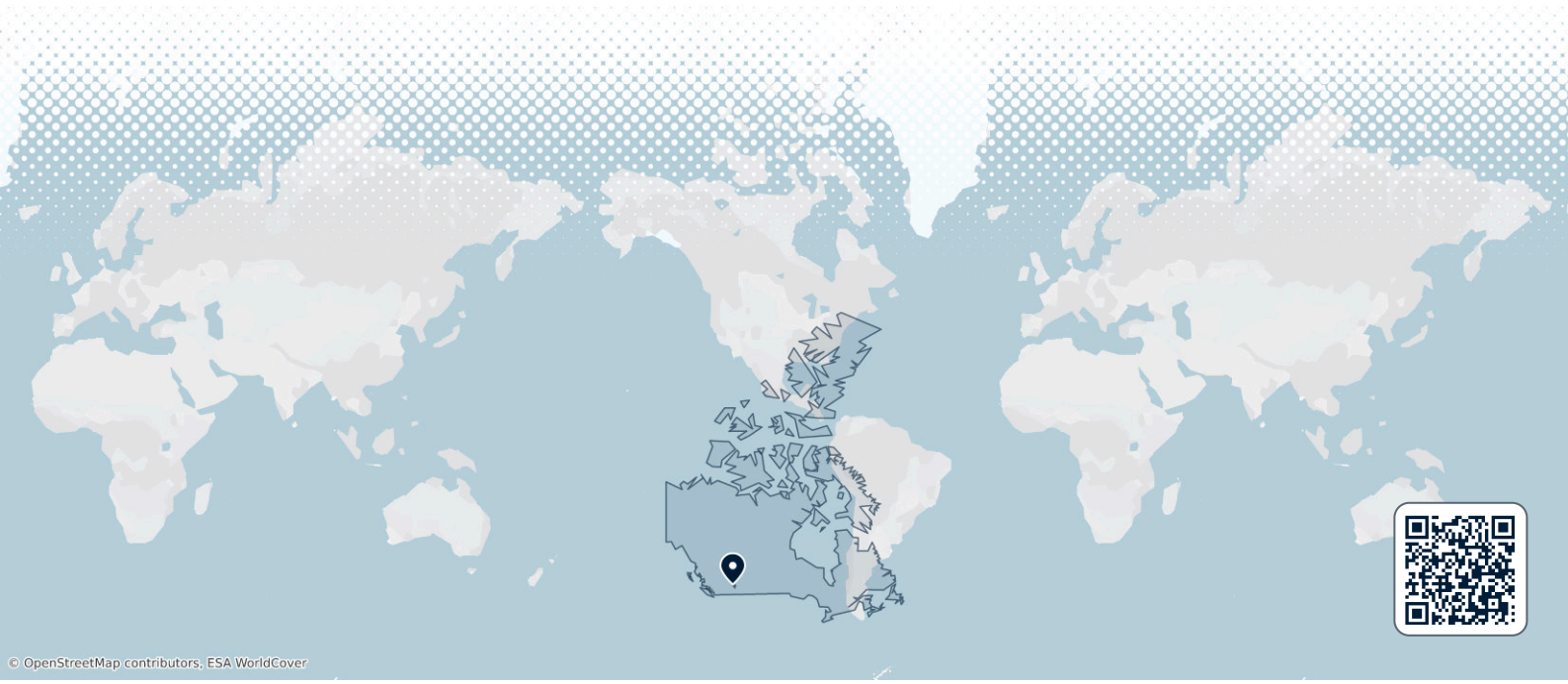


# Banff National Park

Alberta · Canada

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



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## Overview

Banff National Park is in the Canadian Rockies in Alberta. It is Canada's oldest national park and part of a World Heritage Site. The park has glacier-fed lakes, high peaks, forests and wildlife.

Most visitors stay in the town of Banff, at the centre of the park. The town has hotels, restaurants and shops. Most sights are a short drive or bus ride away. The park suits a stay of three to five days. Plan for hiking, scenic drives and, in winter, skiing.

A park pass is required if you stop anywhere in the park. Buy it before you start your visit. Parks Canada passes

## When to visit

July and August are the warmest months and the easiest for hiking, boating and the Lake Louise and Moraine Lake shuttles. They are also the busiest. Book rooms and shuttles early.

June can still have ice on high lakes and snow on trails. September is quieter, with cooler days and yellow larch trees on the high trails near the end of the month.

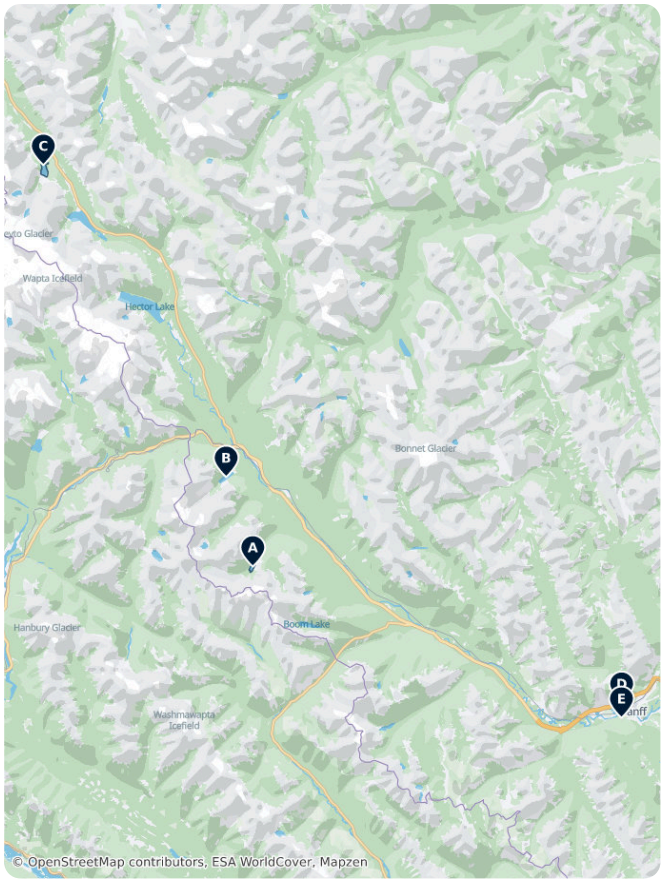
Winter is long and cold. It is the season for skiing, skating and hot springs. Some roads, shuttles and trails close from late October.

| MONTH | CONDITIONS | DAY °C avg / max | NIGHT °C avg / min | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| January | Good<br>Good for skiing | -6° / 1°<br>Feels like -11° | -15° / -28° | 16 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| February | Great<br>Great for skiing | -6° / 1°<br>Feels like -10° | -16° / -28° | 14 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| March | Good<br>Good for skiing | -2° / 3°<br>Feels like -7° | -12° / -22° | 19 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| April | Good<br>Good for skiing | 1° / 7°<br>Feels like -3° | -8° / -16° | 17 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| May | Poor<br>Poor for skiing | 8° / 18°<br>Feels like 5° | -1° / -8° | 19 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| June | Fair<br>Fair for hiking | 15° / 21° | 4° / 0° | 22 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| July | Good<br>Good for sightseeing | 19° / 25° | 8° / 3° | 17 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| August | Good<br>Good for sightseeing | 18° / 24° | 7° / 2° | 14 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| September | Fair<br>Fair for hiking | 13° / 22° | 3° / -2° | 15 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| October | Fair<br>Fair for skiing | 5° / 14°<br>Feels like 2° | -3° / -12° | 16 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| November | Good<br>Good for skiing | -3° / 4°<br>Feels like -7° | -11° / -23° | 18 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| December | Good<br>Good for skiing | -7° / 0°<br>Feels like -12° | -16° / -29° | 16 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

## Top sights

- A Moraine Lake sits in a valley ringed by ten peaks. The road is closed to private cars, so use a reserved shuttle or a tour.
- B Lake Louise is a glacier-fed lake below a large glacier, with a famous hotel on the shore. It has its own guide: Lake Louise.
- C Peyto Lake is a bright blue lake. A short walk from the Icefields Parkway leads to the main viewpoint.
- D Vermilion Lakes are quiet wetlands just west of Banff. They are good for a short drive or a bike ride, and for sunrise or sunset views of Mount Rundle.
- E Cave & Basin National Historic Site protects the hot springs where Canada's national park system began. It has exhibits and short boardwalk walks.
- Banff Gondola rises to the top of Sulphur Mountain. It has wide views over the town and the Bow Valley.
- Banff Upper Hot Springs is a public hot pool with mountain views. It is open year-round.
- Lake Minnewanka is a large lake about 15 minutes from town. Boat cruises run in summer.
- Johnston Canyon has a catwalk trail beside waterfalls. It is busy in summer.

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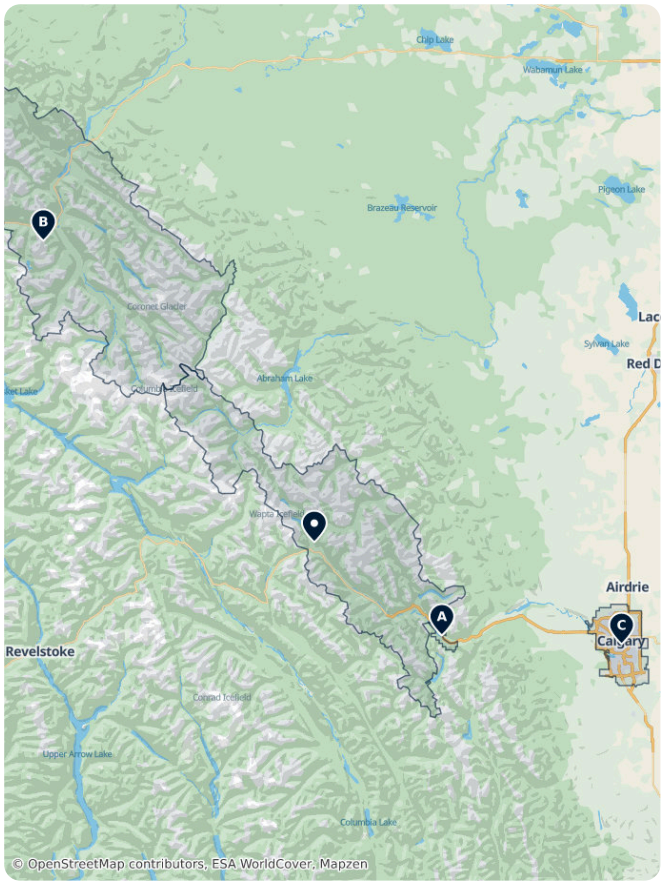
## What to experience

- **Hike a short trail.** Try Johnston Canyon, the Tunnel Mountain trail above town or the Lake Agnes Teahouse trail near Lake Louise.
- **Drive the Icefields Parkway.** The road runs 232 km north to Jasper past glaciers, lakes and viewpoints. Allow a full day each way, with stops.
- **Soak in a hot spring.** Banff Upper Hot Springs is open in all seasons.
- **Ski or snowboard.** Lake Louise Ski Resort, Sunshine Village and Mount Norquay are all inside the park. The season runs from about November to May.
- **Paddle in summer.** Canoes can be rented at Lake Louise, Moraine Lake and Two Jack Lake.
- **Look for wildlife.** Elk are common in town. Bears and bighorn sheep are seen along roads. Keep your distance.

## Day trips

- A Canmore: about 25 minutes by car or bus. A mountain town with cafés, shops and trails, just outside the park.
- **Kananaskis Country**: about 1 hour by car from Banff. It has quieter trails and lakes, and many fewer visitors.
- B Jasper: about 3 hours by car along the Icefields Parkway. The drive is the main reason to go. It passes Bow Lake, Peyto Lake and the Columbia Icefield.
- **Yoho National Park**, British Columbia: about 1 hour from Lake Louise. It has Emerald Lake and Takakkaw Falls in summer.
- C Calgary: about 1.5 hours by car. The nearest large city and the main airport for the park.




## Where to explore

- Lake Louise is the second main base in the park, about 55 km from Banff. It is close to Lake Louise and Moraine Lake.
- Canmore is a town just outside the park gate, with more lodging choices.
- Jasper is the next national park to the north, at the end of the Icefields Parkway.

## Getting there

- **By air**: Calgary International Airport (YYC) is the nearest major airport, about 1.5 hours from Banff by car. Airport shuttle buses run between the airport and Banff.
- **By car**: Banff is on the Trans-Canada Highway, about 130 km west of Calgary. Lake Louise is another 55 km west.
- **By bus**: Scheduled and tour buses run from Calgary to Banff. Roam Transit links Banff, Lake Louise and Canmore. See Roam Transit.
- **Park pass**: Buy a Parks Canada pass before you enter the park. The pass also covers the Icefields Parkway and the Bow Valley Parkway.

## Getting around

- **Public transit**: Roam Transit runs in Banff town and to Lake Louise, Johnston Canyon, the Banff Gondola and Canmore. Route 8X to Lake Louise runs year-round. Extra seasonal routes in summer serve sights such as Lake Minnewanka and the Cave and Basin. See Roam Transit.
- **Lake Louise and Moraine Lake**: Parks Canada shuttles run from mid-May to mid-October (the Moraine Lake service starts on 1 June). Seats must be reserved in advance. Moraine Lake Road is closed to private vehicles all year. Get details at Parks Canada.
- **Ski resorts**: Free shuttles serve the ski areas in winter with a valid lift ticket.
- **On foot and by bike**: The town centre is small and flat. Paths lead to Bow Falls and the Cave and Basin. Rentals are available in town.
- **Taxis and tours**: Taxis and local tour buses are available in Banff.

### Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

**Moderate**

Banff town is small and walkable. Sights in the wider park are far apart and need a bus or car.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

**Moderate**

Paths link the town with nearby sights. Roads in the wider park are long and hilly.

## Driving

- **Is a car worth it?** A car helps for the Icefields Parkway, the Bow Valley Parkway and trailheads away from the transit routes. Roam Transit covers most main sights in summer.
- **Parking**: Parking in Banff town and at lakes and trailheads is limited in summer. Arrive early. Lots at Lake Louise and Johnston Canyon often fill by mid-morning.
- **Winter**: Winter tires or chains are needed on the Icefields Parkway in winter. Check road conditions before you drive.
- **Fuel**: Fuel stations are few on the Icefields Parkway. Fill up in Banff or Lake Louise.

# Food & drink

Banff has a wide range of restaurants, from casual pubs to hotel dining rooms. Alberta beef and bison are common on menus. Banff Avenue has most of the choice. Many places are busy in summer, so book dinner ahead. Tipping of 15 to 20 percent is normal in sit-down restaurants.

## What to eat & drink

### DINNER

**Tourtière**
A savory meat pie, traditionally made with pork, beef, or game, especially popular in Quebec.

### SNACKS & STREET FOOD

**Poutine**
Fries topped with cheese curds and hot gravy, originally from Quebec and now popular nationwide.

**Bannock**
A simple fried or baked bread with roots in Indigenous cooking, found in many regional variations across the country.

**Montreal-style Bagel · Bagel montréalais**
A smaller, sweeter, denser bagel than the New York style, boiled in honey water and baked in a wood-fired oven.

**Maple Syrup · Sirop d'érable**
Syrup tapped from maple trees, mainly in Quebec and Ontario, used on pancakes and in baking and savory dishes alike.

### SWEETS & DESSERTS

**Butter Tart**
A small pastry shell filled with a sweet, gooey butter, sugar, and egg filling, sometimes with raisins or pecans.

**Nanaimo Bar**
A no-bake dessert bar from British Columbia with a chocolate-crumb base, custard filling, and chocolate topping.

### DRINKS

**Caesar**
Canada's signature cocktail: vodka, Clamato juice (tomato and clam broth), and spices, served with a celery stalk.

**Canadian Whisky**
A lighter, smoother style of whisky than Scotch or Bourbon, often blended with rye.

**Ice Wine**
A sweet dessert wine made from grapes frozen on the vine, produced mainly in Ontario's Niagara region and British Columbia's Okanagan Valley.

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## Safety & health

- **Wildlife**: Stay at least 30 m from elk, deer and sheep, and at least 100 m from bears and wolves. Never feed animals. Store food away in a locked car.
- **Bears**: Carry bear spray on trails and know how to use it. Make noise on trails and hike in groups when you can.
- **Weather**: Mountain weather changes fast. Snow can fall in any month at high elevation. Bring warm layers and rain gear even in summer.
- **Altitude and sun**: Banff town is at about 1,400 m. Use sun protection, especially near lakes and snow.
- **Trails**: Check trail and road conditions at the Banff Visitor Centre before you set out. Winter avalanche risk applies on many routes.

## History

The Stoney Nakoda, Ktunaxa, Blackfoot and other Indigenous peoples lived in and used these valleys long before the park existed. Railway workers found the hot springs on Sulphur Mountain in 1883. The hot springs area was set aside as a reserve in 1885 and grew into Canada's first national park.

The railway brought the first tourists, and grand hotels followed. Banff town grew around the park. Today the park is part of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site.

## Country facts

Quick practical facts for Canada at a glance:

CURRENCY
**CAD $**

EMERGENCY
**911**

ELECTRICITY



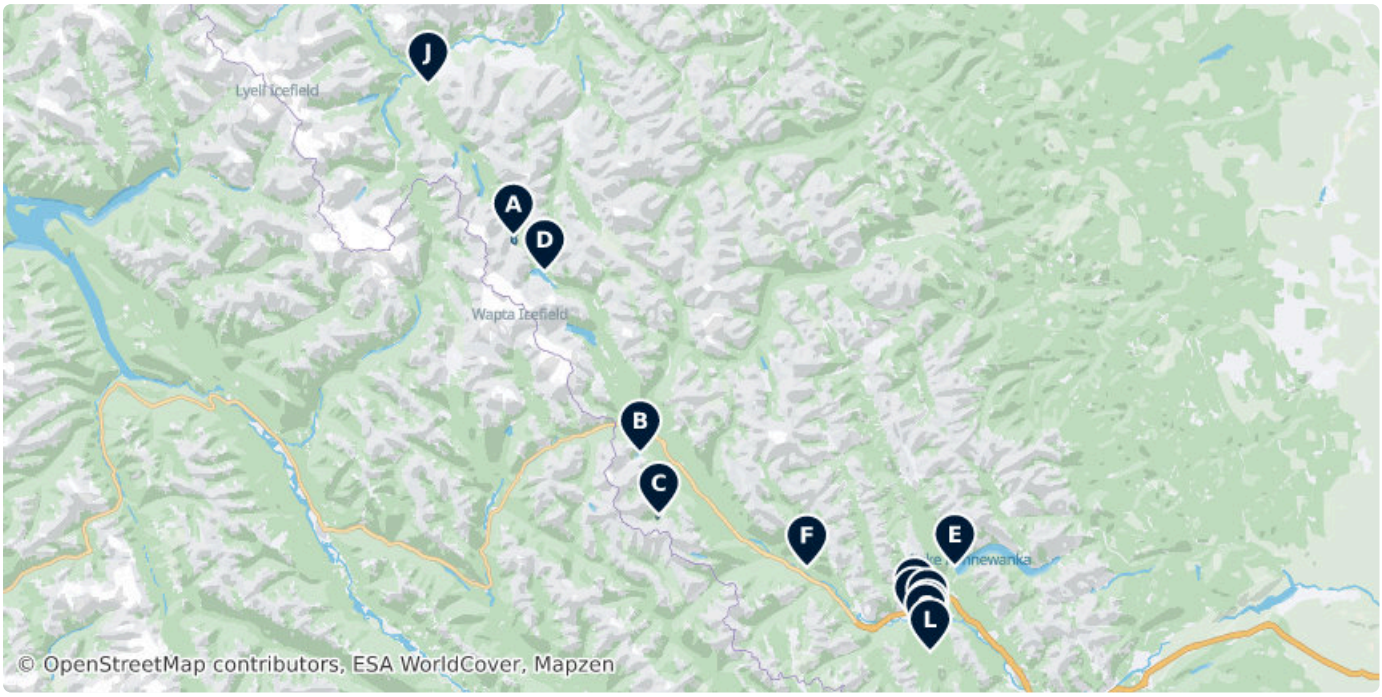
Type A / Type B
120 V · 60 Hz

LANGUAGES
English, French

TAP WATER
**Safe to drink**

# Banff National Park: The Absolute Essentials

Banff National Park, established in 1885, is Canada's oldest national park. It features iconic glacial lakes like Louise and Moraine, the limestone cliffs of Johnston Canyon, and the thermal waters of the Cave and Basin National Historic Site. The park is characterized by the Canadian Rockies' jagged peaks, the Icefields Parkway scenic drive, and diverse ecosystems supporting grizzly bears and elk.

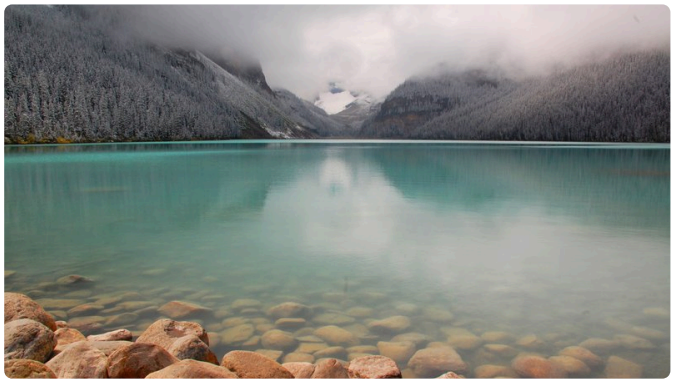





## A Peyto Lake

Glacial lake in the Waputik Range known for its bright turquoise color caused by glacial rock flour. A viewpoint at Bow Summit provides a bird's-eye view of its wolf-like shape.

T0L, Canada (51.72503, -116.52247)



## B Lake Louise

Lake Louise is a glacial lake within Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada.

T0L, Canada (51.41218, -116.22797)

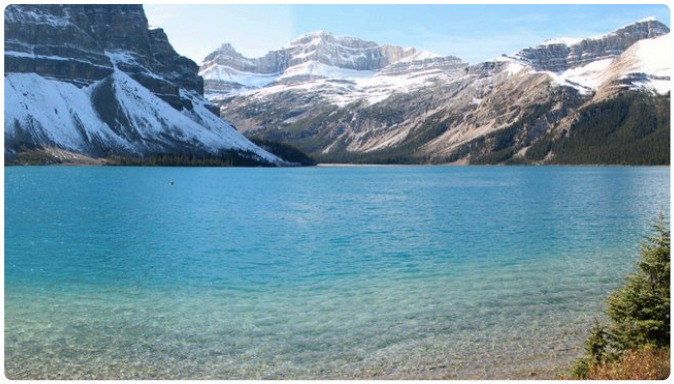
pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/ab/banff/visit/les10-top10/louise



## C Moraine Lake

Moraine Lake is a glacially fed lake in Banff National Park, 14 kilometres outside the village of Lake Louise, Alberta, Canada.

T0L, Canada (51.32193, -116.18498)



## D Bow lake

Glacial lake at the foot of Crowfoot Mountain and Bow Glacier. It is the source of the Bow River and features the historic Num-Ti-Jah Lodge.

31375 Range Road 181A, T0L, Canada (51.67356, -116.45000)

## E Lake Minnewanka Cruise

Guided boat tour on the largest body of water in the park. The route navigates glacial waters toward the Devil's Gap, passing the submerged site of the former Minnewanka Landing resort town.

Minnewanka Trail, Improvement District No. 9, AB, Canada (51.24744, -115.49725)



## F Johnston canyon

Limestone canyon featuring a series of catwalks built into the rock walls. It leads to the Lower and Upper Falls, showcasing dramatic formations and deep blue pools.

(Unnamed Road), T0L, Canada (51.24586, -115.84075)

## G Banff Gondola

Eight-minute aerial ride to the summit of Sulphur Mountain. The top station features a boardwalk to Sanson's Peak and panoramic views of the Bow Valley and six mountain ranges.

T0L, Canada (51.14617, -115.56523)



## H Banff Upper Hot Springs

Public outdoor pool fed by natural mineral-rich thermal waters. Temperatures are maintained between 37°C and 40°C (98°F and 104°F) with views of Mount Rundle.

Mountain Avenue 1, T1L 1K2 Banff (51.15088, -115.56063)

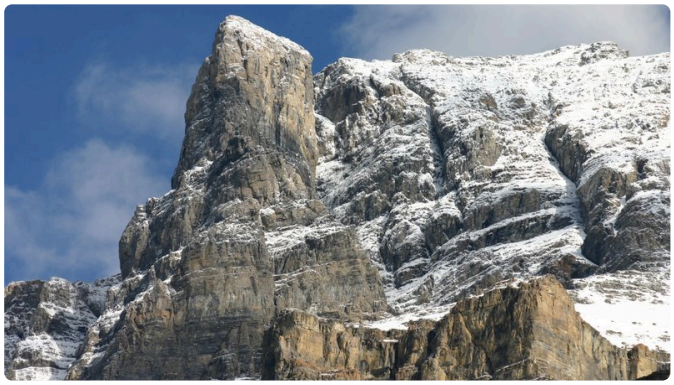
parks.canada.ca/pn-np/ab/banff/sources-banff-springs



## I Bow Falls

Wide waterfall on the Bow River located near the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel. These falls were formed by a change in the river's course through resistant sedimentary rock.

595 Buffalo St, T1L, Canada (51.16741, -115.56090)



## J Mistaya Canyon

Deep, narrow canyon carved through limestone by the Mistaya River. Known for its distinctive circular potholes and swirling water patterns visible from a bridge near the Icefields Parkway.

T0L, Canada (51.94281, -116.72064)



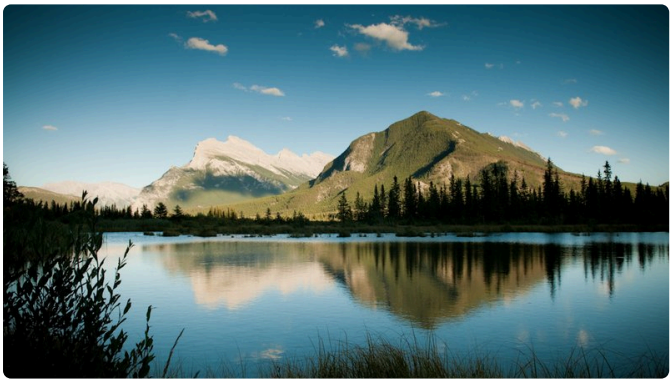
## K Cave & Basin National Historic Site

The Cave and Basin National Historic Site of Canada is located in the town of Banff, Alberta, within the Canadian Rocky Mountains, at the...

T0L, Canada (51.16923, -115.59089)

| | |
|---|---|
| May 15-Oct 15 Mo–Su | 09:00–17:00 |
| Oct 16-May 14 We–Su | 10:00–16:00 |

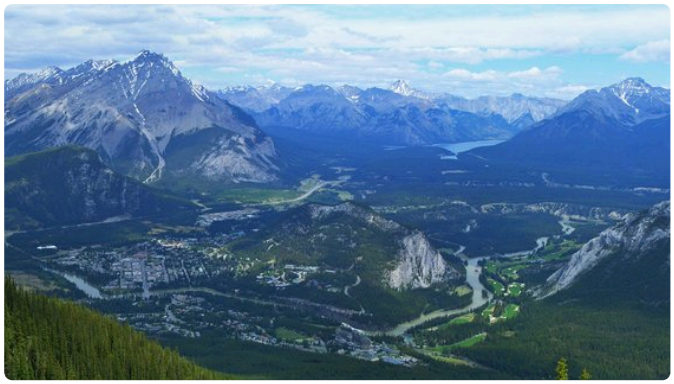
parks.canada.ca/lhn-nhs/ab/caveandbasin



## M Vermilion Lakes

Series of three lakes in the Bow Valley offering views of Mount Rundle. The area is a wetland habitat for bald eagles, herons, and elk, and is a popular spot for photography.

Vermilion Lakes Drive, Improvement District No. 9, AB T1L 1E1, Canada (51.18434, -115.59065)



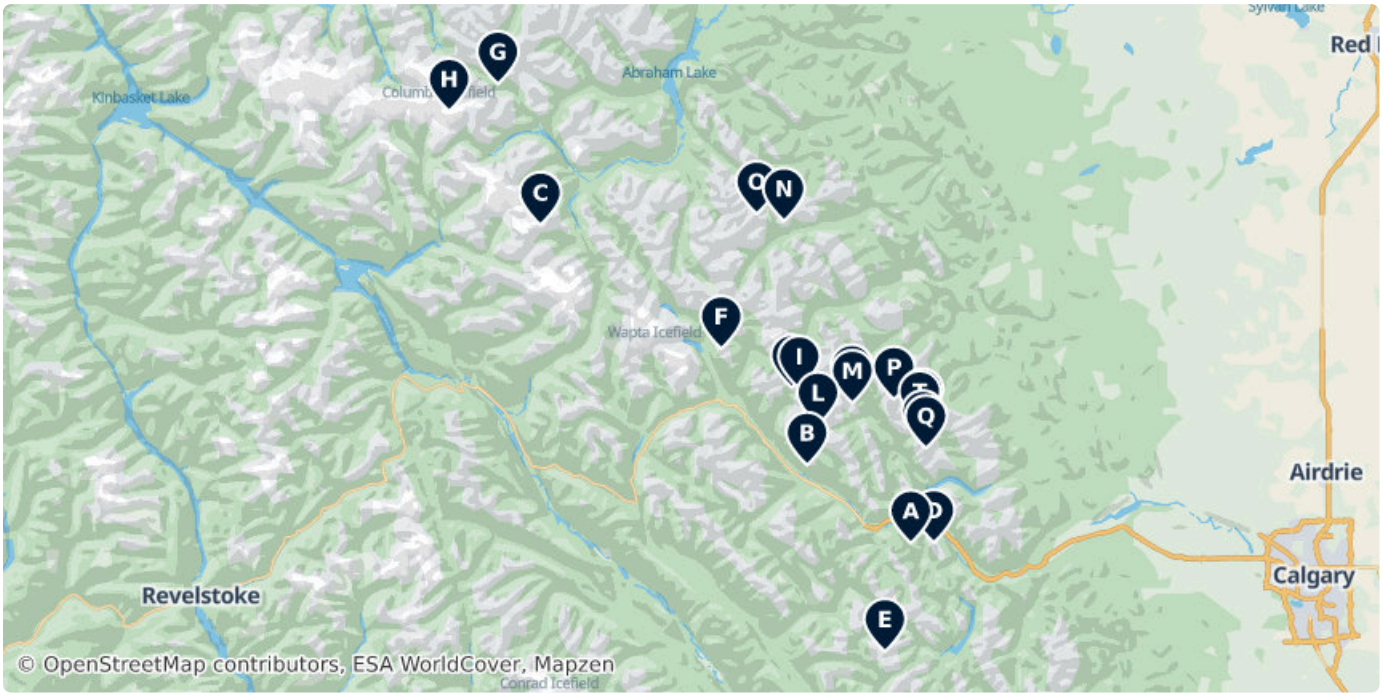
## L Sulphur Mountain

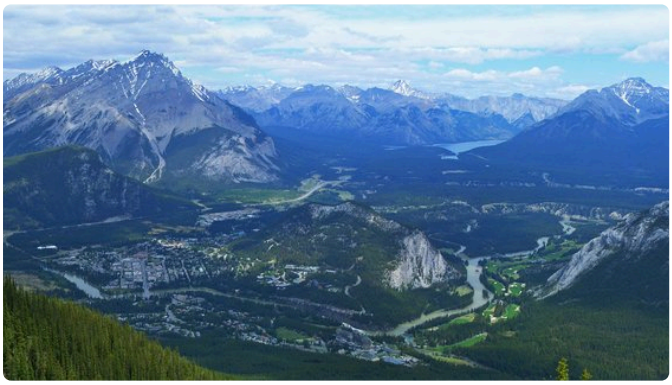
Named for the hot springs on its lower slopes, this 2,451-meter peak offers views of the Sundance Range. It is accessible via an aerial tramway or a 5.5-kilometer hiking trail.

T0L, Canada (51.12362, -115.55503)

# Majestic Mountain Peaks

This collection features the most prominent summits within and surrounding Banff National Park, including the iconic wedge of Mount Rundle and the fortress-like cliffs of Castle Mountain. The list spans from the accessible Sulphur Mountain, home to a historic cosmic ray station, to the remote 3,618-meter Mount Assiniboine, often called the Matterhorn of the Rockies. These peaks represent diverse geological formations, such as the tilted limestone strata of the Sawback and Palliser Ranges and the massive icefields surrounding Castleguard Mountain.



## A Sulphur Mountain

Rising to 2,451 meters, this peak is home to the Banff Gondola and a National Historic Site at the 1903 weather observatory on Sanson's Peak.

T0L, Canada (51.12362, -115.55503)



## B Castle Mountain

A 2,766-meter massif known for its castle-like battlements. It was briefly renamed Mount Eisenhower between 1946 and 1979.

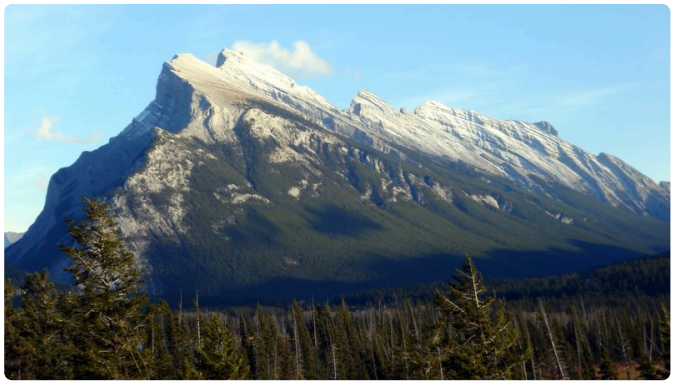
T0L, Canada (51.30530, -115.94030)



## C Mount Forbes

Mount Forbes is the seventh tallest mountain in the Canadian Rockies and the tallest within the boundaries of Banff National Park.

T0L, Canada (51.85970, -116.93170)



## D Mount Rundle

An iconic wedge-shaped peak rising 2,948 meters above the town of Banff, characterized by a sloping western face and a sheer eastern escarpment.

T0L, Canada (51.12458, -115.46919)



## E Mount Assiniboine

Standing at 3,618 meters on the Continental Divide, this peak is nicknamed the Matterhorn of the Rockies due to its distinct pyramidal shape.

T0L, Canada (50.87002, -115.65135)

## F Mount Hector

Mount Hector is a 3,394-metre mountain summit located in the Bow River valley of Banff National Park, in the Canadian Rockies of Alberta,...

T0L, Canada (51.57476, -116.25946)

kananaskistrails.com/mtnheights/mtnheights.php

## G Parker Ridge

A ridge near the Icefields Parkway providing clear views of the Saskatchewan Glacier and the surrounding Columbia Icefield.

T0L, Canada (52.18163, -117.08988)

## H Castleguard Mountain

A 3,090-meter summit at the edge of the Columbia Icefield, notable for housing the entrance to the longest cave system in Canada.

(52.11966, -117.27146)

## I Lychnis Mountain

A 3,119-meter summit located within the Slate Range of the Canadian Rockies, near the Skoki Valley.

T0L, Canada (51.48190, -115.96940)

## J Cuthead Peak

A 2,758-meter peak located within the Vermilion Range of Banff National Park.

T0L, Canada (51.46202, -115.77444)

## K Tilted Mountain

Part of the Slate Range, this 2,618-meter peak is named for the visibly tilted limestone strata that form its summit.

T0L, Canada (51.48500, -115.99780)

## L Badger Peak

A 2,682-meter summit situated within the Sawback Range, north of the Bow Valley.

(51.39797, -115.90027)

## M Vermilion Range

A mountain range in the Canadian Rockies that runs parallel to the Sawback Range and includes several prominent limestone summits.

(51.44917, -115.77233)

## N Indian Lookout

A 2,621-meter summit located near the Saskatchewan River Crossing in the northern section of Banff National Park.

(51.86902, -116.02629)

## O Caterpillar Peak

A 2,771-meter peak belonging to the Murchison Group, situated near the Icefields Parkway.

T0L, Canada (51.88482, -116.12755)

## P Palliser Range

A mountain range northeast of Banff, named after John Palliser, leader of the British North American Exploring Expedition.

(51.45743, -115.61725)

## Q Spectral Peak

A 2,652-meter peak located in the southern section of the Palliser Range.

T0L, Canada (51.34409, -115.49841)

## R Palliser Range

A mountain range northeast of Banff; its highest point is Mount Aylmer at 3,162 meters.

(51.35563, -115.51003)

## S Psychic Peak

A 2,640-meter summit located within the Palliser Range of the Canadian Rockies.

T0L, Canada (51.40623, -115.51180)

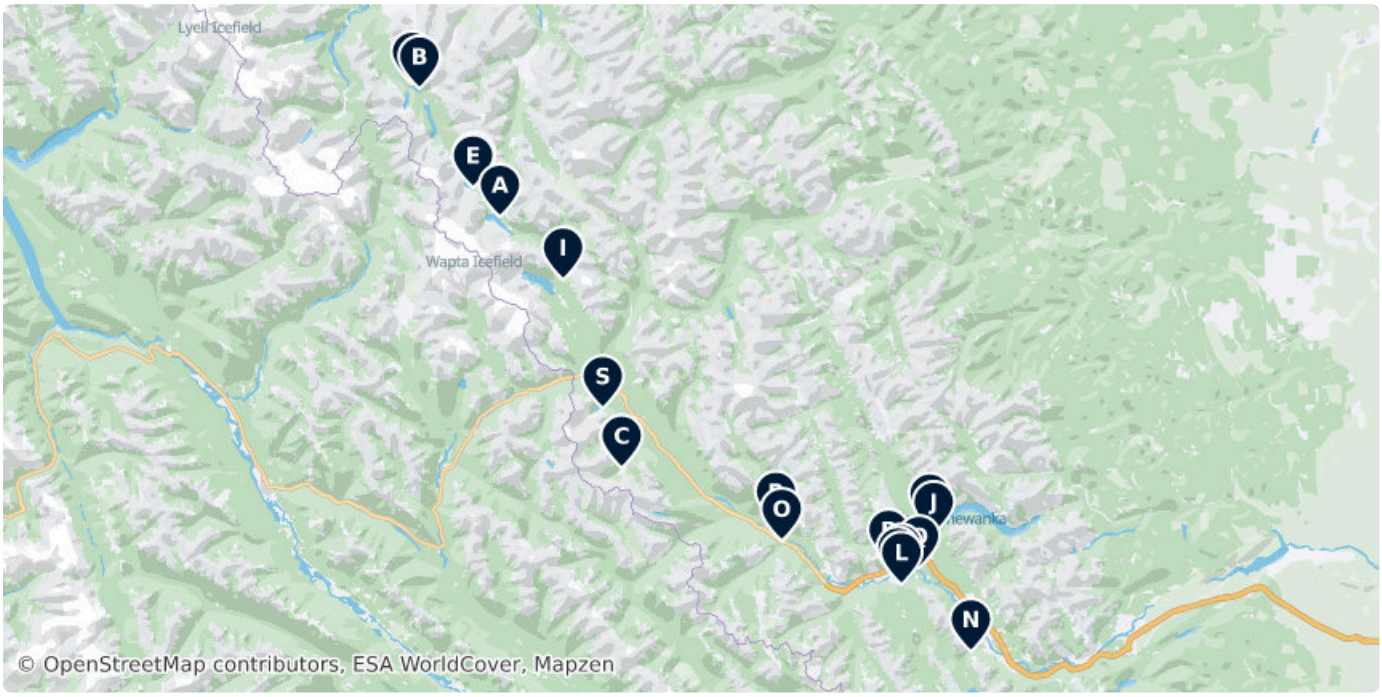
## T Haunted Peak

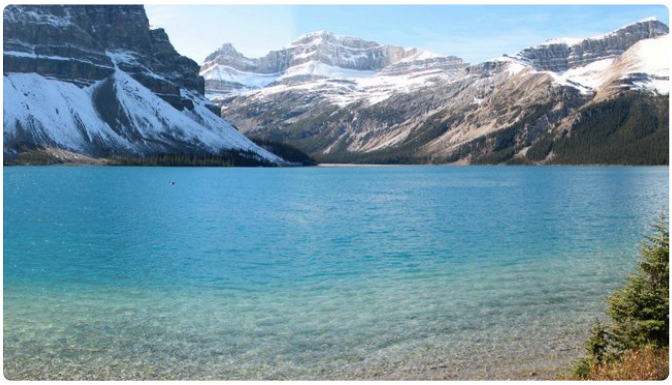
A 2,630-meter peak situated in the Palliser Range, neighboring Psychic and Spectral peaks.

T0L, Canada (51.40125, -115.52141)

# Scenic Viewpoints

This collection highlights key observation points throughout Banff National Park, ranging from roadside stops along the Icefields Parkway to elevated hiking trails. It features the turquoise glacial waters of Moraine and Peyto Lakes, the historic Bow Falls, and the naturally eroded pillars of the Hoodoos. These sites provide perspectives on the region's unique geological features, including the Valley of the Ten Peaks, the Bow River watershed, and the massive limestone faces of Mount Rundle and Castle Mountain.



## A Bow lake

Glacial lake at the base of Bow Summit. It serves as the source of the Bow River and provides views of the Crowfoot Glacier and Wapta Icefield.

31375 Range Road 181A, T0L, Canada
(51.67356, -116.45000)

## B Waterfowl Lake Viewpoint

Roadside stop on the Icefields Parkway featuring views of Mount Chephren's pyramid-shaped peak and the Mistaya River valley.

Icefields Parkway, Improvement District No. 9, AB, Canada
(51.84969, -116.62857)



## C Moraine lake

Glacial lake situated in the Valley of the Ten Peaks at an elevation of 1,884 meters. Its distinct turquoise color comes from light reflecting off rock flour.

T0L, Canada (51.32763, -116.17999)

## D Moraine lake

Glacial lake situated in the Valley of the Ten Peaks at an elevation of 1,884 meters. Its distinct turquoise color comes from light reflecting off rock flour.

(51.32786, -116.18069)

## E Peyto Lake View

Elevated vantage point at Bow Summit, the highest point on the Icefields Parkway, overlooking a glacier-fed lake known for its wolf-like shape.

Caldron Peak Trail, Improvement District No. 9, AB, Canada (51.71402, -116.50946)



## F Peyto Lake - Viewpoint

Elevated vantage point at Bow Summit, the highest point on the Icefields Parkway, overlooking a glacier-fed lake known for its wolf-like shape.

T0L, Canada (51.71753, -116.50751)

## G Waterfowl Lake - Viewpoint North

Northern observation point overlooking the lake and the surrounding peaks of the Mistaya Valley.

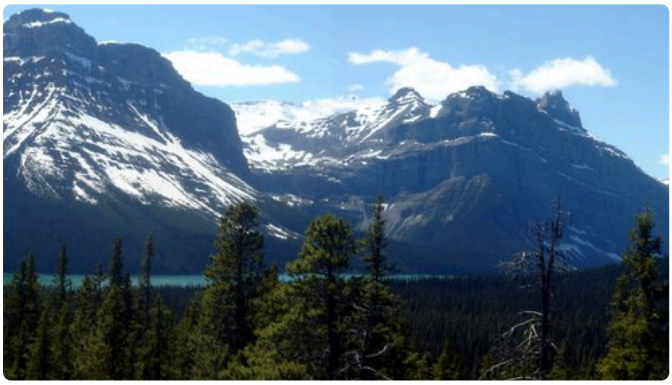
(51.85600, -116.64493)



## H Banff Pedestrian Bridge

Timber-supported bridge spanning the Bow River, connecting the central townsite to the Cascade of Time Garden and trails leading to Bow Falls.

T1L, Canada (51.17275, -115.56823)



## I Hector Lake

The largest natural lake in Banff National Park, named after James Hector, a geologist with the 1850s Palliser Expedition.

30525 Range Road 172A, T0L, Canada
(51.58739, -116.31018)



## J Two Jack Lake

Glacial lake providing clear reflections of Mount Rundle. The site is a popular spot for viewing sunrise and local wildlife.

26351 Lake Minnewanka Scenic Dr, T0L, Canada
(51.23594, -115.48829)

## K Lake Minnewanka Cruise

Guided boat tour on the park's largest lake, offering historical insights into the submerged former village of Minnewanka Landing.

Minnewanka Trail, Improvement District No. 9, AB, Canada (51.24744, -115.49725)



## L Bow falls viewpoint

Observation area for the low, powerful waterfall where the Bow River drops over a layer of resistant limestone near the townsite.

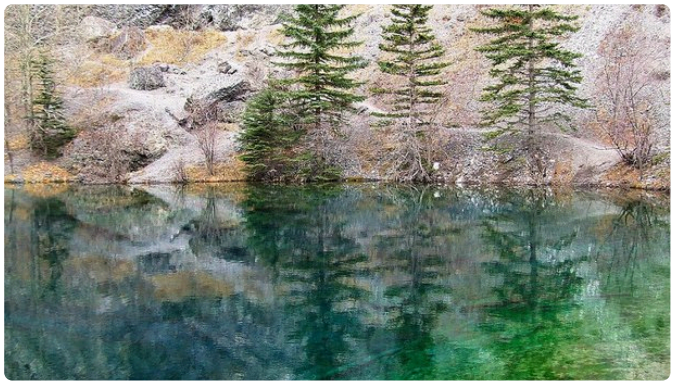
(Unnamed Road), T1L, Canada (51.16598, -115.56020)




## M Tunnel montain Trail

Switchback hiking path leading to the summit of the park's smallest mountain, offering views of the Banff townsite and the Bow Valley.

144 Tunnel Mountain Dr, T0L, Canada (51.17705, -115.56023)



## N First Grassi Lake

Clear, shallow lake known for its vibrant green and blue hues, fed by underground springs and surrounded by ancient reef fossils.

Grassi Lakes Trail, Canmore, AB T1W 2T6, Canada (51.07274, -115.40580)

## O Castle Mountain Lookout

Elevated platform providing views of the 2,766-meter massif, characterized by its fortress-like battlements and horizontal rock layers.

(51.22647, -115.82503)

## P Mount Norquay Lookout

Roadside pull-off on the Mount Norquay access road, offering a panoramic perspective of the town of Banff and the Fairholme Range.

(51.19720, -115.58832)

## Q Path to Hoodoos

Trail leading to a series of naturally eroded pillars made of glacial silt and clay, topped with harder rock caps.

(51.18857, -115.52104)

## R Johnston Creek Valley

Area featuring deep limestone canyons, multiple waterfalls, and the unique Ink Pots mineral springs.

(51.24989, -115.83780)

## S Fairview Lookout

Hiking trail vantage point on the side of Mount Fairview, providing an elevated view of Lake Louise and the Fairmont Chateau.

(51.41008, -116.22184)

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