

The Grand Adventure

Calgary to Mayerthorpe

You're going out to the first part of your Grand Adventure—the northern section of the Cowboy Trail. Getting started is going north from Calgary to Sundre, which is a good leap point for wilderness trips or horseback rides to the Rocky Mountain Forest Reserve. Or else merely hang around the Pioneer Museum of Sundre.

From here, go north to Rocky Mountain House to explore a spectacular National Historic Site where the story of Canada's fur trade and rough traveler life is re-enacted. Take the Voyageur Canoe trip down the North Saskatchewan River for a new viewpoint. You're going to be pushed back by 200 years when you spot the teepees and smell the smoke from the camp site, as the forest is so wild.

If you choose to continue your journey along the eastern side of the foothills, continue on Highway 22 to Mayerthorpe and set up a camp at this northern terminus of the Cowboy Trail or else Rocky Mountain House might be a good option for an overnight stop.

Driving Distance – 394 KM

Mayerthorpe to Jasper

On your journey to Jasper from Mayerthorpe, you will continue to enjoy the beautiful countryside. You will come across Edson, a town constructed in 1910 that is today a significant stop on the CN line. Summer activities here include a rodeo and a two-day sidewalk jamboree showcasing street dance, bands, auctions, and art and craft displays. If you continue on Highway 16 you will reach Hinton. You can explore the fully renovated 20 Km portion of the Bighorn Trail by Hiking and Horseback riding.

Approximately 7 kms (4 miles) past Hinton, you can switch north on Highway 40 for about 22 kms (13 miles) and enter William A Switzer Provincial Park. Five reservoirs, connected to Jarvis Creek, provide more than 30 kilometers of canoeing through this park in the foothills of the Rockies.

Returning to Highway 16, you'll proceed to Jasper National Park and Jasper City. Jasper National Park is a sweeping expanse of scenic beauty—awe-inspiring mountain peaks and centuries-old glacial ice, flower-filled meadows and mirror-like lakes. You will cherish the time you spent here.

Driving Distance – 295 KM

Jasper to Banff (including the Icefields Parkway)

The 230-kilometer Icefields Parkway, which passes between Jasper and Lake Louise, ranks among the world's great highways and is host to some of the most majestic scenery in the Canadian Rockies. The Parkway connects the Bow, Mistaya, North Saskatchewan, Sunwapta and

Athabasca rivers, crosses the Bow and Sunwapta rivers and offers a panoramic view of the hills, glaciers, waterfalls and canyons.

Formerly part of the massive ice sheet that has covered much of Canada for more than a million years, Columbia Icefield is the largest gathering of ice in the Rocky Mountains. It occupies an area of almost 300 square kilometers to a depth of 900 metres. The most reachable glaciers from the main body of the icefield are the Athabasca Glacier, which can be accessed from Icefields Parkway. Glacier tours offer visitors a close look at mill holes (deep, circular depressions) and crevices (long, nearly vertical fissures).

Bow Summit, which is at 2,068 m (6,785 ft.) above sea level, is the highest point on the parkway and offers one of the best mountain panoramas in the world at Peyto Lake viewpoint. Johnston Canyon and Vermillion Lake, closer to Banff, are great places to stop and snap some photos.

In the picturesque village of Lake Louise, the Icefield Parkway ends. You will soon reach the town of Banff, which is a year-round leisure center for visitors, horseback riders, skiers, hikers and mountain climbers, and proceed east along the highway.

Banff is the headquarters of Banff National Park, the first and most popular national park in Canada, with an unmatched blend of towering peaks and high meadows, emerald lakes and spectacular mountain air.

A must-visit is Sulphur Mountain, where the Banff Gondola is one of Banff's most popular attractions. A sweeping panorama of mountains and valleys gifts the journey. Head to the Banff Natural History Museum, where exhibits of wildlife native to Banff National Park are seen, if you would like to brush up on some history. And in the display, which is designed to imitate a 19th-century fur-trade post, First Nations lore and traditions are portrayed in dioramas at the Luxton Museum.

A walk through Banff's downtown area is a good idea if you're looking for something to do in the evening, as the shops are open late and restaurants are numerous. The most convenient campground to use as a base for exploring Banff is the Parks Canada campground at Tunnel Mountain.

Driving Distance – 288 KM

Banff to Waterton Lakes National Park

Leaving the city of Banff, you'll drive back to the Cowboy Trail, passing through Kananaskis Country via Highway 40. This area offers a mix of activities throughout the year.

Reaching Longview, explore the area and explore the towns of Millarville (famous for the market for its farmers' held on Saturdays all through the summer), Turner Valley (it was here, in 1914, that Canada's first major oil discovery was made), Black Diamond and Longview. These towns are all part of the Diamond Valley, the soul of the Cowboy Trail.

There is another excellent interpretive centre, south of Longview, the Bar U Ranch, full of original buildings, ongoing archaeological sites and fascinating displays.



Head south from here to Pincher Creek and drive south on Highway 6 to Waterton Lakes National Park, full of charming B&Bs, lodges, hotels and natural mountain grandeur.

Driving Distance – 361 KM

Waterton Lakes National Park to Cardston

The number one point of interest, Remington-Alberta Carriage Center in Cardston is where the Cowboy Trail ends. Accommodating one of North America's largest collections of carriages, buggies and wagons, is a spectacular example of another era.

From summer markets to ranches and driving trails explore and enjoy the rolling foothills of Alberta. Since you're not far away from Waterton, you could also stay in Waterton for an extra night and travel through Cardston on your way back to Calgary tomorrow.

Driving Distance – 42 KM

Cardston to Calgary

Drive north on Highway 3 to Fort Macleod from Cardston, the first outpost set up by the North West Mounted Police (later RCMP) in 1874. Today, Fort Macleod's main attractions include the historic downtown district, the oldest operating theater in the province (the Empress), the Fort Museum and the nearby UNESCO site of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. This is the largest, oldest and best preserved bison jump in the world.

Then turn north on Highway 2 to Calgary, where you can visit attractions such as Heritage Park, the Calgary Zoo and the Glenbow Museum. Visit the Calgary Tower for a spectacular 360-degree view of Calgary and dare to walk on their glass floor.

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Driving Distance – 235 KM