

BERTON HOUSE WRITERS' RETREAT INFO SHEET

"My original idea was that [writers] could have that time to reflect, to get to know the Yukon, and if they wish to write, to complete some writing. But the main purpose is not to let them write, but simply to give them time off from writing if they want it, or time off to think about writing or about the place they're living in. That's why I called it a 'retreat.' As I well know, writers do need time off away from telephones and other people in order to collect their thoughts. This is what produces great books."

– Pierre Berton, 2000

What is the Writers' Retreat?

Berton House Writers' Retreat provides a unique opportunity for professional Canadian creative writers to work in a remote northern community. The writer is housed in a cozy two-bedroom bungalow in Dawson City, Yukon. The residence is the actual boyhood home of author Pierre Berton.

The program is intended to provide writers with an opportunity to further develop their professional career. It is also an opportunity for them to become familiar with a part of the country they might otherwise not experience.

Since the program began in 1996, Berton House has hosted more than 50 writers. The Writers' Trust of Canada administers the program in partnership with the Canada Council for the Arts, Klondike Visitors Association, and Dawson City Community Library.

What does the Writers' Retreat provide?

Writers are housed at no cost in rent or utilities. A three-month honorarium of \$6,000 is provided along with travel costs to and from Dawson City.

Writers are responsible for their personal expenses (e.g. food, paper supplies) and long-distance telephone expenses. High-speed cable internet is provided as is a printer/scanner. Writers are responsible for bringing their own computer.

Pierre Berton initiated the Berton House library. The collection includes useful northern-themed books, which have been supplemented by the books of past writers-in-residence.

What are the Writers' obligations to the program?

The writer is expected to perform a public reading at the Whitehorse Public Library and the Dawson City Community Library. As well, the writer is to provide a recent book to each of the following libraries: Dawson City Community Library, Whitehorse Public Library, and the library in Berton House. We encourage writers to engage further with the local community by doing such things as:

- hold writing workshops in the community
- feature their work in local and national newspapers and radio stations
- avail themselves for interviews with local and national media
- interact with the public and the local literary communities
- participate in local events and festivals

About Berton House

Berton House is a two-bedroom bungalow, located across the street from Robert Service's historic cabin and just up the street from Jack London's cabin. Berton House has a furnished kitchen, dining room/study, living room, and bathroom. The house is fully equipped with bedding, linen, kitchen appliances, and cooking utensils. The house has a telephone, internet, computer printer, radio, CD player, and television.

Children and spouses are welcome to accompany writers during their residency. However, writers are responsible for all costs (including travel) associated with their families.

Please note: Berton House has a no smoking and no pets policy.

A little about Dawson City...

Dawson City is a small historic northern community at the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers, home for thousands of years to the Han People (now known as the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in). Dawson is the site of the 1896-1898 Klondike Gold Rush that brought tens of thousands of fortune-seekers from all over the world. Dawson has a reputation for friendliness and rugged charm. Mining remains one of the town's main industries. Tourism is the region's other major industry.

Dawson City is located about 500 km north of Whitehorse, the capital of the Yukon. A major highway connects the cities and there is regular air service between them as well. Dawson's winter population is about 2,000. In the summer, the population swells to over 3,500. Due to the remote location of Dawson, fuel and food costs may seem rather high.

Residents are actively engaged in a growing and robust cultural community. The community balances summer cultural tourism events with artistic activity during the rest of the year. The Klondike Institute of Art and Culture presents an annual film festival, visual arts festival, and delivers arts education programs, art gallery exhibitions, and performing arts presentations throughout the year. KIAC has a visual artist-in-residence program which draws visiting artists from Canada and Europe. The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in operates a cultural heritage centre which engages its members and the public in training and productions that promote and develop traditional and contemporary First Nations culture. The Dawson City Music Festival is renowned for showcasing local and national musicians. The Dawson City Museum has a large historical collection and a reference library with 7,000 photographs and records for genealogical research.

In Dawson, there are good local services for writers and residents though writers who require extensive on-site library resources, big-city medical services, and a large urban atmosphere are reminded that these are not available in a small community like Dawson; if you require that level of service for your everyday life, this may not be for you.