



Canada's national parks offer a glimpse of vast, unspoilt landscapes, writes **Laura French**

Try naming Canada's 38 national parks, nine park reserves and thousand-odd provincial parks, and chances are you might hit a stumbling block.

There's good reason the big stars get the limelight – you need only to Google Banff or Jasper to see why these stretches of snow-dusted mountain, electric-blue water and film-set-worthy forest draw the masses – but to gloss over the rest would be to miss the charm of this extraordinarily diverse country.

Know much about Auyuittuq National Park? This dramatic expanse in the Canadian Arctic's remote reaches is one of the country's best spots for Indigenous

art, set among granite rocks pointing up like witches' hats, with seals slumped serenely among the fjords.

Then there's Northwest Territories' Nahanni National Park Reserve, where sulphur springs, aspen forests and Arctic tundra offer a playground for hiking, rafting and canoeing. And the Mingan Archipelago National Park Reserve in Quebec, where tens of thousands of seabirds nest during the breeding season, joining the humpback, minke and fin whales that call its waters home.

That's only scratching the surface, of course. To help inspire you beyond the obvious spots, we've put together a few of our favourites from across Canada.

travel advice

Parks Canada has suspended visitor services and closed facilities in its parks until further notice, in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Check the Foreign Office website for the latest information.



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BANFF, ALBERTA

With its eye-popping formula of luminescent lakes, whipped-cream peaks, emerald meadows and verdant forests, there's a lot to be said for Canada's oldest and most-visited national park. Hiking, biking and canoeing await intrepid travellers, while the dramatic Icefields Parkway drops jaws of all those who drive it – but it's not without its crowds.

YOHO, BC

WHY GO: This quieter underdog in British Columbia combines all the scenic glory of its bigger siblings – plunging waterfalls, milky glacial lakes, dramatic cliff faces and tree-carpeted trails – but with fewer tourists to spoil the view. Bears, coyotes, cougars, wolverines and bighorn sheep are among the 58 species of mammal that roam its varied plains, while more than 200 species of birds flit above its soaring peaks.

HIGHLIGHTS: Among its unique features is the Unesco-listed Burgess Shale Bed, where visitors can explore a collection of fossils that date back more than 500 million years. Other points of interest include Takakkaw Falls, a thundering plume of white water that comes crashing down pine-clad rocks; and the Iceline Trail, a 13-mile loop around glaciers that stand tall, like chunks of white-iced birthday cake.

BOOK IT: Prestige Holidays offers a 14-night self-drive combining Yoho with Waterton Lakes, Mount Revelstoke and Kootenay National Parks from £2,995, departing May 10, 2021, and including car hire, flights and accommodation. prestigecanada.co.uk

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LIKE THIS?

CAPE BRETON, NOVA SCOTIA

Home to the world-famous Cabot Trail – the epic scenic drive that cuts through the Cape Breton highlands – this was the first designated national park in Atlantic Canada. Known as the point 'where the mountains meet the sea', it fuses dramatic river canyons and rugged coastlines with wooded plateaus and vast peaks, offering whale watching, hiking, kayaking and cycling.

GROS MORNE, NEWFOUNDLAND

WHY GO: Newfoundland's answer to its neighbour is Gros Morne, a Unesco World Heritage Site that blends glacier-carved fjords with sleepy fishing villages, scenic mountain vistas and craggy coastal trails. Its diverse terrain brings moose, caribou, black bears, red foxes and plenty more out to play, with hiking, sea kayaking and fishing on hand to entertain.

HIGHLIGHTS: Standout spots include Western Brook Pond, a mirror-flat fjord framed by craggy cliffs and waterfalls that visitors can explore by boat; and the Tablelands, whose otherworldly, red-orange landscapes were formed from mantle rock that was pushed up from the Earth's crust millions of years ago. Hiking trails explore the best of its Mars-like beauty, with routes ranging from an hour to a day, while boat tours and summer geology talks will appeal to those seeking a slower pace.

BOOK IT: Premier Holidays has a 13-night Newfoundland & Labrador Explorer self-drive from £2,249, including flights, car hire, accommodation, admission to Gros Morne and more, departing in May 2021. premierholidays.co.uk

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LIKE THIS?

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, BC

This sprawling stretch of glacier-fed lakes, towering cedar forests and snow-dusted peaks sits on the US-Canada border in British Columbia. It's a hotspot for anyone wanting to hike, bike, climb or ski some of the Rockies' most extraordinary landscapes, where highlights include Rogers Pass, famed for its role in the creation of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

KLUANE, THE YUKON

WHY GO: For an alternative land of extremes, look to this far-out spot in the Yukon, where you'll find Canada's largest icefield as well as its tallest peak, the 5,959m-high Mount Logan. More than 150 miles of hiking trails make it a haven for anyone after a high-altitude adventure, while golden eagles, yellow-rumped warblers and other rare species lure birdwatchers.

HIGHLIGHTS: Flightseeing tours are on hand to whisk visitors over its wild snowy peaks and aqua-blue glacier shards. Those after more of a thrill can raft the glacial Alsek River, get serious on a mountaineering expedition, or try cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, dog sledding and ice fishing. The surrounding region is also a hotspot for history, with Dawson City providing an insight into the Klondike Gold Rush that transformed the area in the late 19th century.

BOOK IT: Best Served Canada can tailor-make a 12-day trip pairing Kluane with Dawson City, the Yukon Wildlife Preserve and more from £2,665, including flights, car hire and accommodation. best-served.co.uk

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