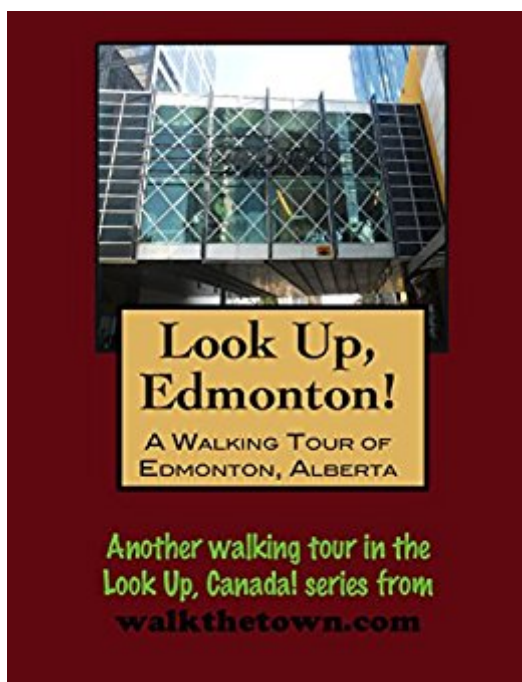


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A Walking Tour Of Edmonton, Alberta (Look Up, Canada!)



Synopsis

There is no better way to see Canada than on foot. And there is no better way to appreciate what you are looking at than with a walking tour. Each walking tour describes historical and architectural landmarks and provides pictures to help out when those pesky street addresses are missing. Every tour also includes a quick primer on identifying architectural styles seen on Canadian streets. There have been more than a few occasions when Edmonton could simply have ceased to exist. In the 1780s the Hudson's Bay Company decided to pursue an aggressive strategy of setting up more and more trading posts further west ahead of its competition. In 1795 one of those on a bend in the North Saskatchewan River was named Fort Edmonton after a London suburb by a Hudson Bay employee now lost to the fog of history. Hudson's Bay Edmonton House was built nearby the North West Company's Fort Augustus. It was such wild country that even fur traders engaged in cut-throat competition saw the merits of teaming up so the two moved into the same stockade, with the post separated by a dividing wall. Although Fort Augustus was much larger, it was Fort Edmonton that emerged out the other end when the North West Company lost the fur trade battles in 1821. The next crisis came with consolidation of posts. Edmonton was on the chopping block until the company's chief trader John Rowand convinced his bosses otherwise and Edmonton emerged as the company's most important location west of Fort Garry, and the virtual "Gateway to the North." As the dominant administrative and transportation centre for the next half-century was assumed to be the natural pathway for the Canadian Pacific Railway when it planned to breach the continent but Parliament amended the railroad's charter in 1882 to send the route south through an unknown outpost called Fort Calgary. Some of the early settlers moved away but others banded together to found the Edmonton Board of Trade and kickstart the Calgary and Edmonton Railway to link the settlement to the rail line. But when it arrived in 1891 the road only ran to the south shore of the river. Edmonton was faced with an existential crisis. Pack up and pivot development to the railhead where the settlement was likely to become a satellite of Calgary or stubbornly stay on the north bank and attempt to carry on its position as "Gateway to the North" without rail service. Civic leaders responded by incorporating as a town and working to bring a competing railroad north of the river. The discovery of gold in the Yukon several years later helped validate the decision. When consolidation came in the early 1900s it was South Edmonton, which incorporated as Strathcona, that was swallowed up by Edmonton. When Alberta was made a province in 1905 Edmonton got the capital and the University of Alberta. A population of only a couple thousand that walked on dirt streets at the dawn of the 20th century was 72,000 riding streetcars down paved streets a decade

later. The general malaise that settled over western Canada with war and economic hard times beginning in 1913 affected Edmonton more than most. But once again its position as “Gateway to the North” shook the community out of its somnambulence as an agricultural and government town. During World War II Edmonton was a base for the United States to build the Alaska Highway and the municipal airport, Blatchford Field that had been Canada’s first licensed airfield in 1929, became the hub for the Northwest Staging Route flying planes from Montana to Alaska. Edmonton also became the staging point for developing the oil sands of northern Alberta and diamond mining operations in the Northwest Territories. Our walking tour of North America’s northernmost city with a population over one million will begin with a landmark whose days of dominance were once as imperiled as the town’s, but is now perched on a lookout above the North Saskatchewan River as prominent as ever...

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