

Train fare

Rocky Mountaineer's refreshed menus show off Canadian produce sourced along the route, writes **Clare Vooght**

While lucky visitors might catch sight of a bear any time between April and November in the Canadian Rockies, I'm told that September is peak time – when they're filling up on snacks before going into hibernation. So, as the Rocky Mountaineer train wends its path through majestic peaks on a fresh September morning, I'm harbouring a not-so-secret hope that I'll spot one from the window.

I keep my eyes focused on the quintessentially Canadian scenery, looking between the firs, pines and centuries-old mountain hemlock trees for a telltale glimpse of black or cinnamon-coloured fur.

The only thing that could possibly divert my attention from the bear hunt – and the awe-inspiring landscape rolling past from Banff to Vancouver – is the food. Barely an hour after boarding the train,

I'm tucking into a stack of fluffy lemon and honey buttermilk pancakes with Okanagan stone fruit compote, doused with generous helpings of maple syrup from Quebec.

There's been a focus on the region's food since the release of Vancouver's first Michelin Guide in 2022, and last year, Rocky Mountaineer updated its culinary programme with a focus on local ingredients and suppliers that champion some of Western Canada's best flavours.

I was lucky enough to bag myself a seat at the end of the 2023 season (to try the GoldLeaf Service menus) and could see why this journey tops many a bucket list. As the season starts up again, the new culinary offering makes Rocky Mountaineer a particularly strong sell for food lovers.

Executive chef Kaelhub Cudmore hails from Vancouver Island and grew up fishing and foraging before later going ➤

SELLING ROCKY MOUNTAINEER



Violet Thumlert,
vice-president of global sales, Rocky Mountaineer

TRAINING SUPPORT

“Rocky Mountaineer’s training platform, Tracks, comprises five informative modules and can be completed in an hour. Tracks graduates become certified Rocky Mountaineer Specialists with a diploma and logo to add to their online presence. They also have access to exclusive training opportunities, and special rates and offers.”

RAIL AND SAIL

“As Vancouver is the western destination for Rocky Mountaineer’s three Canada routes, as well as the home port for many Alaskan cruises, bringing these two experiences together into one amazing vacation couldn’t be easier. Frequent departures throughout the season make it simple to combine the rail experience with any Alaskan cruise from Vancouver.”

EPIC SCENERY

“Rocky Mountaineer’s routes travel through incredible landscapes and national parks, and we don’t want your clients to miss a moment of the ever-changing landscapes. That’s why our trains travel only during the day, with overnight hotel stays.”

PICTURE: Vincent L. Chan



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A chicken dish in GoldLeaf Service; Rocky Mountaineer; a locally sourced fish dish; glass-domed carriage; PICTURE: Matt Radbourne



on to work in various kitchens around the world, including on Seabourn ships as part of the line’s Thomas Keller programme. He’s brought his passion for local fare to the menus on all Rocky Mountaineer routes across Canada and the US.

Many of the ingredients are sourced a stone’s throw from the train tracks: steak comes from Alberta, bee pollen and berries are sourced from hives and fields just outside Vancouver, wines are all from British Columbia’s Okanagan Valley and fish are raised sustainably on the west coast of British Columbia. We pass by waters brimming with hundreds of kokanee salmon – flashes of pinky-coral under the dappled sunlight.

AWE-INSPIRING ROUTE

Our morning is spent marvelling at blue, mountain-flanked lakes before passing through the Swiss-inspired spiral tunnels – mind-boggling passages carved out of the rock inside the mountains, built to allow the train to safely navigate the steep terrain.

The Rocky Mountaineer is the only passenger train that can travel all the way along this route from the mountains to the coast, and it gives guests a much closer look at the mountains than you might get from the nearby towns: we pass tree roots that cling impossibly to the

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topsoil on the mountainside and witness the powerful, gushing Kicking Horse River, where the Canadian national kayaking team trains. We even spot a moose grazing by the tracks.

Just before lunch, there’s an announcement that the chicken being served comes from Fraser Valley – whose eponymous river and quintessentially British Columbian landscapes we’ll be passing by tomorrow.

Guests are served breakfast, lunch and unlimited snacks on board. Before embarking, we were reminded of the old saying that travel calories don’t count – so I tuck in wholeheartedly. And I needn’t have been concerned about the lack of dinner before boarding: lunch is a three-course affair and we’re served a substantial late-afternoon snack of local cheeses with crackers made in the nearby lakeside community of



ABOVE: Customers will be wowed by the scenery they'll see from the Rocky Mountaineer, as it travels from the mountains to the coast

Salmon Arm, leaving me far too full to consider another bite that evening when we stop in Kamloops for the night.

WILD TERRAIN

Still no bear sighting, though, I think the following morning over coffee and lemon and cranberry loaf (a pre-breakfast snack before the hearty main event of British Columbian farmer sausage, roasted red pepper, eggs and smashed potatoes).

A bear sighting looks less and less likely as we pull out of Kamloops into somewhat different surroundings. The dramatic desert backdrop of Painted Bluffs Provincial Park was a filming location for *The X Files* and *Star Trek*, with its red terrain that appears almost martian. It's a million miles from the landscape I was expecting; eagles and osprey soar high at Rainbow Canyon, where the colour intensity is dialled up a notch with its iron, copper and sulphur deposits creating reds, yellows and greens, mixing in with burnt oranges and rusty browns.

Its surreal, otherworldly charm is far from those classic mountain vistas, but a welcome change of scene. But we're soon back to those classic, epic British Columbian views of pristine tree-clad peaks, with no signs of civilisation aside from the train and tracks. With Vancouver mere hours away, we have our final lunch of Canadian Arctic char with herb-infused rice and a tarragon bearnaise sauce, topped off with macarons

top tip

Suggest clients spend a few extra nights in Vancouver before or after their Rocky Mountaineer journey. There's much to impress food lovers: from nine Michelin-starred restaurants to street food at Granville Island's Public Market.

from Vancouver's Granville Island for dessert – a taster of what's to come when we arrive in this foodie city.

I take myself outside on to the viewing platform for one last windswept look at those ancient, majestic tree-carpeted peaks that give way to canyons, where olive-green waters flow. Louis Armstrong's *What a Wonderful World* is playing through the speakers. It truly feels like one of those travel moments I'll remember for life.

But one last taste of Canada is calling, so I head back up to my seat for some BC craft beer – a pale ale from Vancouver brewery Steamworks – while I watch the peaks turn into fields and open wilderness that gradually build into a sprawling metropolis.

I may not have spotted a bear this time, but I did have a wonderful time taking in these humbling vistas, the mountains they call home – and eating at a rate that could match a grizzly getting ready for hibernation. **TW**

BOOK IT

A two-day **Rocky Mountaineer** First Passage to the West package from Banff to Vancouver in GoldLeaf Service starts at £1,900 per person, departing in October. The price includes two days on board the Rocky Mountaineer, two breakfasts and two lunches on the train, overnight accommodation and transfers in Kamloops. rockymountaineer.com