

Alberta's World-Class Passion Play: Dramatic Scenery Sets the Stage



As one of the fastest eroding regions on the planet, the stark Badlands of south-central Alberta are a massive repository of fossils and bones from the period 65 million years ago when dinosaurs were Earth's most high profile life form. It is also home to the [Canadian Badlands Passion Play](#) recognized as one of the most authentic and popular biblical passion plays in the world. Yes, it honors the European medieval passion play traditions, telling in dramatic fashion stories from the life, miracles, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but there the similarity ends.

Spawned by this remarkably photogenic terrain and the perpetual energy of a local community that has taken this very human-focused project to its heart, the **Canadian Badlands Passion Play** has just celebrated 15 years of sold-out success.



On the outskirts of the small town of [Drumheller](#) the 30-acre canyon bowl, forming a natural amphitheater where this biblical cameo unfolds, has sparked visionary imagination, creativity and persistence to re-create the ancient Holy Land venue for this event every summer since 1994. In 2009 over 12,000 visitors from across North America and around the world attended six three-hour performances featuring more than 150 actors and a 50-member choir and orchestra. 2009 also saw new music added and an updated script.

Well before the six performances that take place each July, the Drumheller regional community is on the move to provide the backbone for this annual event. Accomplished riders in this true-to-life Alberta cowboy country are transformed into authentically-costumed Roman soldiers on horseback, women with young children begin sewing costumes for family members who will be participating in the crowd scenes – right down to babes in arms. Men start cultivating dashing beards that will transform them into imposing chief priests, and local farm families offer a range of farm animals, from donkeys to goats and chickens, many of which will undoubtedly be heard on set during the performance!



Over 500 volunteers from across western Canada serve at the Passion Play during its performances. Approximately 100 will actually camp on site, making volunteering part of their summer vacation. Professionals make up the core of the directing crew and theatrical cast with star vocalists, accomplished lead actors, a choir that is a musical treat in itself, and a whole team behind the scenes to generate the technical magic. Nothing is left to chance!

Since its inception, all aspects of the Passion Play have been meticulously researched and designed. This includes every part of the monumental set to the smallest prop piece, as well as hundreds of authentic costumes. This attention to detail has resulted in well-deserved international recognition, being named Alberta's Top Cultural Attraction and One of North America's Top 100 Events, among them. Its theatrical contribution as one of the world's noted Passion Plays has also been written up in academic literature.



In 2010, there will be six Badlands performances between July 9 and 18, three matinees and three daylight early evening shows. It is recommended to arrive one hour early to enjoy the pre-show, the gift shop, and the Interpretive Centre. Adult seats are CAD\$30 each, with reduced pricing for children, students, seniors and family groups.

As a unique North American cultural event, the Canadian Badlands Passion Play serves as the perfect excuse for a spiritual pilgrimage, a bit of historical research, an inspiring way to investigate the Christian faith, or simply an entertaining "time travel" experience in a land that dinosaurs once ruled.

By Alison Gardner

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