



# Fairmont trio supplies Rockies luxury

By Judy Koutsky | Oct 02, 2003



As an avid hiker, I was excited by the prospect of visiting the Canadian Rockies, where Banff, Lake Louise and Jasper, Alberta, are said to contain some of the most scenic hiking trails in North America.

I also didn't balk at the chance to explore the luxurious Fairmont properties in each destination while I was there.

Lake Louise was my first stop. It was May, the shoulder season, and the lake still was frozen. A heavy snowstorm had buried the region the week before, and the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise at the foot of the frosty lake was the only hotel in sight.

The Chateau offers a variety of activities for the adventurous. I opted for a guided heritage hike, which can be booked through the concierge. Mountaineering programs

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The trek to the top of the trail, where we were treated to views of miles of alpine forest and snow-capped peaks, took three hours.

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We returned in time for late afternoon tea in the lobby bar, which, with its floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the lake, was my favorite room at the property.

Lest the idea of tea time causes you to conjure up a guest list of stuffed shirts, let it be known that dress was casual, surprisingly so in light of the luxurious surroundings and the price tag for rooms.

The hotel offers an array of restaurants, ranging from the high-end Walliser Stube, featuring Swiss dishes and fondue, to the casual Poppy Brassiere. There also is a heated indoor swimming pool and a Jacuzzi.

The next day, I moved on to Banff and the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel, which was built by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1888 to bring tourism to the area.

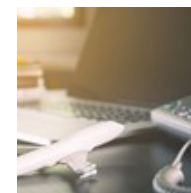
The hotel is dubbed the "Castle in the Rockies," and it resembles just that. While the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise has one-of-a-kind views, Banff Springs has it beat in terms of amenities.

In the last 10 years, \$175 million has been spent in renovations and restorations, especially to the spa. I discovered the spa after a day of hiking, but more on that later.

Once again, I booked a heritage hike through the concierge desk. Fortified by the promise of gourmet box lunches prepared for us by the Pantry, the hotel's 24-hour dining venue, we set off through the snow to a point above the tree line.



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There we were treated to expansive views of the Canadian Rockies, and I had to keep reminding myself it was almost June. We ate our lunches at the base of a mountain popular with rock climbers.

Returning to Banff Springs, I headed straight to the Willow Spring Spa, a signature Fairmont addition built in 1995.

Everyone has his or her idea of a slice of heaven. Spending the day hiking and the evening in the world-class spa might very well be mine.

I signed up for a sports massage and a deep-tissue, full-body treatment that eased the muscle tension in my back.

Then it was time to try out the facilities. In the locker room alone there is a steam room, a sauna, a Jacuzzi and a relaxation room where guests are treated to hot tea with cookies and a terrific view of the outdoors.

The common area (for men and women) boasts a trio of saunas complete with waterfalls -- one hot, one warm, one cold.

There's also an indoor pool and, my favorite, a heated outdoor pool on a balcony that showcases the mountains. Steam rising from the pool attracts deer, and a few kept me company at pool's edge.

Another top amenity for the hotel is its golf course. Playing at the foot of the Rockies is hard to beat -- where else in the world are there elk on the greens?

Banff Springs offers a range of restaurants, with the Banffshire Club being the most exclusive. The prix fixe, four- and five-course menu will set you back a bit, but the food and the service are worth the cost.



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Although Banff Springs and the Chateaux Lake Louise are not new names for most travel agents, the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge, three hours north of Banff, might be.

To get there, I drove on the Icefields Parkway, arguably one of the most scenic highways in the Americas. Along the way, I spotted deer, elk, moose and a black bear.

Although it is technically a three-hour drive, I took closer to five, after stopping to take photos and side jaunts that led to waterfalls and glaciers.

Jasper Park Lodge, often in the shadow of its world-famous sisters, is just as worthy of the Fairmont moniker.

To me, it was a first-class, luxury camp for adults. The cabins are not cheap, and it's easy to see why after stepping inside. Rooms are spacious, with fireplaces, large beds, great views and a Jacuzzi bathtub.

Jasper, also on the banks of the lake, sits at a lower elevation than Banff Springs and Chateau Lake Louise, so the lake was not frozen.

I took full advantage and went canoeing and kayaking. At water's edge, I spotted an elk with her newborn calf. It was calving season, and during my stay I saw dozens of the animals with their young.

The Fairmont Jasper Park does not have the formal feel of its larger sisters, which is part of its attraction, but the service was just as good.

Canadian Rockies Experience vacation packages are available through mid-April. Prices average about \$644 per room, per night, double, and vary depending on resort and activities.

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