



...Travellin' Round

by Michelle Toth,
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Rocky Mountaineer Journey of a Lifetime

In late April early May I was fortunate enough to travel with Rocky Mountaineer on a Learning Journey for travel agents. Our trip was based off one of their most popular packages The Western Explorer. This includes the Journey Through the Clouds 2 day rail route between Vancouver and Jasper and a Brewster coach tour from Jasper to Lake Louise and Banff that ends in Calgary.

I started my journey flying London to Vancouver with Westjet and spent 1nt at the Vancouver Sutton Place Hotel. Rocky Mountaineer included an admission to the Vancouver Tower called The Lookout. The Lookout provides a wonderful 360 degree view of downtown Vancouver, Stanley Park, the North Shore Mountains, Coal Harbour and Burrard Inlet. Our afternoon concluded with a ferry ride to Granville Island to the famous Food Market and shops.

The following morning bright and early we were transferred to the Rocky Mountaineer Vancouver Rail Station. A bagpiper welcomed us for this most exciting of rail adventures. After the "All Aboard" was hailed we boarded the train and were welcomed by our Rocky Mountaineer Gold Leaf service hosts. Today's journey would take us 460km/285 miles to Kamloops. The train travels on average speed of between 30-60km following alongside the Fraser and Thompson Rivers, across bridges, through tunnels with sights of Hell's Gate, Pyramid Falls,



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Coast mountains and the dry arid, remote desert area of the Fraser Canyon. The train will slow down for major wildlife viewing. On day one along this route we saw mountain goats and birds including eagles, osprey and Canada geese of course.

Services in Gold Leaf include snacks and drinks served at your seat, breakfast and lunch are served in the downstairs dining car. Beautiful vistas zoom by your panoramic windows all day long. Each meal has 2 sittings with numerous gourmet choices of main course to suit your fancy along with an appetizer, dessert, coffee, tea or the drink of your choice. Gold Leaf really is an experience that you will not forget. Our service hosts were very informative with their storytelling and even just filling us in on their training and experiences they've had themselves was quite interesting.

Arrival and transfer to our Kamloops Hotel went like clockwork and our luggage was waiting in our hotel rooms. After a long day and a nice walk in Riverside Park, I easily fell asleep, dreaming about our next day on the train!

Our second and last day on the train we traveled from Kamloops to Jasper a distance of 441km/309 miles. We experienced Silver Leaf service which again includes snacks, breakfast and lunch along with your choice of non- alcoholic or alcoholic drinks served at your seat. You still have large picture windows and the great storytelling and services of your Silver Leaf hosts. It was soon clear this was the part of the route that we longed for venturing alongside numerous lakes many still frozen and countless snow-capped and clouded mountains-hence "Journey Through the Clouds". These sights surely make you feel proud to be a Canadian and so lucky to have such beauty in our own country. We had not seen much in the way of wildlife on this section of the journey, but towards Jasper we started hearing shouts of "bear" and we were all thrilled to have seen a mother and her 2 cubs and soon after another bear came within view. We also rode past a small herd of elk just before we reached Jasper. It was certainly a nice way to end our last day on this memorable rail journey.

Rocky Mountaineer Journey of a Lifetime (Continued)

The following morning we boarded our Brewster coach to travel the Icefields Parkway heading from Jasper to Lake Louise. Our first stop was Athabasca Falls for photos and then we carried on to the Columbia Icefield to board our all-terrain Ice Explorer or snow coach. The snow coach may not travel fast but it sure is fun getting onto the Athabasca Glacier. We posed for photos and marveled at how warm we actually felt as the sun broke through the clouds during our time on the icefield. This icefield is one of the largest non-polar icefields on earth. Another attraction here is the Glacier Skywalk-a 1km platform glass walkway that features a scenic 918 foot drop below you. Not for the faint of heart or acrophobic!

We were thrilled to spend the night at the iconic Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise in Banff National Park. This hotel is surrounded by mountain peaks, the Victoria Glacier and a gem of an emerald lake. Even though in late April they still had lots of snow and the lake was mostly frozen we managed to take a walk around the lake. It was so magical to see the

snow sparkling underfoot in this pristine and stunning environment. At this time of year there were warnings of Avalanche activity and of course bears as they were just coming out of hibernation. Winter or summer this destination is incredibly beautiful and offers a plenitude of outdoor activities from skiing, ice skating, snowshoeing and sleigh rides to guided hikes, fishing, mountain biking and canoeing.

In Banff we stayed at the Rimrock Resort which is located across from the Banff Upper Hot Springs and a short shuttle ride from downtown Banff-the shuttle bus pass is included with your stay. Downtown Banff Ave offers lots of souvenir gift shops, restaurants and bars to while away an afternoon. We did take a dip that evening in the Hot Springs. For a nominal fee we were able to warm up and experience the fresh mountain air. The Banff Gondola is a must when in Banff. The ride up Sulphur Mountain is simply breathtaking and for those who don't mind a bit of a climb you may walk up the stairway to the highest point- the weather station. The views of the surrounding mountain peaks and the Bow Valley below along with the iconic "Castle in the

Rockies", the Fairmont Banff Springs will amaze you.

On our last day we made our way from Banff to Calgary saying good bye to the majestic Rocky Mountains. Our hotel for the night was the Fairmont Palliser Hotel. We had a pass to the Calgary Tower which is right next to the hotel. From there you may see the surrounding mountains off in the distance, views of downtown Calgary, the Saddledome and Stampede Park.

What an incredible journey it was for me through Western Canada! If you would like to visit Western Canada with Rocky Mountaineer and perhaps even combine it with an Alaskan cruise please contact me. Rocky Mountaineer operates from April to October each year. I would love to help you plan your "journey of a lifetime". Booking early offers you the best chance for promotional offers and availability of your preferred rail travel dates and hotels.

Please contact Michelle at the London office of Blowes Travel Tel. 519-472-3232.

