



Emerald Lake in Yoho National Park

Rocky Road

CANADA'S ROCKY MOUNTAINS are home to some of the world's most breathtaking natural scenery: snow-capped peaks, stunning turquoise lakes, massive glaciers and thundering waterfalls. On top of this, it is one of the best areas in the country for sightings of elk, wolves, bears, moose, mountain goats and big horn sheep.

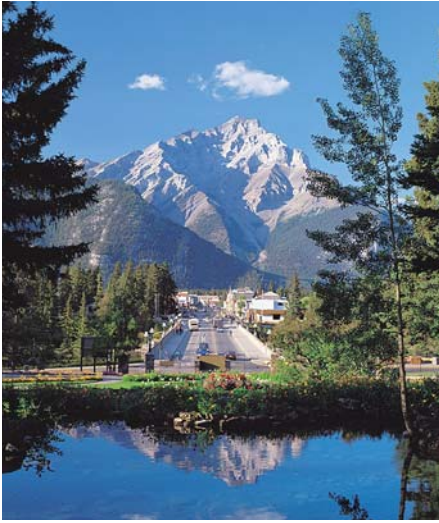
Hiring a car and exploring the area by yourself is the best way to go. You can stop and take photos as often as you wish, get off the main routes and away from the crowds and really discover some of the hidden gems of the area. Our Canada specialists can give you insider tips on just where and when to go to get the most from this spectacular part of the world.



Chuckwagon racing



Moose and calf



Banff Avenue



Big horn sheep



Admiring the view over Banff National Park

Calgary and Banff

Most visitors to this region fly into Calgary and then drive west to the mountain resort town of Banff. A great base for exploring the local area, Banff has a spectacular natural setting, nestled between the looming peak of Cascade Mountain and the gurgling Bow River.

Banff is the oldest and largest of the towns in the mountain parks and owes its existence to the discovery in 1883 of hot mineral springs on the slopes of nearby Sulphur Mountain. By 1887 Rocky Mountains National Park, Canada's first national park, had been created to preserve this magnificent region. Today Banff is a lively town that offers plenty of amenities for visitors, along with easy access to one of the best networks of scenic roads anywhere in the world.

Banff to Lake Louise

Heading northwest from Banff you have the option of two different routes to Lake Louise. The well-trodden path follows the busy Trans-Canada Highway past brooding Castle Mountain, but our firm preference is to travel along the older, quieter Bow Valley Parkway.

This route offers much better wildlife viewing (wolves, bears and elk are frequently seen) and provides the opportunity to hike along the beautiful Johnston Canyon Trail. Carved from the surrounding limestone by a rushing creek, the Johnston Canyon starts at Lower Falls where water plunges 10 metres into a deep pothole. The hike then continues to Upper Falls, where there is a thundering 30-metre drop and on to the Ink Pots, a group of seven cold water springs in a variety of blue-green hues.

Lake Louise

The road continues on to the small mountain village of Lake Louise. Set on the shores of the aquamarine lake of the same name, it's an exceptional place, but can get crowded. You can take the fairly strenuous 3.4 kilometre hike through old-growth forest to Lake Agnes. This walk offers exceptional views of the Beehive Mountains and a spectacular hanging valley. You'll also be rewarded with some scrumptious chocolate cake at the atmospheric Lake Agnes tea house.

Take a detour

For those with the time for a short detour, it's well worth driving towards Golden and Revelstoke along Highway 1. Crossing the provincial border into British Columbia the road takes you through the magnificent Kicking Horse Pass into Yoho National Park. Here you will find such scenic wonders as vivid Emerald Lake, secluded Lake O'Hara, the prehistoric Burgess Shale fossil beds and the engineering marvel of the Spiral Railway Tunnels.





Bow River Valley

Icefields Parkway

Of the many exceptional roads through the Canadian Rockies, the Icefields Parkway must surely be the best for pure scenic grandeur. This 230-kilometre route stretches from Lake Louise in the south to the town of Jasper in the north and is considered by many to be one of the most scenic highways in the world. Don't rush the journey; there are plenty of breathtaking views along the route.

Shortly after leaving Lake Louise you will reach beautiful Bow Lake. Rugged peaks rise steeply from its shores and you'll get excellent views of the surroundings glaciers and icefields from the deck of the Num Ti Jah Lodge. Built in the 1920s it offers an authentic mountain lodge experience.

Next stop is the bright turquoise Peyto Lake. A short uphill walk leads to a spectacular viewpoint over this remarkable glacier-fed lake. Surrounded by a sea of spruce trees and framed by the magical Mistaya Valley, it is a favourite spot for photographers.

Continuing on, you will soon arrive at the Saskatchewan River Crossing with its magnificent views of mounts Wilson and Murchison. These two mountains rise almost vertically from the valley floor, their tumbling cliffs flanking the village on either side.

About 20 kilometres further on, look out for the massive limestone cliffs of Cirrus Mountain. You'll get great views from the Weeping Wall where numerous waterfalls tumble over the mountain's steep sides.

As you drive north it's impossible to miss the Columbia Icefield. At 325 square kilometres this is the largest body of ice in the Rocky Mountains. The icefield is a popular tourist attraction and is almost always busy, but is worth a visit as it is the only place in the world where you can travel by vehicle on a glacier.

Jasper National Park

Further north you will soon cross the 2000-metre Sunwapta Pass before arriving at Athabasca Falls, one of the most powerful and awe-inspiring waterfalls in the Rockies. From here we would recommend you take the alternative highway, 93A, north to the town of Jasper.

There are several excellent viewpoints along this route and most act as a starting point for walking trails through the mountains. One of the best spots for a short hike is the lovely Tonquin Valley where you will get stunning views of Mount Edith Cavell, the highest mountain in this section of the park, Cavell Lake and the beautiful Angel Glacier.

From here it is a short drive to the small town of Jasper which makes a perfect base for a few days while you visit picturesque Maligne Lake and the steep-walled gorge of Maligne Canyon. Here a raging river has scooped out a limestone gorge with walls of up to 50 metres. The Miette Hot Springs are also well worth a visit for sheer relaxation and exceptional views.

Jasper National Park is much less visited than Banff and has excellent wildlife viewing opportunities. Elk are a common sight, even in the town itself, and there are plenty of options for the adventurous such as trail riding, white water rafting, canoeing, fishing and mountain biking.



Grizzly bear in Jasper National Park



1 Lucy's tip: Calgary

If you are planning on travelling to Calgary during the Stampede in July then make sure you book well in advance. We have an allocation of tickets, so assuming you plan ahead we can ensure you see this great event.



2 Lucy's tip: Banff

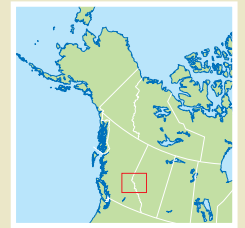
While in Banff, take a gondola ride to the summit of Sulphur Mountain; sit back with a glass of wine and enjoy the 360 degree views.



3 Aaron's tip: Moraine Lake

The Canadian Rockies are dotted with many spectacular glacier-fed lakes and while a visit to Lake Louise is worthwhile, it can get rather busy during peak season. I recommend visiting nearby Moraine Lake, a superb turquoise lake flanked by the glaciated Wenkchemna Peaks (Valley of the Ten Peaks). To make the most of this wilderness setting, you may like to spend a relaxing few days at the highly recommended Moraine Lake Lodge from where you can paddle a canoe into the iridescent water.

The Rockies



4 Elizabeth's tip: Jasper

Jasper has many scenic drives and walks just a short distance from town. Wildlife viewing is always best at dawn and dusk when you are almost guaranteed to have the place to yourself, even in mid-summer. I highly recommend getting up early and taking a drive out to Lake Edith and Lake Annette before breakfast. I've seen a black bear with cubs right on the road at Lake Annette, plus a large group of elk grazing right by the lakeshore. Take care with your picnic though, as the chipmunks will want to share it.



Bull elk, Banff National Park

FACTfile

Many travellers opt to combine their trip to the Rockies with a tour through the heart of British Columbia to Vancouver. This can be done either with a hire car or by taking an exciting train journey. A 16 day self-drive including Vancouver, Whistler and the Rockies staying in three star and B&B properties costs from £1,850 per person. For more information please call Elizabeth, Aaron, Fiona, Lucy or Helen on 01993 838 700.

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www.audley.co.uk/traveller/autumn2010