

NATIONAL PARK SERIES • GUIDE NO. 003

5-Day Banff Itinerary

Banff, Lake Louise & the Icefields Parkway

5 FULL DAYS

SINGLE BASE

CANADIAN ROCKIES

Quick Facts Before You Go

- Moraine Lake Road is closed to personal vehicles — the shuttle is mandatory
- The shuttle departs the Lake Louise Park & Ride, *not* the lake
- Buy a Parks Canada Discovery Pass online before you arrive
- Calgary (YYC) to Banff is about 90 minutes
- Cell service is limited — download offline maps first



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Steal the research. Keep the adventure.

Arrive & Explore Banff

Sulphur Mountain, the summit boardwalk & a first night on Banff Avenue

- 1

MORNING

Arrive Calgary (YYC)

Pick up your rental car and start the drive into the mountains. → 90 min drive
- 2

AFTERNOON

Check Into Your Hotel

Banff townsite works as a single base for this entire itinerary.

BANFF TOWNSITE
- 3

4:00 PM

Banff Gondola

Ride to the Sulphur Mountain summit and walk the boardwalk along the ridge. → 10 min drive

ASHLEY'S FAVORITE
- 4

7:00 PM

Dinner on Banff Avenue

Mountain-town restaurants, cozy patios, and a stroll after dinner.

DON'T MISS

Pro Tip: Book the Banff Gondola online before your trip — summer evening slots sell out, and it's the best light of the day at the summit.

Lake Louise & Moraine Lake

The best day of the trip – two of the most photographed lakes on earth

- 1

7:30 AM

Lake Louise Lakeshore Trail

Easy, flat 2.5 mi round trip along the water. Walk as far as you like.

FAMILY FAVORITE
- 2

9:00 AM

Canoe on Lake Louise

Rental lines get long by late morning. Arrive early, or hike Fairview Lookout instead. → 20 min drive

WORTH THE SPLURGE
- 3

11:00 AM

Lake Louise Park & Ride

The Moraine Lake shuttle departs from HERE, not from the lake. Reserve as soon as bookings open. → Shuttle

DON'T MISS
- 4

12:00 PM

Moraine Lake

Personal vehicles are not permitted on Moraine Lake Road. Shuttle only.

BEST PHOTO SPOT
- 5

1:00 PM

Rockpile Trail

Short 0.5 mi climb to the classic postcard view of the Valley of the Ten Peaks.

BEST PHOTO SPOT

Pro Tip: Shuttle tickets release in two waves — roughly 40% in spring, and the remaining 60% just 48 hours before departure. If you miss the first wave, set an alarm for the second.

The Icefields Parkway

144 miles / 232 km of one of the most scenic drives in the world

- 1

8:00 AM

Depart Banff

Start early — the light is better and the tour buses haven't arrived yet. → 1 hr drive
- 2

9:30 AM

Peyto Lake Viewpoint

Quick 0.4 mi walk to the iconic wolf-head-shaped turquoise lake. → 1 hr drive

BEST PHOTO SPOT
- 3

11:30 AM

Columbia Icefield

Ice Explorer glacier tour or the Glacier Skywalk. Reserve in advance. → 40 min drive

WORTH THE SPLURGE
- 4

2:30 PM

Mistaya Canyon

Short walk down to one of the parkway's most dramatic river canyons. → 30 min drive

EASY ADVENTURE
- 5

4:00 PM

Bow Lake

Glacier-fed lake with mountain reflections — the perfect stop to close the day.

BEST PHOTO SPOT

Pro Tip: Elk, bighorn sheep, and bears cross this road regularly. Use designated pullouts for photos — never stop in the travel lane.

Banff's Scenic Favorites

Canyons, lakes and hot springs — all within reach of the townsite

- 1

8:00 AM

Johnston Canyon

Catwalk trail to the Lower and Upper Falls. 3.2 mi round trip. → 35 min drive

EASY ADVENTURE
- 2

11:30 AM

Two Jack Lake

One of the best reflection spots in Banff — and much quieter than Minnewanka. → 10 min drive

ASHLEY'S FAVORITE
- 3

1:00 PM

Lake Minnewanka

The largest lake in the park. Optional boat cruise or a lakeshore walk. → 25 min drive

BEST WILDLIFE
- 4

4:00 PM

Banff Upper Hot Springs

Historic mineral springs looking straight at Mount Rundle.

WORTH THE SPLURGE

Pro Tip: Bighorn sheep are common along the Lake Minnewanka road — drive it slowly and keep your camera within reach.

Farewell Banff

One last sunrise before the drive back to Calgary

- 1

5:30 AM

Vermilion Lakes

Arrive 30–45 min before sunrise for the best reflections on Mount Rundle. → 10 min drive

BEST PHOTO SPOT
- 2

8:00 AM

Breakfast at Whitebark Cafe

Coffee and a pastry on Banff Avenue — one last mountain-town morning.

ASHLEY'S FAVORITE
- 3

9:30 AM

Banff Avenue

Browse the outfitters, galleries and souvenir shops before heading out.

OPTIONAL
- 4

11:00 AM

Drive to Calgary Airport

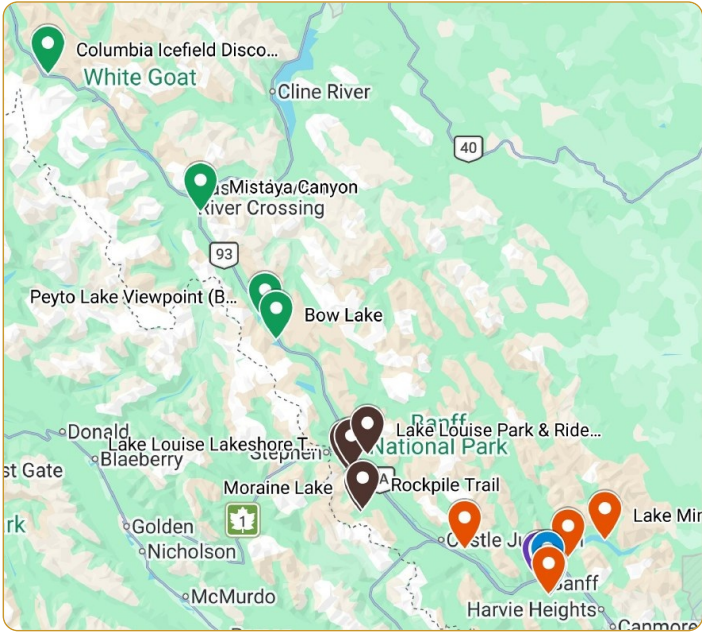
Allow 1.5–2 hours depending on traffic. → Depart

Pro Tip: Book an afternoon or evening flight out of Calgary so you don't have to skip Vermilion Lakes at sunrise.

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Map This Route

Every stop from all 5 days, color-coded so you can navigate once you're in the park.



● DAY 1 • BANFF ● DAY 2 • LAKE LOUISE ● DAY 3 • ICEFIELDS ● DAY 4 • SCENIC ● DAY 5 • FAREWELL



Scan for the Live Interactive Map

Every stop, color-coded by day, in Google Maps — including the Lake Louise Park & Ride. Pull it up before you go, because the park's cell signal won't cooperate.

Where to Stay & What to Pack

One Base or Two?

- **Banff townsite** — the best single base for this entire itinerary. Central, walkable, most restaurants.
- **Lake Louise** — quieter and minutes from the Park & Ride. Choose it if sunrise at Moraine is a priority.
- **Canmore** — outside the park gates, 20–25 min away, and noticeably cheaper.
- Book 6–9 months ahead for summer. July and August sell out.

Don't Forget

- **Layers** — mountain mornings run far colder than midday
- **Parks Canada pass** — buy it online before you arrive
- **Offline maps** — cell service is limited throughout the park
- **Shuttle reservation** — the one booking you cannot leave to chance
- Full gear guide with 70+ picks on the website

FULL ITINERARY · BOOKING LINKS · INTERACTIVE MAP

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