

Backpacking in the Rockies



Highlights

Hike through the alpine meadows and around the stunning mountain lakes of the Canadian mountains! Camping along the way, this backpacking in the Rockies adventure is your own slice of wilderness heaven!

With towering snowcapped peaks – the highest of which stands at a whopping 14440 feet above sea level, meadows strewn with wildflowers and rivers that carve through the land, Canada's Rocky Mountains make for an awe-inspiring holiday. And the Skoki region, with its lakes, and grassy pastures, is great for backpacking. The wildlife is pretty eye-catching too – elk, moose and bears all call this part of the world home. The whole area stretches just short of 3000 miles and runs from British Columbia down to New Mexico in the USA.

If you're new to backpacking, or just fancy a short break into the wilderness, this four-day tour strikes just the right balance. You'll spend your days exploring the Skoki region in Banff National Park and getting back to basics with campsite accommodation set high in The Rockies. Feast your eyes on sights like Ptarmigan Lake – a striking pool of blue in a basin framed by mountains, steep grassy slopes and towering pines. Then there's Red Deer river and lakes. Surrounded by a wide-open blanket of firs that skirt up to the foot of soaring mountain peaks, they – and the rest of this area - make for a seriously impressive day's backpacking.

Is it for me?

You don't need to have the fitness levels of Mr Motivator to get the most out of this backpacking holiday. However, you will need a decent level of fitness, as you will be carrying all of your own gear with you for the duration of the trip. You will also need to be happy camping as there are no hotels on this tour. So, as long as you pack light and have an open-minded and friendly attitude (you'll be travelling in a small group) we think you'll have a great time!

Accommodation

You'll be staying at campsites in modern one-and-two person tents while on the backpacking tour. If you need accommodation in Canmore before or after the trip, the team can arrange something for you, or you can sort something out yourself.

In terms of food, all your meals, snacks and drinks are included from lunch on the first day to lunch on the last day. Usually on the evening of the last day, groups go out in Canmore with the guide for something to eat but this is at your own cost. If you've got a special dietary requirement, please let the team know in advance.

Itinerary

Day 1: Lake Louise to Hidden Lake. At 8.30am meet at the office in Canmore. You'll go over the trip and check to see you're properly outfitted. Once packed, you'll drive for just under an hour, west to Lake Louise.

The hike starts at the Fish Creek parking lot and after four kilometres of ski area road you'll hit the trail which you'll follow for a further three kilometres up Corral Creek to the Halfway Hut - a historic log cabin used as a shelter for travellers en-route to Skoki Lodge in the old days. Just beyond is your first campsite. Hidden Lake, set in a spectacular bowl beneath the rocky ramparts of Mount Richardson, isn't far away, so you can go for a walk once you've set up camp.

Prices from

585 GBP (4 days) per person

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Day 2: Hidden Lake to Merlin Meadows Today is a classic day of backpacking in the Canadian Rockies as you continue up valley to Boulder Pass. Just beyond, Ptarmigan Lake stretches away to the east, surrounded by expansive alpine meadows and rocky peaks. You'll walk along and above the lake to reach the trail that will lead you over Deception Pass and down into the Skoki Valley. Dropping quickly into the forested valley, you'll cross a couple of meadows before coming to the historic Skoki Lodge - built in the 1920s by the Canadian Pacific Railroad. After stopping for a cup of tea it's only another kilometer of downhill hiking until you get to the Merlin Meadows and your camp for the night.

From the campsite it's only 2.6 kilometres of hiking across open meadows to Merlin Lake - another beautiful alpine lake in an unbeatable setting. You can either do this in the afternoon or save it for the next morning.

Day 3: Merlin Meadows to Baker Lake. One of the good features of this region is its complicated topography which allows for a couple of different options today. Your primary goal is the campsite at the outlet of Baker Lake - though if the weather turns bad you may opt for Red Deer Lakes further east. Either way, you'll most likely continue down valley until the trail skirts around Skoki Mountain taking you into the huge open, meadow-filled headwaters of the Red Deer River. You hike past the Red Deer Lakes climbing slowly to Cotton Grass Pass and the head of Baker Creek. Again, you'll spend most of your time out of the forest travelling across meadows surrounded by endless mountains.

Day 4: Baker Lake to Lake Louise. Baker Lake, with its meadow setting, is an amazing place. On this, your final day you'll have time to explore the area, before heading back past Ptarmigan Lake and over Boulder Pass and down to Lake Louise to return to Canmore.

Details

Getting there

The nearest airport to Canmore is Calgary and flights leave the UK from London Heathrow and Glasgow.

Canmore is situated 100km (65 miles) west of Calgary on the Trans-Canada Highway. It is well served by scheduled bus lines both from Calgary (airport and downtown), Banff (20km west) and points further west. Calgary International Airport is well connected to major cities throughout North America and Europe. Once in Canmore we will supply all transport needed for the trip.

Frequent shuttles connect Calgary International Airport and Canmore. Greyhound Bus Lines (1 800 661 8747) serves Canmore from points east and west along the Trans-Canada Highway. Call 609 8790, 609 0300, 609 1490 or 609 8505 for taxis in Canmore.

Price includes

Includes guides, park fees, group camping gear and local transfers. Also includes the 5% Canadian Goods & Services Tax (GST)

All meals and trail snacks from lunch on Day 1 to lunch on Day 4 are included. Groups generally go out for dinner in Canmore with the guide on the final evening (own cost).

Accommodation in Canmore before and after the tour is not included.

Price is per person based on a group of 4 people.

Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed

Travellers should bring

Group camping and cooking equipment plus a full emergency and first-aid kit will be supplied. You will need to bring personal equipment (backpack, sleeping bag etc) and clothing. Rental equipment such as sleeping bags, mats, and backpacks are available, but should be requested in advance. What you bring will have a big impact on the quality of your experience, we especially urge you to read our notes on lightweight gear and clothing. You will need to bring personal backpacking equipment and clothing. When purchasing gear consider both functionality as well as weight. Lightweight packs, sleeping bags, sleeping mats and clothing are readily available and will lighten your load substantially. What you bring will have a big impact on the quality of your experience. Please take the time to read the information below. Make sure you have all your clothing and gear beforehand, reserve rentals in advance. **BOOTS** These should be 'broken-in' and have good ankle support and tread, with 'Vibram' soles or equivalent. Your boots will make or break your holiday so some time spent getting used to them is time well spent. **GAITERS** OPTIONAL. Recommended early & late season. Really help to keep feet dry and socks and pants clean from mud etc. **LARGE BACKPACK** This should be between 55 and 75 Liter capacity depending on the bulk of your personal gear and length of the trip. In it you will carry your clothing, sleeping bag and mat, plus your fair share of group camping gear and food which is typically an extra 10 – 15 liters of space. Lightweight packs are recommended. **PACK COVER** This should be waterproof and large enough to cover the outside of your pack to keep the contents dry in a rain storm. You can also line your pack with plastic bags to keep gear dry. **SLEEPING BAG** We recommend a '3 season' bag as temperatures can drop to below freezing at night. A bag with synthetic fill functions better in wet conditions. Make sure you bring a stuff sac lined with a plastic garbage bag that will reduce your bag to its minimum size (i.e. one with compression straps). This will provide enough space in your pack for everything else. Lightweight bags are recommended. **SLEEPING MAT** Lightweight "Therm-a-rest" mats are recommended except on Wapta Ice Hike. **TREKKING POLES** We cannot recommend these enough! **SUNGLASSES** Regular or prescription with UV protection and hard case. **HEADLAMP** Make sure that you have

extra batteries. A small flashlight will also suffice. **WATER BOTTLE** At least 1 liter capacity. Hydration bladders with tubes work great as well. **SMALL BLISTER & PERSONAL FIRST AID KIT** Bring enough tape and blister treatment pads for personal use as well as double the amount of prescription medication so your guide can store an extra set with the group First Aid Kit in case something happens to your personal supply. **SUN BLOCK & LIP BALM** At elevation there is greater UV exposure, an SPF 30 or higher is recommended. **BOWL, SPOON, LARGE MUG & LIGHT POCKET KNIFE** Un-breakable plastic or light metal set works best. No glass or ceramics. Heavy fixed bladed hunting knives, machetes, axes, etc. Not required. **PERSONAL TOILET ITEMS** Keep to a minimum, no scented items as we will be in bear country. These **MUST** be stored in the group food hangs each night and not be kept in the tents. **INSECT REPELLENT** Those with a high DEET content are most effective, but can irritate the skin and cause damage to gear. Natural alternatives available, also consider a lightweight bug jacket if you are very sensitive to bites. **CAMERA & SPARE BATTERIES/MEMORY** Point and shoot digital cameras work best for almost all situations and are much lighter than SLR cameras with multiple lenses. **LIGHTWEIGHT COLLAPSIBLE UMBRELLA (OPTIONAL)** **CLOTHING** Clothing must be durable to withstand mountain conditions, multi-purpose to keep packs light and compressible to leave room for food and gear in your pack. Cotton clothing is **NOT** recommended as an insulating layer as it causes rapid heat loss when wet. Think of layering your clothing so that you have options for different temperatures and conditions. **Wool or fleece HAT** Great to wear at night to keep you warm. **SUNHAT** Wide brim or baseball style with bandana to cover your neck. **3 – 4 WARM UPPER BODY LAYERS** 1. Light weight polypro top. 2. Medium or expedition weight polypropylene top. 3. Fleece jacket or Puffy pull-over. 4. Optional additional warm layer (puffy vest). **LONG SLEEVED SHIRT & T-SHIRT** For warm dry sunny days. **RAIN JACKET with HOOD** Sufficient to withstand a day of rain/snow. Waterproof/Breathable shell is best. **LIGHT GLOVES or MITTS** Gloves are great around camp for setting up and eating. **SOCKS** 3 sets of your preferred sock combinations. We recommend wool blend socks. **SHORT PANTS** Synthetic, quick drying and preferably not cotton. **LONG HIKING PANTS** Synthetic or wool blend, pref. windproof & quick drying. **NOT** jeans or cotton. **RAIN PANTS** Sufficient to withstand a day of rain or snow. Waterproof/Breathable shell is best. **WARM PANTS** For evenings or in case cold weather. We suggest fleece pants, Thick long johns work too. **LIGHT FOOTWEAR** Sandals, running shoes etc for creek crossings and use around camp.