



Spirit Island is an iconic sight on Jasper National Park's Maligne Lake, the largest glacier-fed lake in the Canadian Rockies, and a photographer's dream. GETTY IMAGES

Glorious Jasper delivers family-friendly adventure

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

As we paddle to the centre of Lac Beauvert, in Jasper National Park, I feel a wave of patriotism sink in.

There's an intense beauty here. It's raw and rugged, and a little overwhelming. Clear emerald water beneath us; soaring snow-capped peaks above. On the sprawling grassy shore, just in front of the stone-and-timber Jasper Park Lodge, the Canadian flag dances in the breeze.

It's a postcard perfect, Instagram-worthy scene that is destined to inspire wanderlust. Even our ever-chatty five-year-old daughter sits in silence, content and mesmerized watching a pair of loons swoop and dive below the lake's surface in search of lunch.

There's a vast openness in Jasper and the scenery is staggering. After the snowmelt, the park's colours are intensely vibrant. It's a photographer's dream. Groves of birch trees burst with leaves that shimmer in sunlight, and the surrounding charcoal mountain ranges forever catch your eye. I'm told that the wildflowers begin to bloom in mid-July, which I can only imagine add to the magic.

Mountain towns in the Canadian Rockies are renowned for offering the ultimate in outdoor adventure. If you're into the extreme, you'll find everything from heli-hiking and rock-climbing, to whitewater rafting, double-black diamond mountain biking and backcountry camping.

However, if a more moderate pace is preferred, there are myriad options as well. Our family merely dabbles in the great outdoors and we definitely prefer creature comforts. For us, the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge was the perfect choice.

With its sprinkling of cabins that wrap around the lake, it has the relaxed feel of a summer camp, yet all the amenities of a full-service resort. And kids love this place. My daughter enjoyed roasting marshmallows in our in-suite fireplace, swimming for hours in the lake-front pool, playing in the indoor kids zone, and being gifted not one, but two toys from the humongous treasure chest located in the lodge lobby.

Venturing outside the 700-acre resort allowed us to explore the pristine wilderness that is Jasper National Park. We began our sightseeing with a ride on the Jasper Skytram, which brought us up Whistlers Mountain, to an elevation of 2,277 metres.

The view from here is a visual feast of turquoise and sapphire glacier-fed lakes and rivers; six mountain ranges and the town of Jasper in the distance below. As my

IF YOU GO

You'll find peak season — June through September — much pricier and busier in Jasper National Park. If you can, travel in May or October, when there's less of a crowd but still the chance for great weather.

In fact, you can even spend less at the Fairmont in shoulder season than you would at a budget hotel in August. We hit the jackpot on the May long weekend this year, with temperatures in the mid-20s, and a town and attractions that felt almost empty. If you're looking for a mid-range cabin-style resort, the Patricia Lake Bungalows are located a mere five-minutes from Pyramid Lake, and are a great option for families.

daughter isn't quite ready for alpine hiking we hung out on the observation deck and grabbed a quick bite at the Summit Restaurant.

Another must-see landmark, just outside of town, is Pyramid Lake, at the base of Pyramid Mountain. We grabbed a few sandwiches from the Patricia St. Deli in Jasper and picnicked on the beach. The water was freezing, but kids waded in the shallows and built sandcastles on the shore.

Sadly we had to cancel the Maligne Lake Boat Tour due to a stubborn layer of ice that hadn't yet melted. This 90-minute cruise explores the largest glacier-fed lake in the Canadian Rockies. I'm told the highlight is a visit to Spirit Island, which is considered to be one

of the most photographed spots in the world.

Wildlife viewing is also a huge draw to the park. Knowing this, we searched in earnest and kept our eyes glued to the dense brush bordering the roadside. On our four-day trip we spotted mountain goats, big horn sheep, elk, deer, a coyote and a brown bear — all from the safety of our car.

Go it on your own, as we did with recommendations on the best locations from hotel staff or book an evening wildlife tour. It's usually a three-hour affair, and children are welcome.

If it fits with your plans, travel to Jasper along the Icefields Parkway — a stunningly scenic highway that connects the national park with Lake Louise in Banff National Park.

Along the route, we stopped a dozen times to take photos and marvel at the view. Highlights of the journey include watching the resident mountain goats and big horn sheep that graze at the side of the road, walking to the base of the immense Athabasca glacier, and stepping out onto the glass-floor of the Glacier Skywalk, suspended high above the Sunwapta Valley. Be prepared for a slow go, as traffic jams caused by wildlife sightings can create quite the backup.

And remember Canada's national parks are free in 2017 for Canada150.

The writer was a guest of the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge. No one from the company read or approved of this story before publication. Mhairri Woodhall is a freelance writer who can be reached at arrivalstravel.com



Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge overlooks Lac Beauvert. GETTY IMAGES



Wildlife viewing is a big draw to the scenic park. CURT WOODHALL

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