

Oddball Minnesota: A Guide to Some Really Strange Places

Jerome Pohlen

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Because of its many, many lakes and the outdoorsy attitude of its citizenry, Minnesota tends to attract hearty travelers who look forward to a vacation rife with fishing, canoeing, hiking, and fighting mosquitoes. These visitors, according to the author, a travel book writer, don't know what they're missing.

In a jaunty, zestily written guide to the state's weirder attractions, Pohlen provides evidence of why vacationers may want to put their canoe in dry dock and hit the Minnesota highways, ready for the truly unique. Appropriate for the quirky subject matter, Pohlen has a funky style that is frequently laugh-out-loud funny. It's like having a wry, well-traveled, road-tripping friend along for excursions to such bizarre places as Belgrade, which boasts the world's largest crow statue, or Bemidji, home to the stunningly large and kind of ugly statues of Paul Bunyan and Babe, his blue ox. Then, of course, there's the recently opened Spam Museum, which celebrates the tinned meat in a way that's strangely reverent and kitsch-inspired at the same time.

With the same kind of mixed tone of camp and pride, the state's large array of fishing-related statues gets its own section, handy for those angling-minded vacationers who want to know where to find mermaids, enormous bobbers, and "Willie the Worm Man." Minnesota natives, too, will find much to enjoy here, since they can now brag that their state is home to the world's largest revolver, Casey Jones' Locomotive, the United States Hockey Hall of Fame, "Coffee Pot Tower," and much, so much, more.

Pohlen also includes non-quirky information that's quite helpful, such as maps, directions, phone numbers, fees for attractions, and times of day and year that attractions are open.

This is the fifth in Pohlen's Oddball travel book series, after Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin, and anyone who craves a Spam logo T-shirt or a photo with the state's largest walleye statute will not only appreciate this fun guide, but will end up hoping that the author keeps hitting the road to do more.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (May / June 2003)

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