



**NATURE
ENCOUNTERS**
TOURS & TRAVEL LTD.

Polar Bears Abound!

November 2005

By Garth Irvine, ZooKeeper/Tour Leader

In November 2005 a small but warmly dressed group ventured from all across Canada to the winter staging ground of the largest north American carnivore. We went to Churchill Manitoba to see the great white bears as they waited impatiently for the ice to form on Hudson's Bay.

Churchill is famous worldwide for the late fall influx of these massive bears. This settlement happens to be the point of the bay where the sea ice forms first. It is not uncommon to see bears in town, and indeed we did have bears outside our hotel at night. Learning how the people of Churchill live with these yearly visitors was most interesting. It was amazing to learn about the polar bear jail, and how its role and methods have changed over time. We also learned about the history of the town and saw many of the other species of wildlife.

Overall we were blessed with ample polar bears. We saw many large males and



even got to witness two sparring and playing with the vast expanse of Hudson's Bay as the backdrop. We visited a sled dog breeding facility which at first glance appeared to be a source of food for the bears. About a hundred dogs were chained and several bears were in the area. There were about a dozen dogs running free and their role was to protect the chained dogs. We did witness polar bears running from these dogs and learned from our knowledgeable and fun local

guide Wally, that wolves were actually a much greater danger to the chained dogs.

All in all it was a spectacular weekend in an area of our accessible north that many Canadians leave to the international visitors. With global warming this southern most population of polar bears is likely doomed and we were so privileged to spend some time in warm safe vehicle getting up close and personal these awesome predators.