

Welcome to Banff, Jasper & Glacier

Sit atop a mountain, hike through the forest, feel the spray of a waterfall: Banff, Jasper and Glacier offer outdoor experiences at their simplest and best.

Historical Heritage

While other countries protect ancient ruins and medieval castles, the Rocky Mountains offer up Banff, Jasper and Glacier, legendary natural wonders replete with crenelated peaks, majestic meadows and scenery-shaping glaciers that together make up an important part of North America's historical jigsaw. Of the hundreds of national parks scattered around the world today, Banff, created in 1885, is the third oldest. Associated with the development of America's cross-continental railroads, which lured wealthy visitors into previously unexplored wilderness, these protected areas practically invented modern tourism, and their hold on the popular imagination has not diminished.

Wilderness Walks

There are bucket-loads of things to do in Banff, Jasper and Glacier, from heart-in-your-mouth white-water rafting to an easy round of golf. But arguably the most rewarding activity in the parks is the simplest – hiking. Walking along a well-maintained trail amid classic mountain splendor is one of life's great spiritual diversions. You won't be the first convert: hiking, by default, was the primary means of transportation for the indigenous people of the Rockies and the early European explorers who followed.

Protected Environments

Acting as litmus tests for the tricky balance between ecological integrity and a rip-roaring visitor experience, the Rocky Mountain national parks have long played a key role in safeguarding North America's natural environment. Glacier protects an ecosystem unchanged since Columbus' time, Banff exhibits some of the finest wildlife-watching in North America, and Jasper is a dark-sky preserve free of unnecessary light pollution; underneath the myriad adventure opportunities lies savvy park management paving the way to a greener future.

Outdoor Accessibility

One of the advantages of the Rocky Mountain parks is their accessibility. Banff, in particular, embodies the fragile, sometimes controversial, juxtaposition between the tamed and the untamed. While some frown at the commercialization of Banff Ave, the home comforts have their merits. Outfitters and guides add safety to potentially complicated trip-planning, while speedy gondolas allow people who might otherwise not have the opportunity to get up above the timberline to experience flower-carpeted alpine meadows and wild animals roaming through their natural habitats.



Why I Love Banff, Jasper & Glacier

By Brendan Sainsbury, Writer

Ever since climbing my first Welsh mountain at the age of eight, hiking and trail-running have been in my blood. For me, Banff, Jasper and Glacier offer some of the best trails in North America – suitably wild and rugged, but easily accessible without a car. On a fine day in high summer, there's nothing I like more than roaming alone above the treeline in Banff's Sunshine Meadows or Jasper's Bald Hills, drinking in the views and singing my favorite Smiths songs to ward off the bears.

For more about our writers, see page 288.