

# A walk in the park

Canada's national parks are free to enter this year, so where should you start? Laura French finds out

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**F**rom bright aqua lakes to glaring blue glaciers, plunging ski slopes to pristine coastlines, Canada's national parks come together to create one giant adventure seekers' playground.

And to celebrate 150 years since the country's independence, entry to them will be free for the whole of 2017, following in the footsteps of the US National Park Service centenary last year.

That's well worth highlighting to clients – especially given current interest in the country. Bookings have gone up 27% year on year according to TrekAmerica, with under-40, adventure-loving types providing a significant boost. That figure is likely to rise even more as Canada celebrates its milestone this year.

So if you're looking to capitalise on this growth,

highlight the variety of national parks on offer with the help of this handy guide.

## ► BEST FOR ADVENTURE: BANFF

Canada's first national park is also one of its most spectacular, with the likes of Lake Louise – the 'Jewel of the Rockies' – adding a glaring pop of turquoise to the diverse, mountainous landscapes that surround it.

It's also a hub for adventure, with river rafting, gondola rides, kayaking, horse riding and more all especially popular.

"The list of activities and excursions available in Banff is endless," says Ross Sinclair, senior product manager for the US and Canada at Travel 2. "That means it's the perfect place for either a winter or summer adventure."

Banff's glaciers, valleys and 



RIGHT:  
Banff

FAR RIGHT:  
Pacific Rim

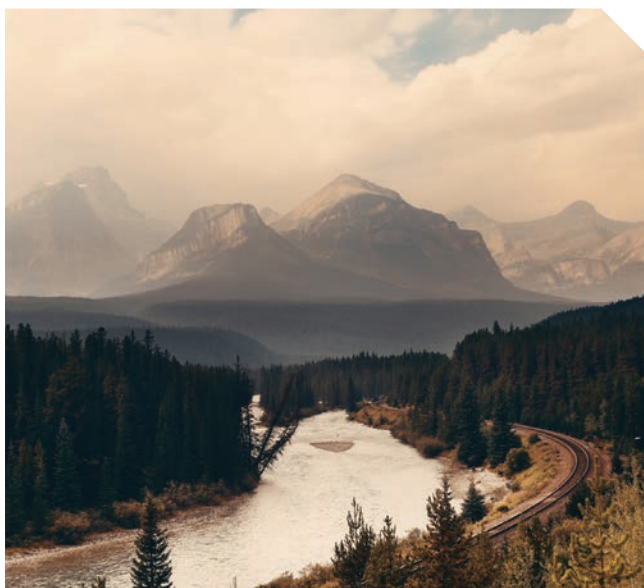
BOTTOM:  
Jasper

## ASK THE EXPERT



Iain Shields,  
product  
development  
manager, Grand  
American  
Adventures

"Many people would never consider the national parks in the winter, but my experience would lead me to do the opposite. The crowds have long since departed, creatures have not been scared off by other travellers and you are free to make your own fresh tracks in the snow. People often ask why it's worth travelling in winter, as grizzly and black bears are hibernating, but there's a whole ecosystem of flora and fauna that call Canada home, and that's still very active at this time of year. If money's a bit tight, it costs next to nothing to rent a pair of snowshoes and make your way through any one of Canada's national parks."



➔ meadows make for ideal skiing terrain, with slopes and views rivalling some of the most impressive in the world, according to Iain Shields, product development manager at Grand American Adventures.

And that's before we even get on to the variety of wildlife. Elk, deer, bighorn sheep and black bears roam the rocky surrounds, and one of the best ways to spot them all is aboard the famous Rocky Mountaineer, which winds its way over from Vancouver on the four-day Classic First Passage to the West tour.



## Elk, deer, bighorn sheep and black bears roam the rocky surrounds of Banff National Park

### ➔ BEST FOR BEACHES: PACIFIC RIM

Canada doesn't lack beaches, but Pacific Rim – on the west coast of

Vancouver Island and home to emerald rainforest, sweeping mountains and empty stretches of coastline – steals the crown when it comes to variety.

Laid-back Long Beach deserves a high place on the to-do list, with surfing, beachcombing and more offered across its 10-mile expanse. There are also plenty of other activities available in the park, including canoeing, paddleboarding, whale watching and seal spotting.

At low tide, lucky visitors may even spot black bears hunting for rock crabs on the shore, according to Denise ➔







**First Class Holidays** offers an eight-day self-drive and rail tour that includes Banff, Lake Louise, Jasper and Vancouver, as well as two days on the Rocky Mountaineer, from £1,704, excluding flights. [1stclassholidays.com](http://1stclassholidays.com)

**Luxury Gold**, by Insight Vacations, offers a 14-day Majesty of the Rockies tour from Vancouver, passing through the national parks of Mount Revelstoke, Glacier, Yoho, Banff and Jasper. Prices start at £5,350 including accommodation, transport and some meals. [luxurygoldvacations.com](http://luxurygoldvacations.com)

**Premier Holidays** offers a 20-day self-drive Tides and Parks of Atlantic Canada trip, visiting Gros Morne National Park, from £2,359 including return flights, accommodation, car hire and some activities. [trade.premierholidays.co.uk](http://trade.premierholidays.co.uk)



Hunn, Canada portfolio manager for Prestige Holidays. She adds: "It's also a year-round resort, with storm watching in winter and surfing in summer."

Travel 2 offers an 11-day independent Essential Vancouver Island package from Vancouver, with stops at Victoria, Torfino and Parksville, all of which border the park.



**A 'must-do' is a visit to Maligne Lake to enjoy a cruise bound for the world-renowned Spirit Island**



**TOP:**  
Gros Morne

**LEFT:**  
Dall sheep

## ► BEST FOR FAMILIES: JASPER

A few hours' drive from Banff lies Jasper, its bigger (though quieter) brother, whose landscapes, interspersed with aquamarine lakes and verdant hiking trails, stretch over 4,250 square miles.

An abundance of wildlife-spotting opportunities and adventure activities make it an ideal place to send families. There are plenty of family-friendly accommodation options available too, including Jasper Park Lodge, which offers a dedicated kids' programme. "A 'must-do' is a visit to Maligne Lake to enjoy a cruise bound for the world-renowned Spirit Island," adds Hunn of Prestige Holidays.

Like Banff, the park has a gondola ride, hot springs and nearby town, all likely to appeal to little ones. It also runs an Xplorer programme for children aged six to 11 (as well as Xplorers 2 for teens), and at the Whistlers and Wapiti campgrounds there are frequent educational programmes featuring talks, films and other activities (for anyone to attend).

Several operators offer family-focused itineraries in the region, including Exodus, whose Canadian Family Discovery trip takes guests on an outdoor adventure, with options for rafting, hiking, biking, canoeing and plenty more thrown in.





RIGHT:  
Waterton  
Lakes

## 3 OF THE BEST

### TIPS FOR VISITING NATIONAL PARKS

Respect park rules: don't feed the animals and always keep a reasonable distance away to avoid disturbing wildlife.

Don't forget binoculars: a high-powered pair, along with a good camera, offer the best chance of spotting wildlife in their natural habitat.

Layer up for the cold in winter: warm socks and gloves, sturdy hiking boots and a good winter coat will ensure that the enjoyment isn't hampered by the cold.



#### ► BEST FOR WILDLIFE: GROS MORNE

"When it comes to wildlife spotting, head to Gros Morne National Park," says Tim Greathead, senior travel expert and product executive at Premier Holidays. Eagles, moose, whales, seabirds, Arctic hare, lynx and more all call this Newfoundland spot home, and there are various ways to see them, including boat tours around the glacier-formed fjords.

Rugged cliffs, fishing villages and sandy beaches make up the park's topography, with 60-plus miles of hiking trails across its scenic features. If that appeals, suggest Premier's 20-day Tides and Parks of Atlantic Canada trip, which passes from Halifax through Digby, St John's and beyond.

#### ► BEST FOR HIKING: KLUANE

Set in the southwest of the oft-overlooked Yukon and home to Canada's highest peak, Kluane



**Kluane is a unique hiking spot with more than 2,000 glaciers, some up to a kilometre thick**

makes for a unique hiking spot with more than 2,000 glaciers – some up to a kilometre thick – found within its borders. Hikes range from a few hours to a few days, which means there is ample time for clients to take in the otherworldly ice fields that characterise its landscapes.

And walkers embarking on them won't be alone, with various creatures to be found along the way. These range from mountain goats and caribou to curly-horned Dall sheep – there are more found in Kluane than anywhere else in the world.

## Ottawa's 150th anniversary events

Ottawa will be the focus of celebrations in 2017, with more than 1.75 million extra visitors expected. Here are a few highlights to look out for.

**Year-round:** Ignite 150 will see 17 stunts and gatherings happening across the city, including film screenings, yoga sessions and a sky-high dinner 50 metres up in the air (July 14-22).

**March 3-4:** Red Bull Crashed Ice world championships take place, featuring athletes on skates racing down an ice track.

**March 27-April 2:** The National Juno Awards arrive, featuring a week-long programme of concerts and music events.

**July 1:** Canada Day will be celebrated on Parliament Hill with a host of performances and other entertainment.

**July 2:** Interprovincial Picnic on the Bridge will see the Alexandra Bridge walkway turned into a picnic green.

Best Served Canada stops here on its Highlights of the Yukon trip, combining this with visits to the wintry landscapes of Whitehorse, Haines and Tok.

#### ► BEST FOR SCENERY: WATERTON LAKES

"Size isn't everything" might be a cliché, but the comparatively small Waterton Lakes, in the southwest of Alberta, proves the point. What it lacks in physical space it makes up for in sheer beauty, with spectacular lakes, colourful wildflowers and quaint villages all combining to create one of the most scenic spots in the Rockies.

There are several golf courses across the mountains, as well as an impressive array of hiking trails, but for a gentler way of experiencing it all suggest a lake cruise. Trafalgar's Secrets of the Rockies and Glacier National Park trip throws one in before moving on to the nearby – and equally stunning – Glacier National Park set across the border in Montana. 