



Banff National Park

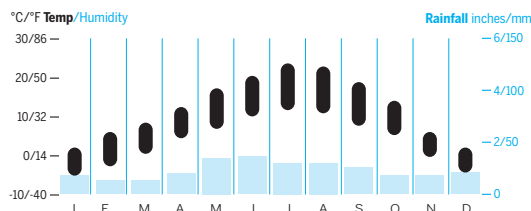
Includes »

Sights	57
Driving	69
Day Hikes.....	74
Overnight Hikes.....	90
Biking.....	93
Other Activities	96
Tours.....	100
Sleeping.....	101
Eating	109
Drinking & Entertainment.....	112
Shopping.....	113
Information	113
Getting There & Away ...	114
Getting Around.....	115
Around Banff National Park.....	115

Why Go?

Ever since it was founded way back in 1883, Banff National Park has proved an irresistible draw for people looking to experience the wonders of the Canadian wilderness, and with some of the world's most mind-blowing mountain scenery right on its doorstep, it's not hard to see why. From the sapphire-blue waters of Lake Louise to the glittering glaciers of the Icefields Parkway, Banff is without doubt one of the jewels of the Canadian Rockies, a fact that was underlined when the park was declared a World Heritage site by Unesco in 1984. And while over 3 million visitors pass through the park gates every year, making it by far and away Canada's most popular national park, it's still easy to give the crowds the slip: just strap on your boots, hit the nearest trail and you'll soon find out what makes Banff such an unforgettable place.

When to Go



Best Hikes

- » C-Level Cirque (p77)
- » Plain of Six Glaciers (p82)
- » Larch Valley (p84)
- » Parker Ridge (p89)

Best Places to Stay

- » Blackstone Mountain Lodge (p119)
- » Num-Ti-Jah Lodge (p108)
- » Skoki Lodge (p109)
- » Fairmont Banff Springs (p102)

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

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

November The winter season begins with a bang at the lively Winterstart sports festival.

Entrances

There are four main road entrances into Banff National Park. All are open year-round, weather permitting. The main East Gate is on Trans-Canada Hwy 1, 7km (4.3 miles) west of Canmore, and has manned tollbooths where you can purchase park passes (they all accept cash, check and plastic). If you already have a pass, you can use the right-hand lane to avoid queuing at the tollbooths. The other park entrances are on Trans-Canada Hwy 1 eastbound from Yoho National Park; Hwy 93 eastbound from Kootenay National Park; and Hwy 93 southbound from the Icefields Parkway. If you're driving, remember to hang your pass from your rear-view mirror so that park staff know you've already paid. For details on current park pass prices, see p56.

DON'T MISS

For quick access to some of Banff's most spectacular sky-top scenery, there's nowhere better than **Sunshine Meadows**. During winter this high-altitude alpine area is home to one of Banff's most popular ski and snowboard resorts, but in summer the warming weather opens up a wonderful network of hiking trails blessed with some of the loveliest scenery anywhere in the national park. The best months to visit are July and August, when the high meadows are awash with vividly colored wildflowers. September is another good month to visit, as the trails are much quieter and the landscape takes on more autumnal hues. Whenever you visit, don't miss the truly unforgettable panorama from **Standish Ridge**, offering a 360-degree view across the Great Divide.

You can hike up to the trailheads from the Sunshine parking lot, but the easier option is to catch one of the frequent shuttle buses provided by White Mountain Adventures. For more information on the Sunshine Meadows area, see p66, and our detailed day hikes on p79.

When You Arrive

- » Buy your park pass from the tollbooths at Banff's East Gate or a park visitor center.
- » Check the latest trail reports at the Banff Information Centre or online at www.pc.gc.ca/apps/tcond/cond_e.asp?opark=100092
- » Most campgrounds operate on a first-come, first-served system: arrive early at your chosen site (ideally well before check-out at 11am) for the best chance of securing a pitch.

PLANNING TIPS

Accommodations in Banff and Lake Louise are expensive and scarce in summer; so book early. To cut costs, avoid peak months or stay outside the park. Some Lake Louise trails require hikers to walk in groups of four in summer.

Fast Facts

- » Area: 6641 sq km (2564 sq miles)
- » Highest elevation: 3618m (11,870ft)
- » Lowest elevation: 1310m (4297ft)

Reservations

Accommodations bookings are handled by the **Banff Tourism Bureau** (☎403-762-8421; www.banfflakelouise.com). For advance reservations at Tunnel Mountain and Lake Louise campgrounds, contact the **Parks Canada campground reservation service** (☎1-877-737-3783; www.pccamping.ca/parks/canada/en). For backcountry campground reservations and wilderness passes, contact the **Banff Information Centre** (☎403-762-1550; banff.vrc@pc.gc.ca).

Resources

- » Parks Canada: www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/ab/banff/index.aspx
- » Friends of Banff: www.friendsofbanff.com
- » Banff Town website: www.banff.ca