



The striking glacier-fed Moraine Lake is a popular detour off the Icefields Parkway



GLOBAL.

# COLUMBIA ICEFIELDS PARKWAY


Traversing a magical swathe of the Canadian Rockies, the Icefields Parkway is best taken at a glacial pace. *Alegria Alano* pumps the brakes on this iconic scenic drive between the atmospheric alpine towns of Jasper and Banff, and discovers the top ways to get a mountain high.

PHOTOGRAPHY JULIAN REYES





“DASHBOARD VIEWS ARE TRULY EPIC, SO YOU’D BE FORGIVEN FOR DETOURING NO FURTHER THAN THE ROADSIDE SHOULDER.”

 @alegriaalano

**A**s our car idled at the junction of Highways 16 and 93, I measured my racing heartbeat against the metronome of the ticking indicator. Few traffic stops elicit such excitement, but we were about to turn onto the Columbia Icefields Parkway – regarded as one of the most scenic alpine drives in the world, bookended with mountain towns adept at catering to visitors’ wild tastes. Connecting Jasper in the north to Banff and Lake Louise in the south, the 230km highway passes through Jasper and Banff National Parks. It’s a three-hour drive, without pausing, but most people take a day to meander along the route and stay a few nights to soak up the alpine-town charm at either end. The drive is best in summer or shoulder seasons: winter snow makes driving more treacherous and

services along the road close. To do it justice, hire a car, start early and take it slow. If plans allow, driving the road both ways is highly recommended.

#### STOCK UP THE CAR

Local eateries know that the great outdoors is the main drawcard of the region, and many offer takeaway options just as enticing as their dine-in menus.

For our start in Jasper, we pack sandwiches from Maligne Canyon Wilderness Kitchen. Be warned – it’s a challenge not to succumb to the scent of smoked meats. “As a smokehouse, we are focused on featuring Alberta meats. This includes brisket, bison and beef rib,” says Executive Sous Chef Tim Barath. “The brisket can be found in everything we create, including sandwiches, baked beans and our comforting signature chilli.” For something sweet, follow the scent of baked goods to The Other Paw, where we take owner Kimberly Stark’s

recommendation of irresistible raspberry white chocolate scones for the road.

#### ON THE ROAD

Dashboard views are truly epic, so you’d be forgiven for detouring no further than the roadside shoulder – although seeing most sights up close only requires a short walk from a car park. If you’re feeling intrepid, there’s also the option to spend a night camping or to hike to secluded huts.

There’s no shortage of stops for both food and scenery. From Jasper, our first stop is Mount Edith Cavell for a stroll, coffee in hand, to see the stunning Angel Glacier hanging over Cavell Pond. Next, the Valley of the Five Lakes gives us our first sight of water tinted an otherworldly blue. Lakes lead to waterfalls: Athabasca, and Sunwapta further up the road. The latter is my must-visit – it’s a short walk to the lookout where you’ll see a picturesque island of pines, completely encircled by cascades rushing over the falls.

Rules and regulations around international travel are fast-changing – always check [smartraveller.com.au](http://smartraveller.com.au) and with local consulates before you jet off.



GLOBAL.

CLOCKWISE: Sulphur Mountain above Banff; smokehouse fare at Maligne Canyon Wilderness Kitchen; Athabasca Falls; beer and bites at Jasper Brewing Co.; Glacier View Lodge on the edge of Athabasca Glacier





**CLOCKWISE:** Kananaskis; the Banff Gondola; Banff city centre; resort lodgings in Banff; Glacier View Lodge; Maligne Lake; roadtrip provisions from Valbella Gourmet Foods; Fairmont Château Lake Louise (centre)







There are plenty of picnic tables to choose from at Sunwapta Falls for lunch, or head to nearby Goats and Glacier Viewpoint where – as the name suggests – you may get to see mountain goats as well as fabulous Rockies views.

Our next stop is Athabasca Glacier on the Columbia Icefield. The surrounding moonscape, howling wind and groans of cracking ice makes it feel more isolated than the kilometre walk from the car park. We take the chance to get cosy and refuel with Alberta beef chilli and a side of poutine from the Chalet before a night of camping, s'mores and craft beer from Jasper Brewing Co.

**LAKE LOVE**

Our camp was strategically close to Moraine Lake and Lake Louise – as these are the most popular glacier-fed lakes, an early start is crucial. Don't let crowds deter you though; the views are breathtaking.

We take in the small but spectacular Moraine Lake, before heading to Lake Louise and its crown jewel, Fairmont Château Lake Louise. It's easily a top accommodation pick, if only for the chance to wake up to that famous view.

If you're just after a meal, there are seven establishments serving classic-meets-contemporary Canadian fare. If staying overnight, a morning hike up to Lake Agnes offers a bird's-eye view of Lake Louise and a chance to sample teas at the historic Lake Agnes Tea House, overlooking yet another crystalline lake.

**WORTHY DETOURS**

There are many more wonders to explore while in the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Canadian Rockies. Maligne Lake and Miette Hot Springs are two favourite excursions near Jasper. On the southern end, dip across the provincial border to Yoho National Park and Emerald Lake.

Or take the stunning drive out towards Calgary to Kananaskis Country, where trails are less busy than on the Parkway. You'll pass the town of Canmore, which offers great packed lunch options from Valbella Gourmet Foods, Rocky Mountain Bagel Co. or Communita Cafe.

**APRÈS ROADTRIP**

Jasper has plenty to warrant an extended stay, or finish your drive in Banff, where you'll likely discover you're never far from an expat (many Australians landed in Canada because of its laid-back culture, trading sand for snow).

Aligned to capture a perfect view of

Cascade Mountain, Banff Avenue is the place for shopping and dining. Detour down Bear Street for more boutiques, galleries and restaurants, as well as the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

For a drink, Park offers Alpine Dry

Gin, distilled with glacial water and hand-picked Canadian spruce tips. For regional fare, The Bison's signature bison short ribs are a must.

Banff also serves up a medley of international eateries. Sample a Louisiana breakfast at Tooloulou's while you sip on a Caesar, Canada's answer to a bloody Mary. You can also go Greek at the Balkan Restaurant, warm up with a bowl of *tantan men* at Ramen Arashi, or fill up on wood-fired, clay-oven curry at Masala.

The Columbia Icefields Parkway is the epitome of the old adage prizing the journey over the destination. And here, an unhurried pace is its own reward. ✂

*The writer drove the Columbia Icefields Parkway in October 2019 and June 2020.*

“THE CHÂTEAU IS EASILY A TOP ACCOMMODATION PICK, IF ONLY FOR THE CHANCE TO WAKE UP TO THAT FAMOUS VIEW.”

**d.** [delicious.com.au/travel](https://delicious.com.au/travel)  
For more international destinations to inspire.