



Around Banff National Park

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Best Places to Eat

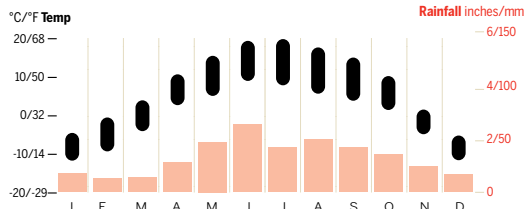
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Why Go?

Although many visitors never venture much beyond Banff, it's well worth taking the time to explore outside the park's borders. Banff is buffered by numerous other spectacular national and provincial parks, all blessed with the same kind of sky-high scenery, but with the added advantages of having far fewer visitors and quieter trails. Kananaskis and Yoho are the locals' tips for hiking, while Golden is the center for adventure sports. Backcountry walkers head for the remote trails in British Columbia's roadless Mt Assiniboine Provincial Park.

When to Go

Banff National Park



Jul Warm, settled weather makes this the prime month for hiking and sightseeing.

Late Sep The summer crowds die down and the forests are at their most colorful.

Nov The winter season begins and outdoor activities are plentiful.

Canmore

Canmore is Banff for locals, a former coal-mining town that reinvented itself during the 1988 Winter Olympics (when it hosted the cross-country skiing events) into an outdoor activity center extraordinaire. Spend time sitting in a downtown bar or cafe and you'll quickly ascertain that most of the population lives here because they love it – and no wonder! The hiking, cycling, skiing and spiky mountain vistas are magnificent, and the rock climbing – Canmore acts as HQ for the Alpine Club of Canada – is world-class.

Quieter, cheaper and more chilled than Banff, Canmore's small, but still growing, hub makes a good launching pad for the national park or the more hidden pleasures of Kananaskis Country to the south. There are plenty of hotels scattered around town, and reasonable transport links connecting to both Banff and Calgary, including the bike-friendly Legacy Trail, which is heavily used by both locals and tourists.

In June 2013, Canmore was temporarily cut off when catastrophic flooding closed Hwy 1 and destroyed a number of local homes. A state of emergency was declared and massive damage to infrastructure ensued. All told, it was the costliest natural disaster in Canadian history. Most of the visible damage in Canmore has now been repaired.

Canmore is 24km (15 miles) southeast of Banff Town and 7km (4.3 miles) from the park's East Gate along Hwy 1. Most shops, services and restaurants are along Main St (8th St), which runs west from Railway Ave.

Sights

Big Head

SCULPTURE

At the end of Main St, half-buried in gravel by the Bow River, sits the impressive sculpture known as the Big Head (for reasons that will soon become obvious once you see it). Created by the artist Al Henderson, the sculpture was inspired by Canmore's name; the original town of Canmore in northwest Scotland was called *ceann mór*, a Gaelic word meaning great head or chief.

The sculpture has become a much-loved landmark, and the head's shiny pate is sometimes adorned to mark town festivities. It occasionally even gets its very own woolly toque in winter.

Canmore Museum & Geoscience Centre

MUSEUM

(www.cmags.org; 907 7th Ave; adult/child C\$5/3; ☀ noon–5pm Mon–Fri, 11am–5pm Sat & Sun May–Sep, 1–4pm Fri–Mon Oct–Apr) The town's small museum has an intriguing collection of exhibits and photographs relating to Canmore's coal-mining history, the story of the 1988 Olympics and, more recently, the devastating 2013 floods.



Activities

Canmore Nordic Centre

MOUNTAIN BIKING

(www.canmorednordiccentre.ca; Olympic Way) Nestled in the hills to the west of town on the way to the Spray Lakes Reservoir, this huge trail center was originally developed for the Nordic events of the 1988 Winter Olympics. It's now one of the best mountainbike parks in western Canada, with over 65km (40 miles) of groomed trails developed by some of the nation's top pedal-heads and trail designers.

There are graded routes to suit all abilities, from easy rides to technical singletracks and full-on downhill. You can bring your own bike, or hire one from Trail Sports (p73), opposite the center's day lodge. The center also offers guided rides and skills clinics (C\$60 for 1½ hours) with certified instructors.

If mountain biking is not your thing, most of the center's trails are also open to walkers, orienteers and roller-skiers, and in winter some are specially groomed for cross-country skiers. Whatever the time of year, take precautions to avoid wildlife encounters, as the trails cross through areas of backcountry that form part of the Bow Valley Wildlife Corridor, and you might find that grizzlies, black bears and ungulates have decided to use the trails, too.

The center is a 3.6km (2.2-mile) drive from Canmore on Spray Lakes Rd. Across the river take Rundle Dr, continue south along Three Sisters Dr and follow signs to the Canmore Nordic Centre.

Elevation Place

HEALTH & FITNESS

(☎ 403-678-8920; www.elevationplace.ca; 700 Railway Ave; ☀ 6am–9pm Mon–Fri, 8am–9pm Sat & Sun; 🏊) Canmore's spanking new sports center replicates many of the activities you can do outdoors, so if the weather's not cooperating, this is a good place to hang out. The kid-friendly swimming pool is excellent, and the huge indoor climbing wall is an ideal place to get to grip with the basics before you tackle a real crag.