

# Nature's revival



Bull elk in Jasper National Park

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Harry Collins Photography

One year on from devastating wildfires, the Canadian town of Jasper is making strides towards recovery, finds **Olly Beckett**

**f**rom the forests around Jasper, elk, moose and sometimes even the occasional bear come to visit the picturesque Canadian town, while the heady scent of pine constantly wafts through the streets. In summer 2024, however, it was fire that came from the forest and proceeded to destroy a third of the Alberta town, known as a good base from which to explore the Canadian Rockies.

Following a long period of hot and dry weather, wildfires began near the town on July 22 and were finally brought under control almost seven weeks later. Since then, there has been a remarkable effort to help the town – and its tourism industry – recover.

#### RESCUE AND REBUILD

"This town is used to serving visitors," says Patricia Brown of Jasper-based Indigenous tour operator Warrior Women. "But when the fire came, we served each other."

That community spirit continues and is still very much needed today. On the edges of Jasper and into some of the downtown blocks, there are gaps where buildings once stood, but you'd have to be familiar with the town to spot the missing links.

A year on, downtown is buzzing and the bars and restaurants are full of locals and visitors. Hotels too are thriving again, with occupancy this summer at an average of 96%. Several hotels burned down in the fire, but two are being rebuilt and set to open in 2027.

#### TOWN AND COUNTRY

The wild landscape that Jasper is known for is also experiencing a rebirth. "Aspen trees are returning in abundance, and some are already a couple of metres tall," says Jeff Hanson, a guide from local operator SunDog Transportation and Tours, during an Ecology of Fire tour. "The fire is just part of the natural cycle – although this was a particularly intense fire." ➤

# DESTINATIONS

## CANADA | JASPER



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Pyramid Mountain and the Athabasca River; Jasper SkyTram cable car; Matricia Brown of Warrior Women; boat cruise on Maligne Lake  
PICTURES: Shutterstock/LukasKrbec; Mike Gere Photography; Mike Seehagel



Brown adds that Canada's Indigenous people have deep generational experience of forest management. In fact, the group Indigenous Guardians advises Parks Canada on how to manage this land.

Warrior Women's tours in and around Jasper acknowledge the impact of the fire, but also look beyond it. A regular collaborator with tour operators including Luxury Gold, First Class Holidays and Canadian Affair, Warrior Women offers immersive experiences such as beading and medicine walks. In spring 2026, the company will add arrow fletching to its roster of activities.

It's worth telling potential clients that compared with the vast size of Jasper National Park, a relatively small area was affected by the fire; in fact, only about 3.5% of the land was burned. Journey one hour out of Jasper towards the almost impossibly picturesque Maligne Lake and you'll soon be amid tall, green trees. You can always look up for more beauty too: Jasper National Park is a designated Dark Sky Preserve and Jasper Planetarium runs various night-time experiences.

Much of the tourism infrastructure escaped damage, including popular attractions such as the Jasper SkyTram cable car and the cute Jasper the Bear statue. The edges of the town's largest resort, the 700-acre Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge, were touched by fire (some staff accommodation was destroyed) but, walking through those charred trees now, there are plenty of indications that life is returning.

Grass and wildflowers cover the ground like a carpet, a few of the trees are showing signs of green in their boughs and herds of elk merrily munch on the lower foliage that has sprung up, thanks to the rare appearance of sun on the forest floor through blackened branches.

### NATURE AND NURTURE

"The fire will rejuvenate the forest floor," says Hanson. "The plants and trees here have evolved to cope with fire. Low-lying bushes that produce berries will soon thrive and, as a result, in four to five years, Jasper will be the bear capital of North America."

There are a variety of foraging tours currently available in Jasper, including a Wildfire Peak-Nic trip sold by Jasper Food Tours that journeys up a prominent local mountain, offering gorgeous views of the Rockies and Athabasca River. On these tours, guides help identify edible foods. I tried a surprisingly tasty spruce needle tea, while the meal I had at the Crimson Hotel's Terra restaurant (which uses locally farmed and foraged ingredients, including forest mushrooms and berry mustard) was truly memorable.

Jasper is a place of hope, strength and rejuvenation, where the state's symbolic flower – the wild rose – once again pushes through darkened ground and makes the most of the sunlight until the forest fully returns. Jasper's spectacular scenery will put your clients' cameras through their paces, conversations with its people will impart valuable insights and clients will go home with a renewed sense of wonder. However, word spreads like wildfire, so the town is filling up with travellers again – be sure to book well in advance. **TW**

### BOOK IT

**Canadian Affair** sells a 16-night Great Parks of the West fly-drive holiday from £2,069 per person, room-only, based on two sharing on departures from May to October. Includes car hire and international flights. [canadianaffair.com](http://canadianaffair.com)

### Getting THERE

It's a four-hour drive to Jasper from the nearest international airport in Edmonton, but there are other ways to reach the town. Three Rocky Mountaineer rail itineraries call in on their way to or from Vancouver or Banff. For clients keen on rail but wanting to travel independently, national train service Via Rail connects Jasper to stations across Canada. SunDog Transportation and Tours (pictured) offers one-way sightseeing itineraries from Banff that terminate in Jasper. The tours include stops in Jasper and Banff national parks, the option to board an adapted vehicle to drive onto the Athabasca Glacier, as well as a drive along the dramatic Icefields Parkway – considered to be one of the most scenic drives in the world.

