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The Ultimate Canadian Adventure

CAR RENTAL & RAIL | CHELSEA DAVIS | NOVEMBER 06, 2017



PHOTO: Canadian Rockies courtesy of Via Rail. (photo by Chelsea Davis)

Countless superlatives could describe my experience [journeying across Canada](#) onboard VIA Rail's The Canadian.

Experiencing a [cross-country train ride](#) has always been on my bucket list despite some major reservations. Would I feel claustrophobic? What if I get bored? Will I feel trapped?

What I didn't consider was the fact that Canada—being the incredibly beautiful, scenic and vast country it is—couldn't be a more ideal destination to explore by train.

“Imagine an adventure that begins the moment you board the train. Leave the city center behind and glide past gentle prairie fields, rugged lake country and picturesque towns to the snowy peaks of the majestic [Rockies](#). The Canadian brings you the landscapes as you’d never see any other way. No other mode of transportation allows you to experience the country so intimately,” said Chloe Simard, VIA Rail Public Relations Coordinator.

Unique to [Canada](#) is the partnership between railway travel and luxury hotels, which dates back to 1886 when William Cornelius Van Horne was put in charge of expanding the Canadian West’s tourism potential by the Canadian Pacific Railway.

His solution? Build the most luxe, five-star accommodations along the railway line through the Rocky and Selkirk Mountains.

“If we can’t export the scenery, we’ll import the tourists,” Van Horne once remarked.

Though no longer known as Canadian Pacific Hotels— they’re now [Fairmont Hotels and Resorts](#) — the brand continues to pride itself on its iconic, château style properties in Canada. While on board The Canadian, guests are invited to stay overnight at a number of Fairmont’s most esteemed properties.

One such property is the Fairmont Banff Springs, otherwise known as “Canada’s Castle in the Rockies,” which also serves as a National Historic Site of Canada and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Other Fairmont properties that showcase both Canadian architecture and highlight the nation’s celebrated history include Fairmont Hotel Vancouver, Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge, Fairmont Winnipeg, Fairmont Royal York ([Toronto](#)), Fairmont Chateau Laurier, Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth ([Montreal](#)) and Fairmont Le Château Frontenac in [Quebec City](#).

Although I didn’t traverse the entire country, my two-day, overnight journey on The Canadian was relaxing and serene, providing me with mile after mile of pristine wilderness landscape for my viewing pleasure. The Canadian took me from Jasper to Vancouver, cutting through the Rocky Mountains, dense forest, rivers and waterfalls at a determined speed that kept the impressive scenery coming.

Onboard The Canadian, you're treated just as you would be at any upscale hotel. Everyone from the bartender to the train captain and other personnel are exceptionally friendly, genuine and attentive, ensuring you have what you need throughout the ride.

The dining car was another unexpectedly satisfying experience.

Meals are inspired by traditional Canadian cuisine, giving passengers the opportunity to try dishes from the various regions the train passes through. With table cloths, decorative flowers and complete table settings, the experience is essentially that of dining in a restaurant.

When booking a ride with VIA Rail, guests are invited to curate their own stops along the way. Depending on where you're headed, the types of experiences range greatly:

—Get pampered at the award-winning Willow Stream Spa at Fairmont Banff Springs and soak in the mineral pool or under one of the waterfalls surrounding it.

—Hike to Athabasca Falls, a picturesque waterfall in Jasper National Park, which is known for the powerful force of its descending water.

—Admire the glacial landscape at Columbia Icefield, the largest ice field in the Rockies, located astride the Continental Divide.

—Explore Vancouver's Granville Island, an area filled with talented local artisans, a floating houseboat community, public farmer's market, sake maker, shops and restaurants.

My absolutely favorite excursion? Dog sledding for nearly ten miles to the Great Continental Divide—the high point separating the east from the west.

In addition to getting to pet, feed and bond with the most energetic and loving dogs in all of Canada, you're also invited to learn the basics of driving a team from your sledding guides.

Flying across blankets of fresh snow, along the base of looming peaks in Lake Louise, past countless snow-dusted trees, all powered by the enthusiasm and vigor of the happiest Huskies around, was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life.

For information on booking your own VIA Rail Canada adventure, [click here](#).