

Canada tends to be on everybody's Bucket List.

When you ask around, most people will say that they would love to see Canada one day.

The chances are that you would too.

And it's no surprise when you consider the amount of sights and experiences it has to offer.



Imagine travelling on the Rocky Mountaineer, or seeing a black bear. Would you like to walk across a glacier? Or to stand on top of a mountain? Picture snow capped mountains overlooking lush green valleys. Think of swimming in lakes and tall crashing waterfalls....



Are you smiling?

Then you had best start planning your trip now.

Here is where you start:

CANADA



FLIGHT DURATION FROM HEATHROW TO
CALGARY: 9 HOURS

TIME DIFFERENCE: 7
HOURS BEHIND

CHECK IN TIME: 3 HOURS

CURRENCY:
CANADIAN DOLLARS

EXCHANGE RATE:
APPROXIMATELY 1.47 TO THE £

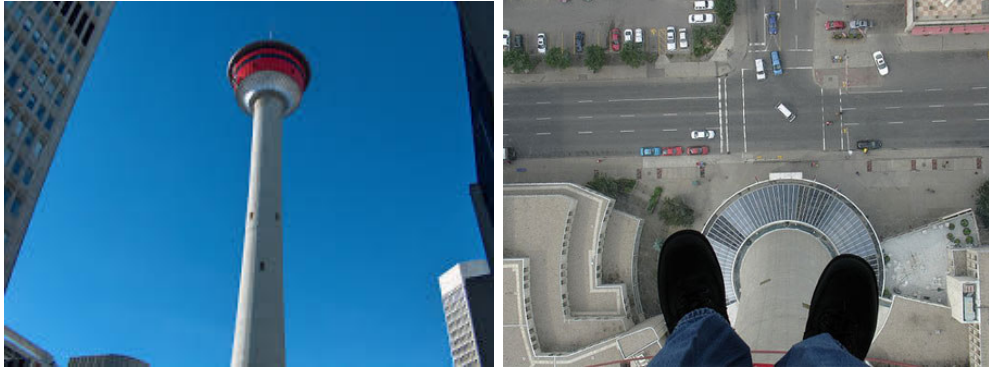
VISAS: NOT
NEEDED FOR BRITISH PASSPORT HOLDERS

BEST TIME OF YEAR TO VISIT: JUNE
- SEPTEMBER FOR THE SUMMER
DECEMBER - MARCH
FOR THE SKI SEASON

Calgary

The drive from Calgary airport to Calgary city centre is just 20 minutes. We were based at the Calgary Marriott which is a typical Marriott. It's 4*, has good facilities and very corporate style about it. It is in a fantastic location dead opposite the famous Calgary tower. The high street is a 5 minute walk around the corner and consists of very similar shops to those in our own high streets, such as the Bodyshop, H&M, HMV and a few designer shops. It isn't particularly geared towards tourists. A walk around town is pleasant enough as it is very architecturally attractive, and there is a free tram to help you get around too.

Calgary tower is a great attraction <http://www.calgarytower.com/>



At 1228 metres high it is the worlds highest observation deck with a 360 degree view. There is a steakhouse downstairs and a revolving restaurant called Sky at the top. Above Sky is the observation deck. Dinner at Sky is delicious, a meal here is a must if you're staying in Calgary, even if you're scared of heights! It's easily accessible as the lift isn't glass and the observation deck is enclosed. It has floor to ceiling windows offering a fantastic view of the city, and even a strip of glass floor that you can stand on.

But a stay in Calgary isn't something I would necessarily recommend as there is very little else to do there. The Calgary tower offers a great view of the city and there is a history museum in the high street, but unless the Stampede is in town, a tourist would struggle to fill a day here.

Banff

The easiest way to explore Canada is to drive. You can travel at your own pace, the roads are wide and clearly marked. Driving is on the right and there isn't any steep mountainous roads, just spectacular mountainous scenery. A tour can be arranged without any driving if that is preferred. The drive from Calgary to Banff is 2 hours and I recommend doing this as soon as you land at Calgary. Banff is beautiful. Its an attractive ski resort, a picturesque town filled with boutique shops selling sweets and souvenirs and also bars and hotels, all surrounded by the snow capped rocky mountains. Stay here for 3 nights and go for a walk around. Rent a canoe from Blue Canoe and paddle up the Bow River. Hire a bike and peddle out to Johnson lake for a swim. Pack up a picnic and head up to Two Jack Lake to take in the views of the surrounding peaks. Go and see the Christmas shop that is open all year round. Buy Bear Claw chocolates and don't share them with anyone. Stop in Evelyns Coffee Bar with its unusual art displays and have the home made soup. Have a cheese fondue in the Swiss restaurant. Try a beer in the Banff Avenue Brewing Co. where all of the beer is brewed in house. And lastly, try poutine, it's a local dish consisting of chips, cheese and gravy and you need to experience this at least once. Daily.

This is just what you can do in the town. There is so much else Banff has to offer.



Fun Stuff

After a day exploring, the perfect place to unwind is in the Mineral Springs http://www.hot springs.ca/BANFF_UPPER_HOT_SPRINGS.php First discovered in 1884, the hot springs have been turned into a huge outdoor swimming pool that over looks the mountains providing a stunning view while you relax. The water is hot, normally around 40 degrees' , so 1 hour is the recommended time to spend in here and take a bottle of water with you. Sunglasses are also a good idea as there is little shade. The entrance fee is \$8 plus towel hire. You can even rent a swimming costume if you have forgotten yours.

Another famous attraction is the Gondola that takes you from Banff to the very top of Sulphur Mountain <http://www.explorerochies.com/banff-gondola/> This is a great way to spend either a morning or afternoon. Take a trip in a 4 passenger glass gondola up 698 metres and enjoy the stunning view over Banff and the Bow River. Stand on the main level observation deck and enjoy a birds eye view, then have a hot chocolate in the mountain top cafe. The gondola is open everyday and only closes for maintenance work. The cost of the trip is \$35 per adult, the view alone is worth the trip.

Johnston Canyon is worth a visit during your stay. This canyon has a series of steel walkways built into the canyon walls allowing visitors to walk through the canyon to the lower falls and up to the upper falls. As we were there during the snow we were able to partake in an Icewalk, the canyon was frozen and the scenery was spectacular. Comfortable walking shoes are absolutely essential whatever the weather, we saw many people have to turn back. Hiking shoes or trainers are best in the summer months. Cleets will be necessary in the ice, if you book a guided walk these will be provided for you. The canyon is a particularly popular attraction during their summer months and it pays to get there early. Aim to be there before 9am if you want to avoid the crowds. It can get very high and very narrow in places so if you're not keen on heights then a guided tour would be best.



The Whyte museum in Banff will give you an insight into the art, culture & history behind the Rockies. It a small museum that is open daily and is entrance by donation only. If you're spending a day in town I recommend spending an hour or so here to give you a better understanding of the local area.

Banff is arguably most famous for its skiing and it is possible to spend a week here just skiing as there are a wide range of runs. Mount Norquay is one of Banffs ski locations but it's not for the faint hearted. It is black runs only and very steep. However, there are easier options to choose from. It is possible to book a tri area lift pass which will give you access to Mount Norquay, Lake Louise and Sunshine Village. Beginners should head to Lake Louise.

Hotels



Key to Properties

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1. Juniper | 12. Banff Inn | 23. Buffalo Mountain Lodge |
| 2. Banff Aspen Lodge | 13. Charlton's Cedar Court | 24. Douglas Fir |
| 3. Rundle Manor | 14. Banff Caribou Lodge & Spa | 25. Banff Rocky Mountain Resort |
| 4. The Driftwood Inn | 15. Rundlestone Lodge | 26. Homestead Inn |
| 5. Banff Ptarmigan Inn | 16. Spruce Grove Inn | 27. Banff Park Lodge |
| 6. Banff International Hotel | 17. Voyager Inn | 28. Brewster's Mountain Lodge |
| 7. High Country Inn | 18. Swiss Village Lodge | 29. Mount Royal |
| 8. The Red Carpet Inn | 19. Bumper's Inn | 30. The Rimrock Resort Hotel |
| 9. Irwin's Mountain Inn | 20. Inns of Banff | 31. The Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel |
| 10. Banff Avenue Inn | 21. Hidden Ridge | |
| 11. Delta Banff Royal Canadian Lodge | 22. Tunnel Mountain | |

Delta Banff Royal Canadian Lodge

<https://www.deltahotels.com/Hotels/Delta-Banff-Royal-Canadian-Lodge>



This attractive 4 ½* hotel is a short 10 minute walk from town. We had a very enjoyable dinner here in the Evergreen restaurant. The food is excellent, i recommend the fish. If you are planning a stay here and intend to book a Delta room I suggested requesting a room with two queen beds, as that will be bigger than a room with 1 king. Alternatively you could upgrade to a premier room which will have a fireplace or balcony. These are a little bigger and have a split bathroom. Junior Suites are bigger still and have a large lounge area and have large jetted baths. Each room type is on all floors.

Caribou Lodge <http://www.banffcariboulodge.com/>



This beautiful 4* mountain Lodge is just a 15 minute walk into town and it was my favourite hotel. We spent 2 nights here. It is an intimate hotel despite having 190 rooms and it has a welcoming homely feel to it. It has a lovely large fieldstone fireplace with plush sofas in the lobby. Perks include free wifi, a Red Earth Spa and a very small very hot plunge pool. Keg steak house is their restaurant and it is open for breakfast, lunch & dinner. Expect to pay around \$15 for breakfast.

Fox hotel & Suites, Banff <http://www.foxhotelsuites.com/>



The Fox hotel & Suites is 5 minutes closer to town than the Caribou Lodge, and is a very attractive alpine style 4* hotel. It has a popular Chilis restaurant and a cave and basin inspired hot pool. Other facilities include a sauna, a bar, fitness facilities and a fireplace in the lobby. This hotel is better suited to young couples due to its lively atmosphere.

Fairmont Banff Springs <http://www.fairmont.com/banff-springs/>



This stunning hotel looks like a castle in the middle of the forest. It plays host to the rich and famous. Al Gore was hosting a conference there during our visit, Robin Williams has stayed there recently and even Marilyn Monroe once stayed there. The big attraction of this vast and

impressive hotel is the Afternoon tea, just for the unrivalled view from the floor to ceiling windows overlooking the valley. This is a must do for every visitor to Banff, book early to avoid disappointment. Alternatively you could treat yourself to a cocktail in the Juniper Bistro or the Rundle Lounge. Why not buy a day pass and enjoy a dip in the mineral pools in the Willlowstream Spa? There are many room types here, I would suggest upgrading from the standard rooms as these are very small and don't have a good view. Wifi is free is you sign up for free membership.

Other hotels

I didn't get to see the Ptarmigan Inn but walked past it on several occasions due to its close proximity to town. It's in an excellent location for exploring Banff by foot. It is a 3* and excellent value for money. Have a look <http://www.banffptarmiganinn.com/>

Lake Louise

Lake Louise is just a 45 minute drive from Banff and the scenery there is stunning. This brilliant blue lake sits in a valley surrounded by snowy peaks. I visited in April and it was completely frozen. The snow was waist deep in some areas, and on parts of the lake you could go ice skating and take a sleigh ride through the snow. In the summer months guests can explore the many hiking trails and can try and spot a bear or wolf. The guides at the Fairmont hotel will take you on wildlife spotting walks, and be sure to book them early as they are in high demand.



Fun Stuff

Nature and wildlife are the main attraction of this beautiful resort. Bears, wolves and moose have all been spotted in this area. The guides will tell you the best time of day to spot them is at dusk or dawn, and always try the railway tracks first. As Canada exports grain by train, the grain spills on to the tracks attracting every kind of wildlife. You can choose to book an escorted tour with a local guide, or you can venture out on your own. Take the chair lift up

the mountain, it operates regularly each day and it a good place to spot the animals. But the activities aren't just restricted to around the lake. For the more adventurous there is canoeing available on the lake and also white water rafting nearby. Some tours simply stop at Lake Louise for an afternoon en route to Jasper, which will give you the opportunity to see it. But would recommend spending a couple of nights here if you have the chance.

Hotels

Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise <http://www.fairmont.com/lake-louise/>



The Fairmont hotel commandeers the best location on the lake, as well as being every bit as stunning as its sister property in Banff. Even if you don't stay here, make time to go and have a cocktail in the Lake view lounge and enjoy the view from the pallidian window. If you are staying here, consider upgrading from the lead in rooms, as these can also be quite small and have an unattractive view. Wifi is free in this Fairmont hotel too if you sign up for free membership.

Deer Lodge <http://www.crmr.com/deer/>



The best thing about Deer Lake is the staff who work there. They were among the friendliest that we met and gave great service. It is a much smaller hotel and has more of a local feel to it, although the dark wood interior can look a little dark even during the day. Opt for a Heritage room, as they are light and bright. The food is particularly good and you will have the opportunity to try more unusual dishes here too. Fancy trying Elk meatballs? Have a look at the dinner menu:

<http://www.crmr.com/wordpress/wpcontent/uploads/2013/05/DLdinner2013-21.pdf>

Things to do & places to go

There are other resorts that I would have liked to explore during my trip, such as Jasper and Vancouver. Jasper, we were told locally, is a smaller version of Banff and just a 3 hour drive from Lake Louise. I would recommend a 2 night stay there. We have used a hotel called the Lobstick Lodge for many years and we always get good feedback on it. Have a look at this http://www.mpljasper.com/hotels/lobstick_lodge/

If you time it right you can board the Rocky Mountaineer from Jasper and take the famous 2 day Journey through the Clouds

http://www.rockymountaineer.com/en_GB/routes_and_packages/canadian_rocky This is the most popular and most scenic train ride available. It will take you from Jasper to Kamloops, where you will spend the night at a hotel by the train station. The next day you will board the train early and it will take you to Vancouver. Consider upgrading from Red Leaf to Gold Leaf as this will give you a glass domed panoramic view of the Rockies. The supplement is high, but arguably worth it.



Once in Vancouver you could spend 3 nights here exploring the city. Stay in the Sandman <http://www.sandmanhotels.ca/hotels/vancouver-city-centre/> Go and see Victoria Island, take a whale watching boat trip and enjoy the parks and gardens of the city.

Flights

Air Canada, British Airways, American airlines and the Charter airline Air Transat all offer regular non stop services to Calgary. Calgary is a logical place to start a tour of Canada. From here you have easy access to Banff, Lake Louise, Jasper and then you can travel down to Vancouver and fly home from there.

We travelled with Air Transat from Gatwick which took 9 hours. The legroom was surprisingly generous for a charter flight. The gentleman in our party was 6' 5'' and he was comfortable in an aisle seat. However, extra legroom seats can be purchased for £50 each way. Seat back screens are provided as well as a impressive range of entertainment and meals. Headphones are chargeable, but ipod ones seem to work just fine. If travelling with Air Transat, bear in mind that they only accept credit card payments for drinks, duty free etc. Debit cards and cash are not taken. Bear in mind that as Air Transat are a charter airline rather than a schedules airline they will always be the cheapest option.

We can tailor make itineraries to Canada to suit everyone. For those who would like to experience everything West Canada has to offer at a leisurely pace this is what i suggest:

Heathrow / Calgary

Hire a car. Drive straight to Banff. 2 hours

3 nights in Banff

Drive to Lake Louise. 45 minutes

2 nights in Lake Louise

Drive to Jasper. 3 hour drive

2 nights in Jasper

Drop off hire car. Take the Rocky Mountaineer via Kamloops into Vancouver

3 nights in Vancouver

Vancouver / Heathrow

It is also possible to include a stay in the East. The regular flights between Toronto and Calgary make this easy to arrange, and it will give you a chance to see Niagra Falls, see the French influence in Montreal and enjoy the train rides to Quebec.

A self drive holiday gives you the freedom to travel at your own pace and in privacy. It is easy to drive around Canada as the roads are wide, clearly signposted and user friendly. However, Canada is also easily accessible to those who don't want to drive abroad. It is possible to take a coach transfer from Calgary airport to Banff, and there is an excellent escorted tour from Banff up to Jasper that includes the fantastic experience of driving across a glacier.



It's all too easy to think about going to Canada one day and then never getting round to it, or letting life get in the way.

But look what you could be missing out on...

For further details and assistance call Sarah at Westway Travel in Wickford on 01268 735301 or email sarahfirth@westwaytravel.co.uk