



BANFF NATIONAL PARK

This 6,641-square-km (2,564-square-mile) national park encompasses some of the world's most magnificent scenery. The snowcapped peaks of the Rocky Mountains form a spectacular backdrop for glacial lakes, fast-flowing rivers, and endless forests. Deer, moose, elk, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, black and grizzly bears, wolves, and cougars inhabit the park's vast wilderness, while the human species is concentrated in the picture-postcard town of Banff and the village of Lake Louise—two of North America's most famous vacation destinations. One of the park's greatest drawing cards is the accessibility of its natural wonders. Most highlights are close to the road system. But adventurous visitors can follow an excellent system of hiking trails to alpine lakes, along glacial valleys, and to spectacular viewpoints where crowds are scarce and human impact has been minimal.

Many visitors planning a trip to the national park don't realize that the town of Banff is a bustling commercial centre within the park itself. The town's location is magnificent. It is spread out along the Bow River, extending to the lower slopes of Sulphur Mountain to the south and Tunnel Mountain to the east. In one direction is the towering face of Mount Rundle, and in the other, framed by the buildings along Banff Avenue, is Cascade Mountain. Hotels and motels line the north end of Banff Avenue, while a profusion of shops, boutiques, cafes, and restaurants hugs the south end. Some people are happy walking along the crowded streets or shopping in a truly unique setting; those

more interested in some peace and quiet can easily slip into pristine wilderness just a five-minute walk from town. A short drive north, Lake Louise, which is regarded as one of the seven natural wonders of the world, is rivalled for sheer beauty only by Moraine Lake, just down the road. Just north of Lake Louise, the Icefields Parkway begins its spectacular course alongside the Continental Divide to Jasper National Park.

Although the valleys of the Canadian Rockies became ice free nearly 8,000 years ago and native people periodically have hunted in the area since that time, the story of Banff National Park really began with the arrival of the railroad to the area in the 1880s. Word of soothing hot springs soon got out, and the government encouraged visitors to the Cave and Basin as an ongoing source of revenue to support the new railway. A reserve was established around the springs and two years later, in 1887, the reserve was expanded and renamed Rocky Mountains Park. It was primarily a business enterprise centred on the unique springs and catering to wealthy patrons of the railway, but has evolved into Banff National Park, one of the world's most famous and most visited parks.

Bow Lake (opposite)