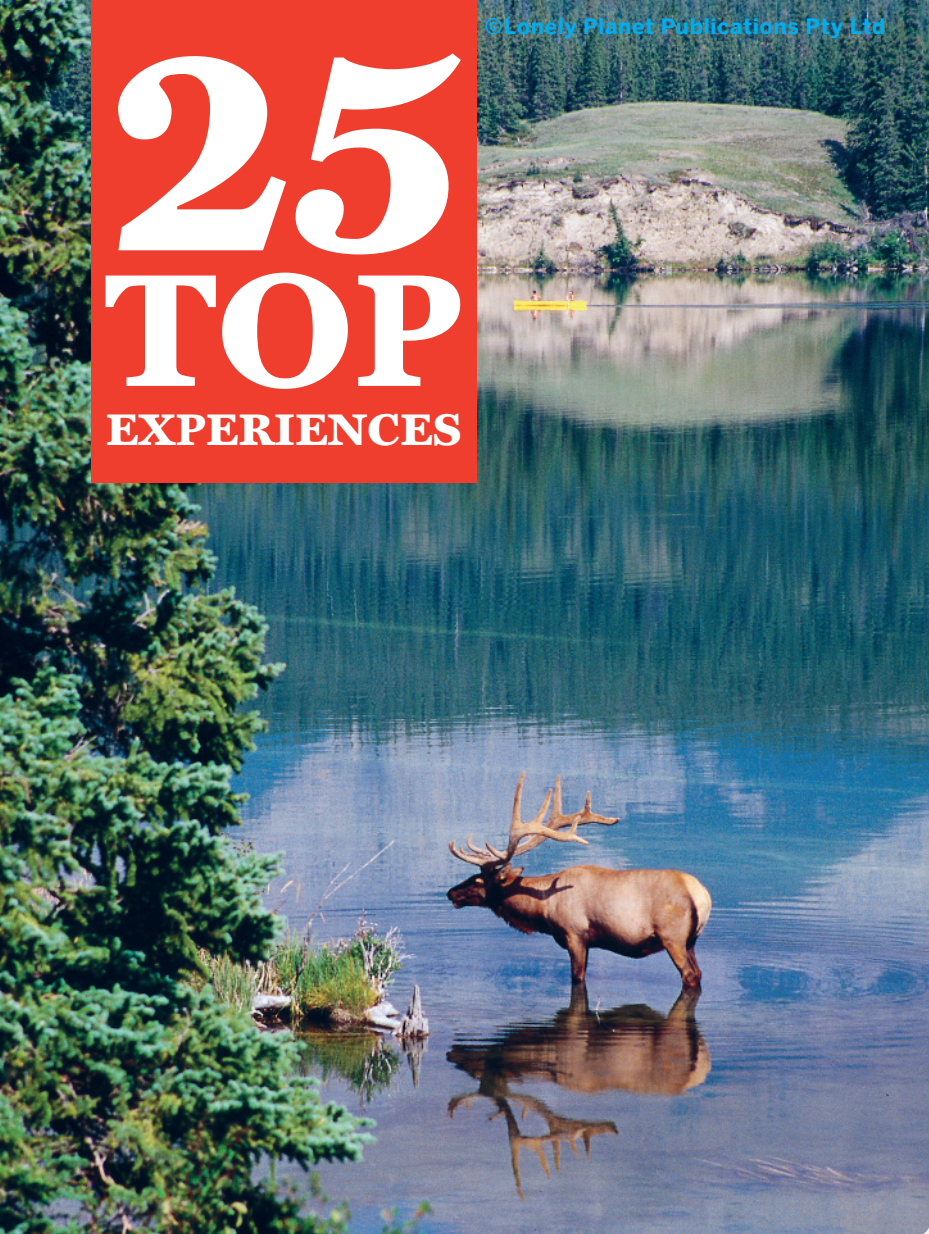


25 TOP EXPERIENCES



The Rockies (BC/Alberta)

1 The sawtooth of white-dipped mountains straddling the Alberta/BC border inspires both awe and action. Four national parks – Banff, Yoho, Kootenay and Jasper – offer opportunities for hiking, kayaking and most of all, skiing. The train provides another popular way to experience the grandeur. Luminous lakes, jumbles of wildflowers and glistening glaciers glide by as the steel cars chug up mountain passes and down river valleys en route to points east or west. Jasper National Park, above



Haida Gwaii (BC)

2 Once known as the Queen Charlotte Islands, this dagger-shaped archipelago (p752) 80km off BC's coast is a magical trip for those who make it. Colossal spruce and cedars cloak the wild, rainy landscape. Bald eagle and bear roam the ancient forest, while sea lion and orca patrol the waters. But the islands' real soul is the resurgent Haida people, best known for their war canoe and totem pole carvings. See the lot at Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, which combines lost Haida villages, burial caves and hot springs with some of the continent's best kayaking.



Vancouver (BC)

3 Vancouver (p624) always lands atop the 'best places to live' lists, and who's to argue? Sea-to-sky beauty surrounds the laid-back, cocktail-lovin' metropolis. With skiable mountains on the outskirts, 11 beaches fringing the core and Stanley Park's thick rainforest just blocks from downtown's glass skyscrapers, it's a harmonic convergence of city with nature. It also mixes Hollywood chic (many movies are filmed here) with a freewheeling counterculture (a popular nude beach and Marijuana Party political headquarters) and buzzing Chinese neighborhoods.