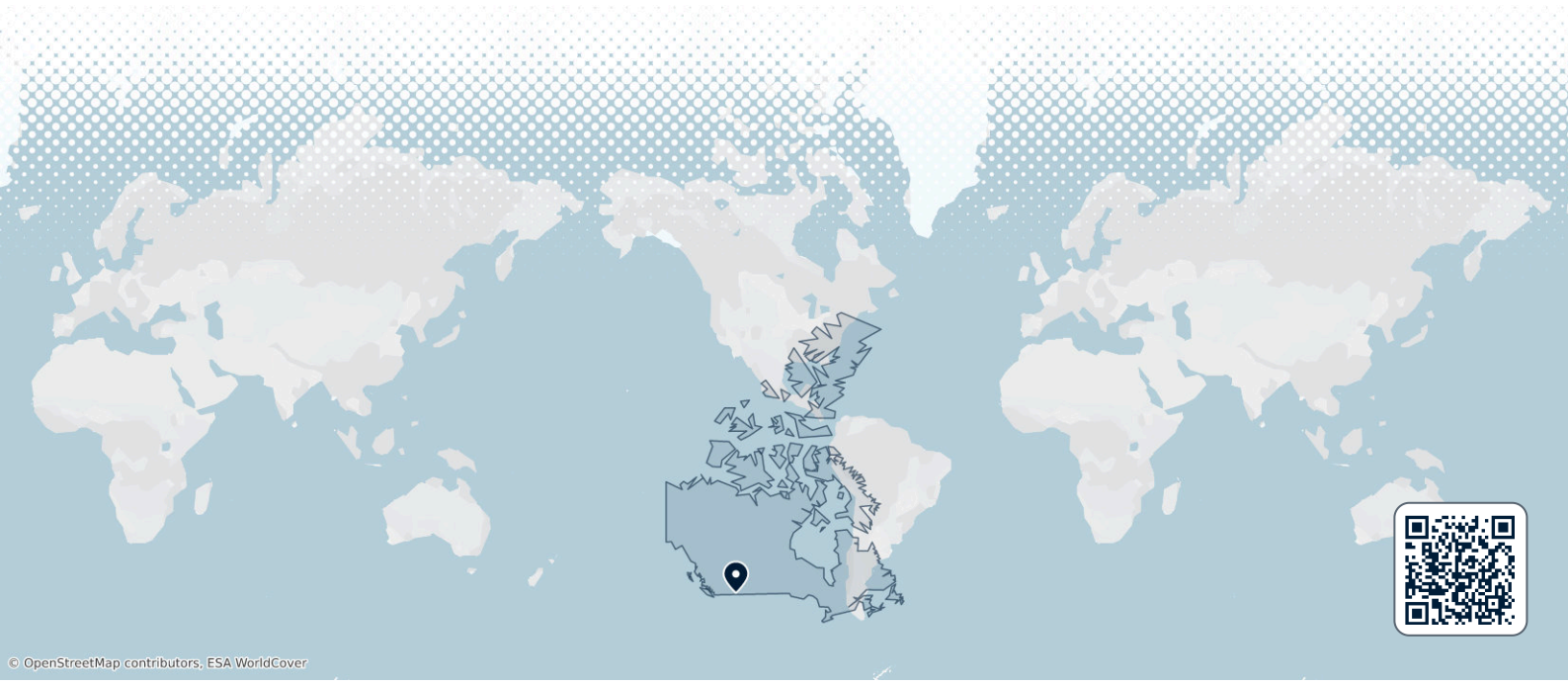


# Fernie

British Columbia · Canada

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



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## Overview

Fernie is a small mountain town in the Elk Valley of southeast British Columbia, in the Canadian Rockies. The Lizard Range rises directly above the town, and the Elk River runs through the valley. The town grew around coal mining and is now known for powder skiing.

Most visitors come in winter for Fernie Alpine Resort, a few minutes south of downtown. In summer the same slopes serve hikers and mountain bikers. The town has a compact historic centre with brick buildings, cafes and a few small museums.

Plan a long weekend for a ski trip. For summer, two to four days is enough for trails, the river and the town.

## When to visit

Winter is the main season. Fernie Alpine Resort opens in early December, conditions permitting, and runs into spring. Mountain snow is deep, and January is cold, with nights often below -10 C.

July and August are the warmest and driest months and the best time for hiking and biking. Lifts and bike trails run in summer, and high trails are mostly clear of snow from July to September.

Spring and late autumn are quiet. Snow can fall on the mountain in any month, and some businesses close for a few weeks.

| MONTH | CONDITIONS | DAY °C avg / max | NIGHT °C avg / min | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| January | Good<br>Good for skiing | -3° / 4°<br>Feels like -7° | -11° / -24° | 20 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| February | Good<br>Good for skiing | -2° / 4°<br>Feels like -6° | -11° / -24° | 16 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| March | Good<br>Good for skiing | 2° / 6°<br>Feels like -2° | -7° / -17° | 20 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| April | Fair<br>Fair for skiing | 7° / 16°<br>Feels like 3° | -2° / -10° | 18 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| May | Fair<br>Fair for cycling | 15° / 24° | 5° / -1° | 18 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| June | Good<br>Good for sightseeing | 20° / 27° | 9° / 4° | 18 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| July | Great<br>Great for sightseeing | 25° / 32° | 12° / 7° | Dry air · Calm winds |
| August | Great<br>Great for sightseeing | 25° / 32° | 12° / 7° | Dry air · Calm winds |
| September | Good<br>Good for sightseeing | 20° / 30° | 8° / 2° | 12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| October | Fair<br>Fair for cycling | 11° / 21°<br>Feels like 8° | 2° / -6° | 15 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| November | Good<br>Good for skiing | 2° / 8°<br>Feels like -2° | -5° / -16° | 20 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| December | Good<br>Good for skiing | -3° / 4°<br>Feels like -8° | -11° / -24° | 21 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |

Best months: July, August

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

## Top sights

- Fernie Alpine Resort is the main reason to visit. It sits on Ski Hill Road, south of town, and has five alpine bowls. The resort has a vertical drop of about 1,080 m. In summer, lifts serve hiking and bike trails.
- Downtown Fernie is the historic centre. Brick buildings from the early 1900s hold shops, cafes and restaurants. The compact grid is easy to walk.
- Fernie Museum is in a former bank building. It tells the story of the town, its coal mines and the 1908 fire. Check opening hours before you go.
- The Arts Station is a community arts centre on 1st Avenue, with a gallery and events.
- The Fernie Ghostrider is a rider-shaped mark on the cliffs of Mount Hosmer above the town. It is tied to a local legend. Look for it from downtown on a clear day.
- Maiden Lake is a small lake at the north edge of town with a short, flat loop. It suits a quiet walk.
- The Elk River runs beside town. Rafting, fishing and riverside walks are popular in summer.

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## What to experience

- **Ski the bowls.** Fernie Alpine Resort is known for powder and open alpine terrain. Runs suit all levels, but the bowls reward strong skiers.
- **Try cat or backcountry skiing.** Guided trips run in the surrounding ranges. Go with a guide unless you have avalanche training.
- **Ride the bike park.** Lifts carry riders up the mountain in summer. Trails near town also suit cross-country riders. Bike shops downtown rent and repair bikes.
- **Hike the Lizard Range.** Trails lead to alpine lakes and ridges. Island Lake and Mount Proctor are two options.
- **Float or fish the Elk River.** The river is known for fly fishing. Use a local guide for rafting.
- **Walk the old town.** A loop of downtown streets takes about an hour and passes the museum, the arts centre and several heritage buildings.

## Day trips

- **Sparwood**: A small mining town about 30 minutes north. It is known for the World's Biggest Truck, a huge mining haul truck on display.
- **Lake Koocanusa**: A long reservoir southwest of Fernie, near the US border, popular for boating and fishing in summer.
- **Cranbrook**: The nearest larger town, about 1 hour west, with the airport and more shops.

## Where to explore

- Kootenay National Park is a mountain park to the west, reached by road via Cranbrook and Radium Hot Springs.
- Waterton Lakes National Park is a national park to the east, across the Alberta border.

## Getting there

- **By air**: Cranbrook airport (YXC) is about 1 hour away by car, with limited flights. Calgary International Airport (YYC) is about 3 hours away and has many more flights. Kalispell, Montana, is about 2 hours away.
- **By car from Alberta**: Take Highway 3 (the Crowsnest Highway) west over the Crowsnest Pass. Calgary is about 3 hours away, and Banff about 4 hours.
- **By car from BC**: Highway 3 also links Fernie with Cranbrook, about 1 hour west. Vancouver is about 11 hours away.
- **By bus or train**: There is no passenger rail. Scheduled bus service is limited, so a car or airport shuttle is the practical option.
- **Official information**: See Tourism Fernie.

## Getting around

- **On foot**: Downtown is small and flat, and most shops and restaurants are within a short walk. The ski resort is not walkable from town.
- **By car**: A car is useful for the resort, trailheads and day trips. Parking is limited at the resort on busy winter days.
- **Shuttles and buses**: A shuttle serves the ski hill in winter. Check the current schedule before you rely on it.
- **By bike**: Town streets and nearby trails suit cycling in summer. Bike shops downtown rent bikes.
- **Taxis**: A few taxis and airport shuttles operate. Book ahead for early flights.

### Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

**Moderate**

Downtown is compact and flat. The ski resort and trailheads are a short drive away.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

**Moderate**

Town is easy to ride in summer. Trails and the bike park suit confident riders.

## Driving

- **Is a car worth it?** Yes for day trips and trailheads. If you stay in town and ski, you can manage without one.
- **Highway 3**: This is the only main road. It crosses mountain passes, and winter conditions can change fast.
- **Winter**: Use winter tires and carry a shovel, blankets and water. Check DriveBC before you set out.
- **Resort parking**: Arrive early on weekends and holidays. Parking at the base can fill up.
- **Fuel**: Fill up in Fernie before long drives. Services are far apart in the valley.

## Safety & health

Fernie is a safe town. Mountain weather and snow are the main risks.

In winter, stay inside resort boundaries unless you have avalanche training, a transceiver, a probe, a shovel and a partner. Check the Avalanche Canada forecast before any backcountry trip. Ski patrol closes terrain for a reason.

Bears and cougars live in the valley. Carry bear spray on trails and keep food secure. Keep your distance from all wildlife.

Rivers are cold and fast, especially in the spring melt. Weather can turn within an hour in the mountains, so bring layers. Phone signal is weak on many trails.

## History

The Elk Valley is the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa people.

Coal brought settlers in the late 1890s, and William Fernie, a prospector and mine developer, gave the town its name. A large fire destroyed most of the town in 1908. It was rebuilt in brick and stone, and much of that downtown remains.

Coal mining is still important in the valley. The ski resort opened later, and tourism now sits beside mining in the local economy.

## 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**

## DATA SOURCES

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