

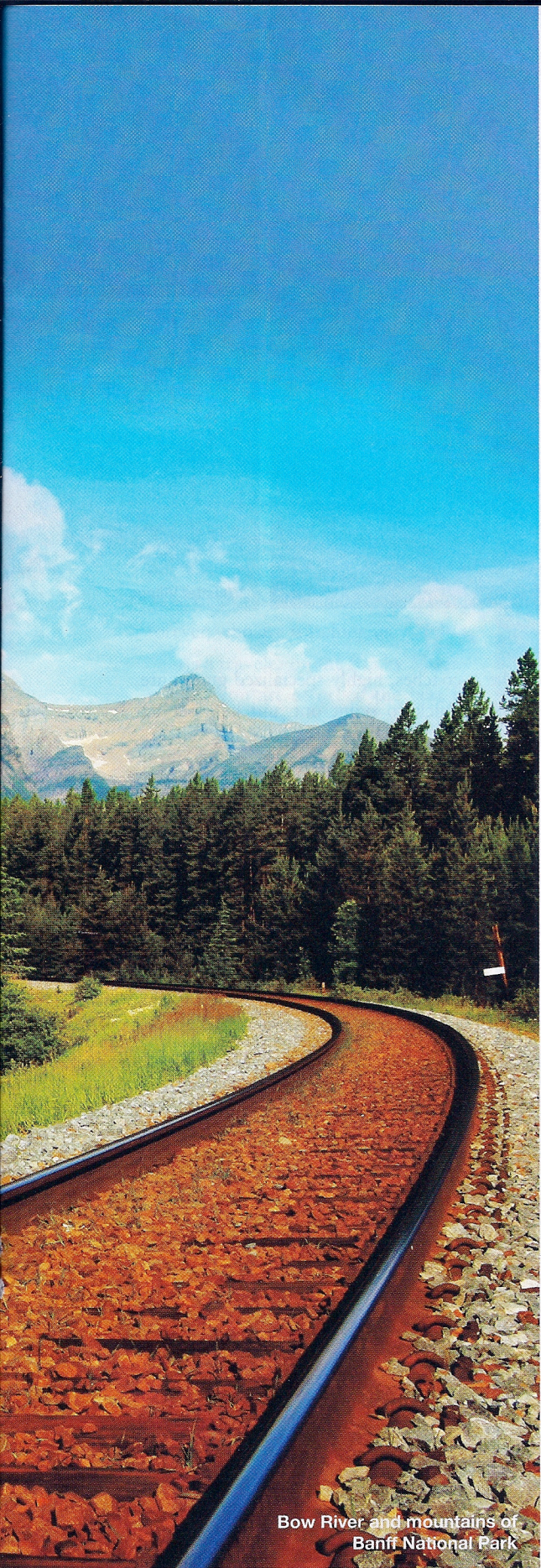
# GOLDEN TICKET

LUXURY RAIL TRAVEL  
IN BACKCOUNTRY  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

BY GLENN KAUFMANN







Bow River and mountains of Banff National Park

PHOTO: ©THINKSTOCK.COM

As marvelous as it is to be out in nature, there is something nearly as grand about sitting in a comfortable chair, drink in hand, with your eyes trained on distant snowy peaks as they pass by, or the blue green glacial lake at your feet as you absorb it all in 360 degree air conditioned comfort.

Serious rail travel aficionados consider GoldLeaf Service on British Columbia's Rocky Mountaineer to be the trip of a lifetime. And once you've stepped aboard one of the Rocky Mountaineer's custom made bi-level rail coaches, fine dining, leisurely pace, a focus on the natural world, and impeccable service conspire to deliver the ultimate vacation commodity: time.

Wending its way through the Canadian Rockies and along the mighty Fraser River, the Rocky Mountaineer's four routes are nothing if not deliberate. Maximizing exposure to the natural world, all rail travel occurs during the day, with the Mountaineer traveling a scant 280 miles each day. Sauntering along at just 30 mph, the train hugs narrow ledges with twenty-mile-long mountain lakes on one side and snow-capped mountains on the other. Passengers "ooh" and "ahh" at the view, pointing out bald eagles and California bighorn sheep that cling to jagged crags just a few feet above the observation dome.

### LUXURY SERVICE

While the Rocky Mountaineer also offers passengers its RedLeaf level of service (which includes spacious reclining seats set alongside large picture windows), the Rocky Mountaineer experience that draws up to 100,000 international travelers annually is the seamless marriage of the unforgiving wilderness and luxury travel. In 2007, *National Geographic Magazine* named the Rocky Mountaineer one of the "World's Best Rail Journeys," likely referring to the Mountaineer's GoldLeaf Service, which offers a sumptuous blend of luxury accommodation, fine dining, and unparalleled views of backcountry British Columbia.

GoldLeaf passengers spend most of their time aboard seated on the glass-domed observation level. While complimentary drinks and snacks are served here, formal meals are offered during four daily breakfast/lunch seatings down below in a plush, wood-paneled salon. This luxurious wood-paneled dining car



delivers white-linen service and fresh cut flowers. Passengers are offered a selection of hot and cold entrees prepared to their specification, while large windows ensure that the Canadian Rockies continue to provide a feast for the eyes as well. Glistening green in the high desert sun, British Columbia's signature ginseng farms are more than just colorful trim atop the Fraser River's canyon walls. They've inspired the Rocky Mountaineer's four award-winning chefs to draw heavily on local and regional ingredients to create a menu that is sumptuous, sustainable, and primarily locally/regionally sourced.

For GoldLeaf travelers, luggage is picked up each morning at the passenger's hotel and delivered to their lodging choice in the train's next overnight destination. A courtesy van drives ahead of the slow-moving train and arranges to have guests checked in, luggage taken to their rooms, and room keys delivered to the station as the train pulls in for the night.

Additionally, highly customizable itineraries, variable accommodations

and numerous packages offer the luxury of seemingly endless flexibility. And, with its onboard elevator and specially trained staff, travel on the Rocky Mountaineer is all but seamless for older travelers or those with mobility restrictions.

As you'd expect with any high quality travel, the ultimate onboard luxury is exceptional service that is always there, but never intrusive. On the Rocky Mountaineer's GoldLeaf

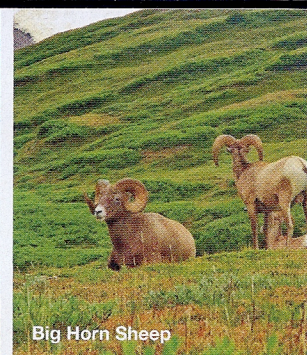
coaches, highly specialized guides are quick to point out and help set up photographic opportunities before they arrive. By journey's end, these "guest attendants" come across more like knowledgeable traveling companions than paid guides.

## INTO THE WILD

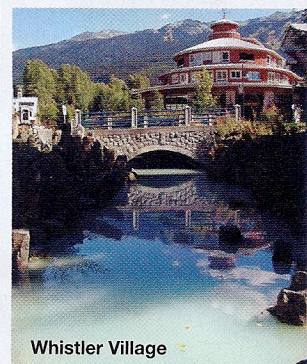
As the train snakes its way along the canyon floors and ledges of the Rockies, past gold mining towns long played



Mount Robson at twilight



Big Horn Sheep



Whistler Village

## if you go

The Rocky Mountaineer  
Rockymountaineer.com  
877-460-3200

### ITINERARIES

The Rocky Mountaineer's range of itineraries offers travelers the opportunity to explore diverse environments in and around the Canadian Rockies. From towering snow covered mountains to plunging canyons carved by raging whitewater rivers, temperate coastal rainforests, and arid mountain deserts, the Rocky Mountaineer takes in the breadth of British Columbia, allowing passengers to

get on and off, walk around, explore national parks, and take life list photos of bear, moose, eagles, and big horn sheep.

The Rocky Mountaineer offers three two-day routes with overnight stops in Quesnel and Kamloops, as well as the Whistler Sea to Sky Climb, a 3.5-hour climb from Vancouver along the coast and up to the ski and shopping resort village of Whistler.

The First Passage to the West itinerary traces the route of early explorers along the mighty Fraser River, and through Thompson Canyon, on its way to the Spiral Tunnels and on up through Kicking Horse Pass and into Banff National Park.

Travelers choosing the Journey Through the Clouds route pass through several mountain ranges in British Columbia and

follow the Fraser and Thompson Rivers on their way to Kamloops, then turn further north, passing Pyramid Falls, the Albreda Icefields and Mount Robson (the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies) before reaching Jasper National Park.

The Rocky Mountaineer's newest journey, Rainforest to Goldrush takes passengers through regions of lush coastal rainforest deep aquamarine lakes, and then into areas of high mountain desert where lush green ginseng farms cling to the sides of the Fraser Canyon, and then into the Cariboo Plateau deep in the interior, where prospectors and speculators sought their fortunes in the Canadian Goldrush. This itinerary offers views of Mount Robson as well, and allows travelers to spend time exploring Jasper National Park.

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES.COM



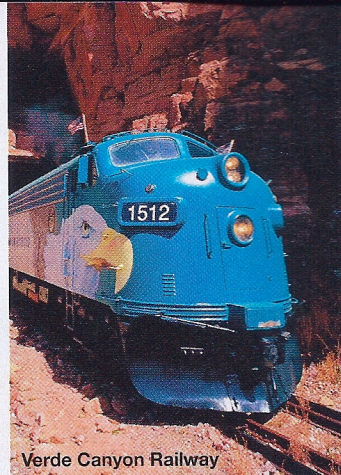
out and turned to other industries, it's clear that little has changed since the days when fur trader and explorer Simon Fraser first passed this way looking to claim the land and establish a trading post and toehold of civilization amidst the wilderness. Fortunately civilization mostly lost that battle.

Though towns and signs of industry appear on the horizon, grow larger, and finally pass away, the grandeur and permanence of nature are constant traveling companions on the Rocky Mountaineer. It's unclear if we are watching the mountains as they pass, or if it is they, who've been here forever, who are watching us.

As a traveler on the Rocky Mountaineer, you are afforded the best of both worlds. Luxury accommodations and service deliver you to nature's doorstep, and from there you can remain in the lap of luxury, or take time to explore Gold Rush towns set deep in the wilderness and hike the trails of the largest and most northerly national park in the Canadian Rockies. Here again, the luxury of choice is left to the traveler.

The Rocky Mountaineer's four routes showcase the diversity of British Columbia. From the sea to the high desert plateaus with glistening green Ginseng farms, to the primordial lushness of coastal rainforest, and the high mountain grandeur of the Canadian Rockies, the Mountaineer spoils you with views that go home with you, tucked safely away, waiting to surprise and remind you when you get back home, and life speeds up again. **H**

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Verde Canyon Railway



Grand Canyon Railway

## RAILS YEAR ROUND

MAKE TRACKS ALL YEAR LONG ON THESE OTHER GREAT RAILROAD JOURNEYS NEAR AND ABROAD.

**GRAND CANYON RAILWAY** - The GCR runs 65 miles — approximately 2 hours 15 minutes one-way — between the town of Williams and the Grand Canyon.

**VERDE CANYON RAILWAY** — Passengers travel through the scenic crimson pinnacles of the Verde Canyon on a four-hour roundtrip journey from the old mining town of Clarkdale, located southwest of Sedona, to the Perkinsville ghost ranch and back.

**MEXICO'S COPPER CANYON** - Ferrocarril Chihuahua al Pacifico (El ChePe) is owned by Ferromex, which is a private company. A major freight connection between Chihuahua and the coast, the 14 to 16 hour journey traverses 390 miles of rugged terrain. The trip starts at sea level in Los Mochis, and rises 7900 feet before descending into Chihuahua City (people with breathing problems should consult with their doctor).

**DURANGO AND SILVERTON NARROW GAUGE RAILROAD** - The D&SNGRR travels 45 miles each way along the Animas River from Durango to Silverton during the summer season, early May through October. On winter trips, late November through early May, the train travels 26 miles each way to the wye at the Cascade Canyon Pavilion.

**ALASKA RAILROAD** — Offering both summer and winter (weekend only) itineraries, the route spans over 500 miles from the seaport of Seward through Denali National Park all the way to Fairbanks.

**BLUE TRAIN** - On its regular 994-mile route between Pretoria and Cape Town, South Africa's Blue Train glides past gold fields of the Witwatersrand, the grain, fruit and sunflower farms of the northern Cape, on to Kimberley, seat of South Africa's original diamond rush. Routes to Durban and Pilanesberg Game Reserve are also available.

**TRANS SIBERIAN EXPRESS** — The Trans-Siberian Railway is often associated with the main transcontinental Russian train that connects hundreds of large and small cities of the European and Asian parts of Russia. The route starts in St. Petersburg and ends in Vladivostok, spanning a record 7 time zones and taking eight days to complete the journey. It is the third-longest single continuous service in the world.

**ORIENT EXPRESS** — The Venice-Simplon Orient Express brings back the historical luxury Orient Express through vintage Art Deco trains that run primarily between London and Venice.

**For more information or help planning and booking a railroad vacation, contact AAA at 1-877-248-6962.**