



I ♥ MY LAKE TOWN

BY CHRISTINA MONSON

INTERNATIONAL FALLS

A town rich in history and land rich in geological phenomena of an almost unimaginable time, International Falls is a hub of activity all year round. Nestled in the middle of a series of border towns, International Falls may see more traffic than other border towns due to its stones throw distance from Fort Frances, Ontario, Canada (which this editor enjoyed as her first international experience... first stamp on my passport? Check!... Note: the border patrol people were delightful and LTM made its first known international debut!).

I'm a sucker for history and International Falls is not lacking in this topic. It's difficult to know where to begin for the sake of this article but once you're in town, your first stop should be the Koochiching Museum. Meet Edward, a man passionate about the area and knowledgeable beyond belief. He guided me through over 10,000 years of Borderland history covering the area's Native culture and history, European settlement, and the fur trade, rail, and modern forestry and their affects on local natural resources. The deep appreciation for the past and how it has shaped this community is evident in the museum's vast array of exhibits. As does any typical community, International Falls has notable players in its history involving the settlement and development of the area, as well as those who found solace in the remoteness of International Falls and found themselves in a lifetime of environmental efforts. This is all told in this museum and attractions around the area.

On the flip side and as any die-hard sports fans would know (and I was surprised to find out) is that this quiet little town once captured the heart of one of the most legendary football players of all time, Bronko Nagurski. This 1930s era All American Minnesota Gopher and

NFL Chicago Bears Hall of Famer's story is told adjacent to the historical museum where you can find superhuman sized rings, photographs and news clippings of his domination, trophies, letters from government officials, and the story of this giant's life both on the playing field and off in the farmlands around International Falls. A man of "Bunyanesque proportions," as the short feature film taught me, Bronko has had a lasting impression on this community.

Bronko was an exceptional man; a kind soul who wanted nothing of fame but everything of a normal, quiet life. Much is the same for the locals here. They're extremely friendly and helpful... like EVERY lake town I've visited (keep it up, MN!). Wandering around town, you can expect great service and incredible food and coffee at the Coffee Landing. Just down the street you'll find a delightful new shop called Eleven 71 which features Minnesota inspired products and trendy boutique clothing. Set in a historic building, its charm goes beyond the products to the pressed ceiling, block window wall, and wood floors to the bright eyes, big smiles, and giant personalities of the owners! Some long-time staples of the business community are also a must-visit including Ronning's, Border Bob's, and many locally owned restaurants and hotel/motels, and be sure to visit the Backus Community Center, the Chamber, and Convention & Visitor's Bureau.

Activities abound in this town and in the surrounding area. Most notably is nearby Voyageurs National Park. Oh! This gem!!!! Such beauty. Such untouched beauty lives just minutes from International Falls. The history of the park alone is reason enough for a visit, but learn from my mistake--- take time to visit. To experience the park effectively, take a week (minimum) to explore. Visit the informational centers. Spend wise money with an outfitter that will show you



more history and places of awe than any book or map can show you. Tour abandoned gold mines. Fish the abundant waters. Boat up (yes, up... as in, north!) on the same passages that the Voyageurs of the late 1600s travelled. Rent a houseboat and float on your own timeline. Stay at the historic Kettle Falls Hotel, still in operation since 1910, which can only be accessed by water. Observe the park's many ecosystems and rocky land formations. Make this a priority of your trip north. There's no better time than now, as the National Park System celebrates 100 years! We're so intrigued by this iconic park that we've expanded our coverage in this issue. Don't miss our ON THE SET article about two brothers who have just released a short feature film on Voyageurs National Park.

This, folks... this is what northern Minnesota is made of! Seemingly at the edge of civilization, you might be surprised how close this quaint little town really is. A mere 289 miles from Minneapolis. 165 from Duluth, and safe to say no more than a couple hours from most anywhere else in northern MN.

So why International Falls? Why our winter Lake Town? Good questions. It's obvious that International Falls and the surrounding area are a mecca for open-water fishing (boasting an extended walleye season until mid April and river access as soon as the ice is safe), hiking, kayaking, and a million other warm(er) weather activities. But why winter? Easy answer. It's cold! It's darn cold! International Falls is known as one of the coldest places in the contiguous United States and is dubbed the "Icebox of the Nation." And that makes this town cool! *Yep, I went there.* As Minnesotans, we embrace the elements. We thrive in challenges. We embark outside in some extreme conditions. We use our charcoal grills in blizzards. We walk, heck we drive, on frozen lakes. We are hardy and we celebrate winter, so why not celebrate in one of the coldest places? Great question! Visit International Falls and find out what makes it such a premier winter destination.





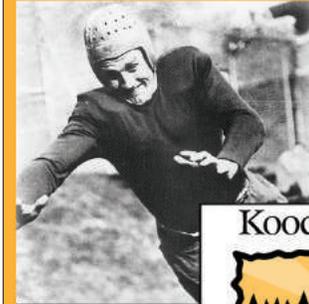
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The Koochiching Museums offer visitors a unique experience with two museums in one facility. Share in the story of NFL legend and hometown hero Bronko Nagurski, as well as the various cultures who traversed and populated this region; claiming the "Icebox of the Nation" as their home.

www.koochichingmuseums.org

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GATEWAY TO VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK

Photo: Mersha Shuff

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