

TRAVEL | OPINION

You can go home again: returning to my birthplace of Iqaluit 30 years later

By Lyla Miklos

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The view from the balcony where Lyla Miklos stayed in Iqaluit looks out over Frobisher Bay.

Photo: Lyla Miklos

Lyla Miklos became a resident of Hamilton in 1982 when she moved “down south” with her parents from Frobisher Bay. Lyla would like to thank Susan Anderson and Jack Guest for their hospitality and former Iqaluit city councillor Lynda Gunn for her generosity during her visit to Nunavut’s capital.

Iqaluit is the capital city of the Canadian territory of Nunavut. Its name translates into “place of many fish,” which is symbolized in the city’s official flag and seal. It now has a population of more than 7,000.

When I was born there (half a century ago), it had just been officially recognized as a village. It was still a part of the Northwest Territories and called Frobisher Bay. In the late 1960s my grandparents Dezső and Katalin Miklós founded the [Frobisher Inn](#). For many years their hotel was the only place for visitors to stay. Everyone from the late Queen Elizabeth to former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau to Mr. Dressup slept in its rooms.

In the early 1970s my mother, Susan, worked as a journalist for CBC Radio during the day and waitressed for the Frobisher Inn at night. My father, Dez, and her met, married and had four children — all born on Baffin Island: Lyla, Csaba, Erin and Mihaly. When the lease on the hotel came up for renewal, my grandparents decided to retire and sold the family business. My last visit to my birthplace was in the mid-1980s, back when I was a student attending Cardinal Heights Middle School.



Lyla Miklos stands outside the front doors of the Frobisher Inn, the hotel her grandparents founded more than 50 years ago.

Photo: Lyla Miklos

Iqaluit has seen a dramatic amount of growth since I was last there, but despite its many changes the welcoming vibe I remember from my childhood is still very much [in the air](#).

My flight from Ottawa to Iqaluit on Canadian North airlines was a blast from the past. The flight included a complimentary hot meal with a drink from the bar followed by dessert and special coffee (with Baileys and extra whipping cream). Pro tip: Book your flight directly with them. I saved \$1,000 going that route. Roundtrip from Pearson was going to be \$2,500 using either Expedia or Air Canada.

The inside of the new Iqaluit International Airport is covered in stunning murals and statues made by Inuit artists. Public art can be found all around Iqaluit from the architecture of several government buildings to a sculpture garden in the centre of town and a two-storey statue at the “four corners” in recognition of the 20th anniversary of the Nunavut land claims agreement.



A view of the city of Iqaluit from the top of the lookout trail at Sylvia Grinnell Territorial Park.
Photo: Lyla Miklos

The Frobisher Inn is no longer the only game in town. Iqaluit has several hotels and Airbnbs you can stay at. The newest one being the Inuit-owned and operated [Aqsarniit Hotel and Conference Centre](#). It is a gorgeous venue. Inuit art everywhere. Dinner in their dining room was delicious. The story behind its construction is fascinating. All furniture, fixtures and equipment were finished in a factory. From there, modules were shipped from Asia, tugged to shore, trailered directly to the site and set into place over a period of nine days.

I wasn't lacking for places to eat while I was in Iqaluit. The Frobisher Inn has a coffee shop, dining room and bar. [The Discovery Hotel](#) had an all-you-can-eat buffet brunch. [The Black Heart Café](#) reminded me of queer-friendly independent coffee shops in Hamilton that sell fairtrade goods. [Yummy Shawarma and Pizza](#), which opened a little more than a decade ago is a family-owned business serving scrumptious authentic Lebanese food. [The Snack's](#) crinkle fries poutine came highly recommended and did not disappoint. The night I went to [NuBrew Co.](#), Iqaluit's microbrewery, they were hosting a trivia competition. I tried out a tasting flight of four different beers.



Sunset over Iqaluit reflects off Frobisher Bay.

Photo: Lyla Miklos

But the main reason you need to experience Iqaluit is the breathtaking landscape in every direction.

[Sylvia Grinnell Territorial Park](#) used to be the “mountain” I would climb when I was a kid so I could look at the waterfalls. Now the entire area around the Sylvia Grinnell River has been developed by the Nunavut government so visitors can enjoy camping, fishing, picnics, dog sledding and more. There are fire pits and picnic tables along the river and a look out point with a telescope so you can get a better view of the falls. The day I went a steady line of locals came with their fishing poles hoping to catch some Arctic char.



If you thought grocery prices in southern Ontario were depressing, check out the price of a pound of butter in Northmart, Iqaluit’s main grocery store.

Photo: Lyla Miklos

Iqaluit is above the tree line, so the landscape in summer [looks a lot like the Scottish Highlands](#) with different coloured rocks, mosses and wildflowers covering the ground. I came a little too early in August to go wild berry picking.

The suburb of Iqaluit is Apex. At the back of the Apex Cemetery whale bones are displayed and have become a major tourist attraction. The beaches of Apex still house some of the Hudson's Bay Co.'s original trading stores.



Lyla Miklos with City of Iqaluit Mayor Solomon Awa.

Photo: Lynda Gunn

Travel down [“the Road to Nowhere”](#) and you will discover a stunning view of the Apex River along with a beautiful park partially funded by the local Rotary Club that my Father was a founding member of.

A walk down to the end of the Frobisher Bay pier in the afternoon will give you a dramatic view of low tide. The entire city is very walkable. Cabs charge a \$9.50 flat fee per person



St. Jude's Cathedral is Iqaluit's iconic Anglican church.

Photo: Lyla Miklos

Iqaluit has a [visitors centre](#) and a [museum](#). Both venues have artwork and interactive displays. The museum had a gift shop. On the day I went several of the artisans who were selling their art to tourists in the various hotels were selling their art to the museum. My fun discovery was finding a picture in the museum archives of my father with now King Charles when he visited the Frobisher Inn in 1975.

I made a point of visiting [St. Jude's Cathedral](#), Iqaluit's iconic Anglican Church in the shape of an igloo located in the centre of town. Along with the cathedral, Iqaluit is also home to a mosque, Kingdom Hall and Bahá'í House among many other places of worship.

I took a tour of city hall but missed out on an official tour of the Nunavut legislature. Currently, legislature tours are only on Tuesdays and Thursdays and you need to book them 10 days in advance. Visiting city hall was good karma, because I ended up running right into Iqaluit's Mayor Solomon Awa, after having a coffee, tour and a chat with the current manager of the Frobisher Inn, Ted Bailey, who was originally hired by my grandparents.



Lyla Miklos discovered a photo in the archives of Iqaluit's Nunatta Sunakkutaangit Museum of her father, Dez Miklos, with now King Charles at the Frobisher Inn during his 1975 royal visit.

Courtesy of Lyla Miklos

I made friends with two same-sex couples who were also on vacation in Iqaluit during my visit. One of them was from Vancouver and another one from Atlanta. Both were pleasantly surprised by the abundance of rainbow flags that were on display throughout the city. If I had stayed a little longer, I could have enjoyed a Pride Picnic at Sylvia Grinnell park.

We all observed how hot it was while we were there, even with the windows open while we slept. The hottest it got during my visit was 15 C, but the sun wouldn't completely disappear until after 10:30 p.m., and rose again just after 3 a.m.

The legacy of the Miklos family continues to echo throughout the city. I kept running into people who used to babysit me when I was a kid. Including the host of CBC North's Inuktitut evening news broadcaster Eva Michael. There is still lots of love and fond memories for my late grandparents and parents from the people of Iqaluit. I'm pretty sure if I had stayed another week everyone would have been inviting me over for dinner.

I hope it won't be another [30 years before I visit](#) Iqaluit again.

If you have the opportunity to experience this once-in-a-lifetime Canadian vacation, make it happen.

For me, it still feels like home.

Opinion articles are based on the author's interpretations and judgments of facts, data and events. [More details](#)

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