: America north...for movie fans.

Winnipeg's Exchange District—the historic core of the city—includes one of the finest collections of early 20th Century terra-cotta architecture in the world. When you wander the district's 20 blocks, look up! The ground floor will often be real stone, but the upper floors are finished in less-expensive terra cotta to replicate the stone. The district has been used in film to replicate Chicago and other American cities in such films as *Shall We Dance?* with Richard Gere. Excellent walking tours of the Exchange are available, (www.exchangedistrict.org). The Exchange also features loads of galleries and funky shops, along with gay-popular Underground Café and Mondragon Bookstore and Coffee Shop.

498: Little queer hole in the prairie.

The kind of hole you try to get a small white ball in! Knowing that Winnipeg has a queer golf organization should make you lesbians book your airline ticket immediately (sorry for the stereotype). The gay and lesbian group meets on Wednesday nights at Winnipeg's Players Golf Club, and, at press time, they are planning to start their 2010 season in May—just in time for all the Unison folks to hit the links. (www.outgolf.ca)

499: It makes a village.

While it's not exactly a gay village, the Osborne Village neighbourhood is a gay-popular part of Winnipeg, especially for dining. Spots to try for a bite include Baked Expectations, Noir Wine Bar and Eatery, Second Cup Coffee, Segovia Tapas Bar, and Stella's Café. (www.osbornevillage.com)

500: Support a Gay Bar.

Like I need to tell you this one! Winnipeg has a couple of gay watering holes, and they'll surely be hopping during Unison! Singers are supposed to stay well-hydrated, so they'll be the sober ones in the crowd (yeah, right). Winnipeg's two gay bars are Gio's (www.gios.mb.ca) and Club 200 (www.club200.ca). Both are in walking distance of the Unison host hotel! **O**



Winnipeg's Golden Boy.



Mondragon bookstore and cafe is a gay-friendly hangout in the Exchange District. Photo: Randall Shirley