



Whirlpool Jet Boat Tours traverse the Niagara River with a spin through Class V rapids.

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SkyWheel is an enclosed merry-go-round offering aerial views of the American Falls and Horseshoe Falls.

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The Cave of the Winds Tour explores the area beneath the American Falls.

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Horseshoe Falls

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POWER TRIP

Reckoning with the force of Niagara Falls

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

One summer day 20 years ago, I stopped at Niagara Falls while moving from Minnesota to Vermont for a job. After snapping a picture of the falls to prove that I'd been there and done that, I thought I'd seen it all and felt no reason to rush back. Oh, what I've been missing! A recent visit proved that there's so much to see and do that even a four-day trip can feel too short.

While the United States and Canada offer similar ways to experience the falls, the area is uniquely binational—so plan an itinerary that incorporates both the New York and Ontario perspectives for a comprehensive experience.

To really get a feel for the power of Niagara Falls, opt for a ride on a Whirlpool Jet Boat. Navigating through the Class V Devil's Hole Rapids on Niagara River at times requires all of its 1,500 horsepower. The hour-long excursion in the Niagara Gorge is available on open boats, where you're guaranteed to get wet, or on a domed boat, if you prefer to stay dry. Getting

within arm's reach of the whitewater's whirlpool is a memorable, heart-thumping adventure. The Maid of the Mist, which has offered the closest view of the falls for more than 150 years, won't soak you, but you're sure to feel the spray as the double-decker boat traverses the waters at the base of the American Falls, Bridal Veil Falls and the basin of Canada's Horseshoe Falls for a half-hour ride.

Niagara Falls is far from a sitting-pretty excursion. The "Bridal Veil Falls on the Cave of the Winds" tour lowers you via elevator 175 feet down into Niagara Gorge, where you can navigate the route made of wooden walkways (which are reconstructed each year) to get to within 20 feet of the falls. Photo ops are abundant—but learn from my mistake and bring only a waterproof camera. (For a similar yet different experience, head to Ontario's Table Rock Complex for the "Journey Behind the Falls" tour and get below and behind the base of Horseshoe Falls.) Walk alongside the Niagara Gorge rapids on Ontario's White Water Walk. The boardwalk is built at the site of some

famed tightrope crossings, which are no longer allowed due to safety concerns—and don't even think about going down the falls in a barrel, although you can get your picture taken in front of a Niagara Falls backdrop in the lobby of the Skylon Tower.

Challenge yourself with a 26-foot climbing wall, ride a simulated elevator down a 300-foot shaft with stops along the way to view rock strata and fossils, catch a show on a 180-degree multiscreen theater and more at New York's Niagara Gorge Discovery Center. The hands-on, multimedia museum showcases the 12,000-year history of the Niagara Gorge and Falls. Ooh and ahh watching "Illumination of the Falls," which takes place each night from dusk until midnight (specific hours vary by season). More than 20 large Xenon spotlights brighten the falls in a rainbow of colors each night—a tradition since 1925. Fireworks light up the summer night sky above the falls.

From both the United States and Canada, inspiring vistas abound, including panoramic aerial views of Bridal Veil Falls, the American Falls and the Canadian Horseshoe Falls from the Whirlpool Aero Car, an antique cable car; SkyWheel, an enclosed merry-go-round; or the observatory deck at Skylon Tower, all located in Ontario. New York offers aerial views aboard a helicopter and a helium balloon.

Niagara supplies hydroelectric power for more than one million people, but attracts more than 14 million tourists each year. It's a wonder worth visiting again and again. **SP**

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE

Delta and AirTran offer direct flights from Atlanta to Buffalo, New York. Niagara Falls is approximately a half-hour drive from the airport; transportation is available by shuttle, bus, taxi and rental car. For border crossings, U.S. citizens need valid documentation; for up-to-date information about what is required, visit <http://travel.state.gov/travel>.

WHERE TO STAY

Ontario options include Queen's Landing, Prince of Wales and Oban Inn & Spa in Niagara-on-the-Lake as well as Niagara Fallsview Casino and Doubletree Resort Lodge & Spa in Niagara Falls. New York options include Crowne Plaza in Niagara Falls and Barton Hill in Lewiston.

WHERE TO EAT

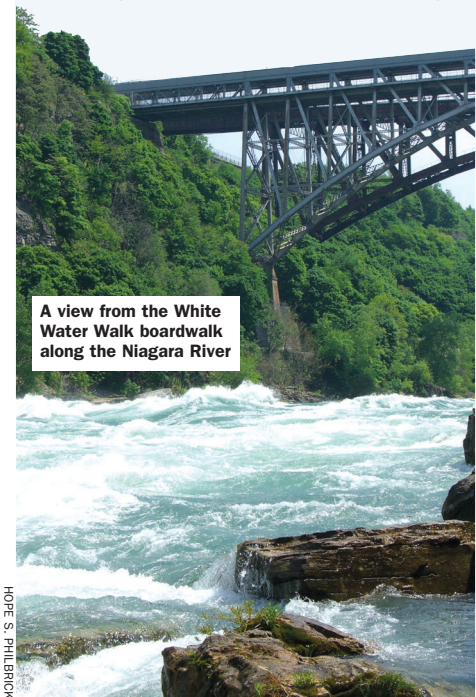
Top of the Falls Restaurant overlooks Horseshoe Falls, Queenston Heights Restaurant overlooks the Niagara River, and the Red Coach Inn overlooks the Niagara River Rapids.

WHAT TO DO

Stay dry by touring Frank Lloyd Wright's Darwin Martin House, taking in a performance of a play written by Bernard Shaw at Shaw Festival Theatre, appreciating the extensive art collection at RiverBrink, honing your culinary skills at Strewn Winery & Cooking School, visiting an underground railroad stop at Murphy Orchards, or exploring the history of the War of 1812 at Fort George and Old Fort Niagara.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The most affordable way to take advantage of multiple Niagara Falls-related adventures is to get a Niagara Falls & Great Gorge Adventure Pass and/or Passport to the Falls. For details, visit www.tourismniagara.com, www.niagara-usa.com or www.buffalocvb.org.



A view from the White Water Walk boardwalk along the Niagara River

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