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# The Canadian Rockies: 4 Parks; 2 Countries; Train, Boat, Gondola, and MORE... Oh My!



By **Orenstein** on 12/31/2016



The Canadian Rockies are among the planet's most majestic mountains and deserve a prominent place on your travel bucket list. If you have always wanted to see them but are unsure of when to go, what to see, how to get around or where to stay, Ginny and I recommend taking a well-run tour with a professional guide. One of the best is the aptly-named Uncommon Journeys' Elegant Canadian Rockies tour. In eight days during the prime summer season, it covers the best of the U.S. Glacier National Park and the Canadian Rockies with panache.

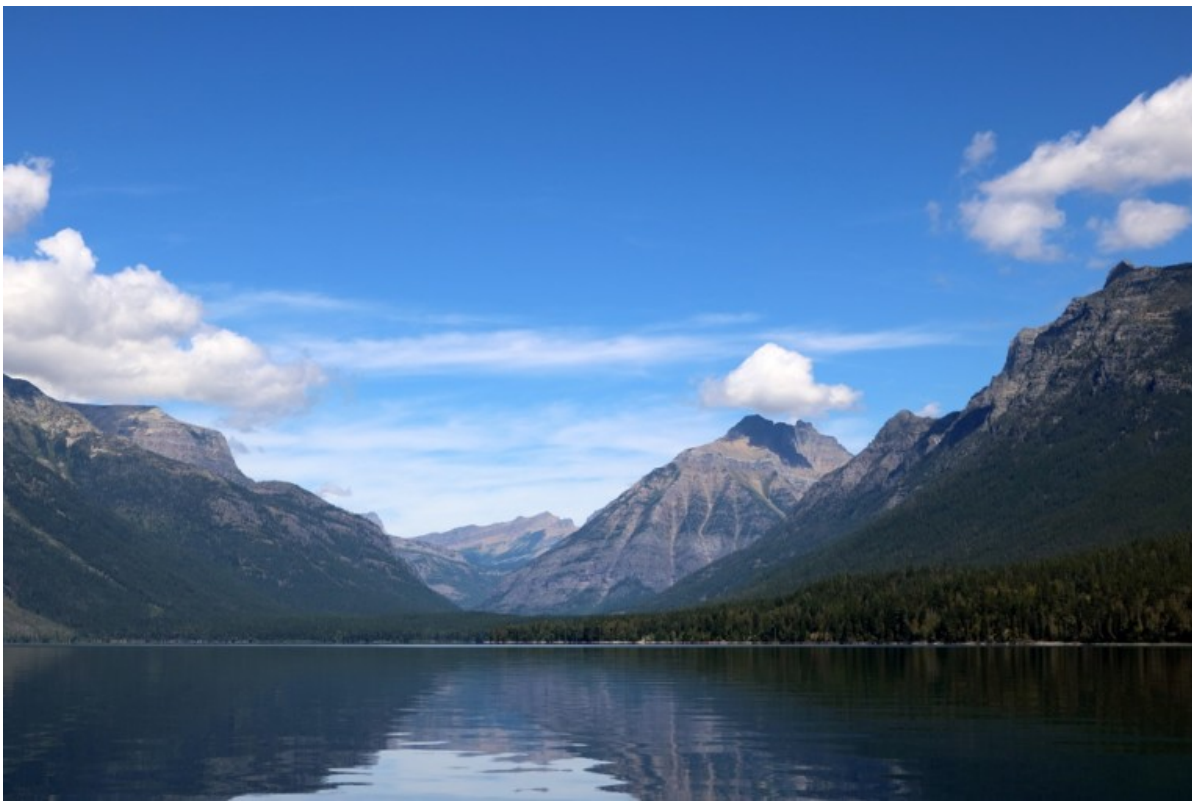
Our August tour started at beautifully-restored King St. Station in Seattle, where, in the manner of railroad barons of old, we were welcomed aboard three fully-staffed private railroad cars (a dome diner and two sleepers) tucked on the end of Amtrak's storied Empire Builder. Soon, we were enjoying drinks and hors d'oeuvres as we hugged Puget Sound and headed across the Cascades at sunset. After dinner and a good night's sleep in our private compartment, we woke up in Montana. Coffee and a light breakfast awaited as we covered the final miles to Whitefish, Montana, our first destination.



3 private cars, from Elegant Journeys, bring up the rear of Amtrak's Empire Builder. Here they are on the platform of the Whitefish Montana.

Credit: Jeff Orenstein

Detraining there, we boarded a private bus with our guide, toured the town and stopped for a full breakfast before checking in to the impressive Lodge at Whitefish. Next on the agenda was a tour of southern Glacier National Park including a ranger-narrated boat trip on Lake McDonald.



Boat tour of Glacier National Park's Lake McDonald. Fantastic views of the area's glaciated topography. Credit: Jeff Orenstein

On day three, we boarded a fabled Red Jammer bus and traversed Going To The Sun Road across the continental divide. Met again by our bus and guide, we headed for Canada and five more days of touring the best of the Canadian Rockies in Alberta and British Columbia. We spent one night in Waterton and four in Banff as we were treated to narrated tours of Canada's Waterton Lakes, Banff, and Yoho National Parks.

Among the highlights of our tour were visits to the Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), a gondola ride to the top of Sulphur Mountain, lunch at the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, stops at Moraine Lake, the spiral tunnels at Kicking Horse Pass and incredible vista after vista including glimpses of wild elk, bears and mountain goats.

The tour ended at Calgary airport where we bid fellow tourers and our guide goodbye and headed for home.

### ***Before You Go, do some pre-trip research at:***

- <http://www.uncommonjourneys.com>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian\\_Rockies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Rockies)
- <http://www.canadianrockies.net/>
- <http://banffnationalpark.com/canadian-rockies>

### ***Getting There:***



We recommend spending at last one night in Seattle before the 4:00 p.m. tour departure to avoid missing the train because of transportation delays.

- By air, fly to Sea-Tac (Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, SEA) and take the light rail train from the airport to King Street Station or your downtown hotel.
- By train, arrive at King Street Station on Amtrak's Cascades from Portland or Vancouver or the Coast Starlight from Los Angeles.
- By ship, numerous cruise ships call at Seattle.

If you go without a tour, the Canadian Rockies are accessible by car, plane and train

- The TransCanada Highway, mostly two lanes, crosses the Rockies on its coast-to-coast route. It can be treacherous in the long Canadian winter.
- By train, Amtrak's Empire Builder skirts the southern regions of Glacier National Park and crosses Marias Pass. Via Canada's Toronto-Vancouver Canadian also crosses the Rockies and stops at Jasper.

### ***When You Are There***



The famous 1930's-era Red Jammer buses traverse Going To The Sun Road across the continental divide in Glacier National Park. The driver's narration and the views are incredible. Credit: Jeff Orenstein



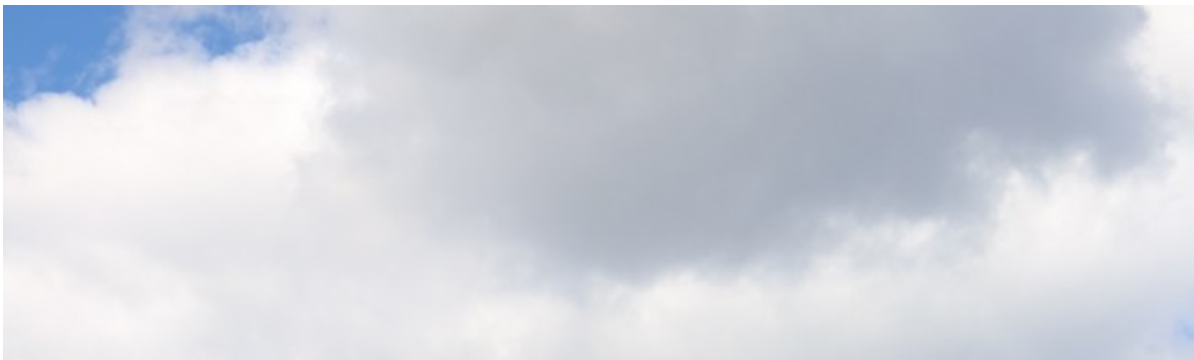
- Take your camera and work on perfecting your photography. A walk along Banff's the Bow River and/or a hike in the nearby mountains is recommended.
- Dine at a waterfront restaurant in Waterton and outdoor restaurants with a view in Banff during the brief but beautiful summer.
- Visit Banff's Cave and Basin Museum, the Banff Center for The Arts, Cascade Gardens and check out a Banff farmers market.

### ***If You Want To Extend Your Tour:***

- Spend a few days in and around Seattle before the tour. Use the city's good light rail system to get around.
- Visit Vancouver and/or Victoria before arriving in Seattle.
- Spend a few days in Calgary after the trip and explore one of Canada's modern and bustling cities.



The view from the dining room, Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, is justly-famous and world-class.



***Ginny O's Tips For Dressing The Simply Smart Travel Way For The Elegant Canadian Rockies Tour:***





The view from Banff's Cascade Gardens includes Banff Ave. as it crosses the Bow River Bridge and passes in front of many of the town's restaurants and hotels and moves traffic toward the Rockies beyond. Credit: Jeff Orenstein

Leave the dressy wear at home. Bring walking shoes, jeans, casual pants and be prepared to dress in layers because even in August, it can turn cold at this altitude. You can always leave coats, etc. on the bus when the weather warms up. One dressy sweater will suffice for group dinners. Laundry is available in Banff if needed.

### ***This Destination At A Glance***

**Mobility Level:** This trip is fully accessible for people of any mobility level. Tour guides can assist with access to the train, the motor coaches, lodging and attractions. While some non-strenuous hiking is an option at various stops, none is required to see 99% of the views

**When To Go:** Four departures, June to September.

**Getting Around:** Uncommon Journeys handles all transportation and lodging arrangements from the trip's beginning in Seattle to its end at Calgary

Airport. Individual tour participants are responsible for getting to Seattle's King Street Station and home from Vancouver airport.

**Special Travel Interests:** The Rocky Mountains, Canada, rail travel, national parks.

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**Editor's Notes:** Orenstein is a travel writer who lives on Florida's West Coast. He and his wife Virginia enjoy simply smart travel and writing about it. They can be reached at [jorenstein@SimplySmartTravel.com](mailto:jorenstein@SimplySmartTravel.com). Check out their travel ideas, articles and blog at [www.SimplySmartTravel.com](http://www.SimplySmartTravel.com). Please like [www.facebook.com/SimplySmartTravel](https://www.facebook.com/SimplySmartTravel)



The gorgeous waters of Emerald Lake are colored by finely-powdered glacial runoff held in suspension by the lake's waters. Credit: Jeff Orenstein