

Winterpeg

While most people are agonizing over closing down their cottages, or frantically counting their pennies for a vacation in Florida, I have already dug out my winter boots, coats, toques, scarves, wool socks, mitts, and warm underwear. I am very excited about another winter, especially if it has blizzards, heavy snowfalls, and freezing windchill. Oh, and don't forget a white Christmas with all the trimmings.

If you haven't already guessed, I'm not originally from around here, but winter has always been my favourite season, and I am, at last, living in a country that obviously knows what a real winter is all about. After 35 years of balmy winters in Sydney, Australia, where temperatures rarely fall below 0°C, who could blame me for wanting to experience a real winter.

I moved to Canada three years ago, and part of the reason was because I love your winters. It's a great time of year, don't you agree? So much to do, the air is fresh, crisp and clean, and everything looks magical all covered with snow. Ah, the snow – the more the better as far as I am concerned, which is quite a distressing concept for many of you, I know.

Yes, I can see you out there, shaking your heads and screwing up your faces, thinking what is she on about? How can someone from somewhere so warm revel in a place that can be so cold? Well, for starters, because it's different, and it provides me the perfect opportunity to try different things.

Let me plug in your car, clear snow from your windshield, and shovel snow from your sidewalk. For most of you, these are simply winter chores, and certainly nothing to get excited about. But these are things I have never done before, and all a part of the time of year that I enjoy so much.

So far, I've managed to survive whatever has been thrown at me, from relatively short, wet and mild winters to very long, dry and freezing ones. And I've done some fairly diverse and exciting things for an Aussie so far north, not the least of which was deciding to make my home here in Winnipeg.

Wait a minute – did she say Winnipeg? That insanely freezing place stranded out there on the prairies, where blizzards and freezing rain and howling winds are the norm? Where Chinooks are a myth, mild weather is rare, and -40°C is not uncommon? Where it might be a dry cold but it lasts and lasts and lasts, sometimes for more than half a year? Winterpeg? What, is she crazy??!!

Come on, now. Winnipeg winters are great. Character building, inspiring. Many writers, artists and musicians say that the weather here lends itself to some of their best work. Still, as much as I love being outdoors, I need the bone-chilling cold to keep me inside every now and then, mostly to spend time with friends who don't necessarily share my passion for this time of year.

Oh yes, you can say what you like about Winnipeg – I've heard it all, but I don't care. I'm staying put. I love it here, and besides, I've made quite an impact. My nauseatingly positive attitude about the cold stuff has impressed and inspired even the most negative and hardened of critics. Maybe they're right, and the novelty will wear off after another ten or 20 years. But until that happens, I'll go on making angels in the snow, jumping over snowbanks, walking down the middle of frozen rivers, and wandering around outside during those blizzards – just to get a better look.

Next time you're outside in the winter, try to see it from an Australian point of view. You might actually like what you see.

For Commentary, I'm Jenny Gates in Winnipeg.

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