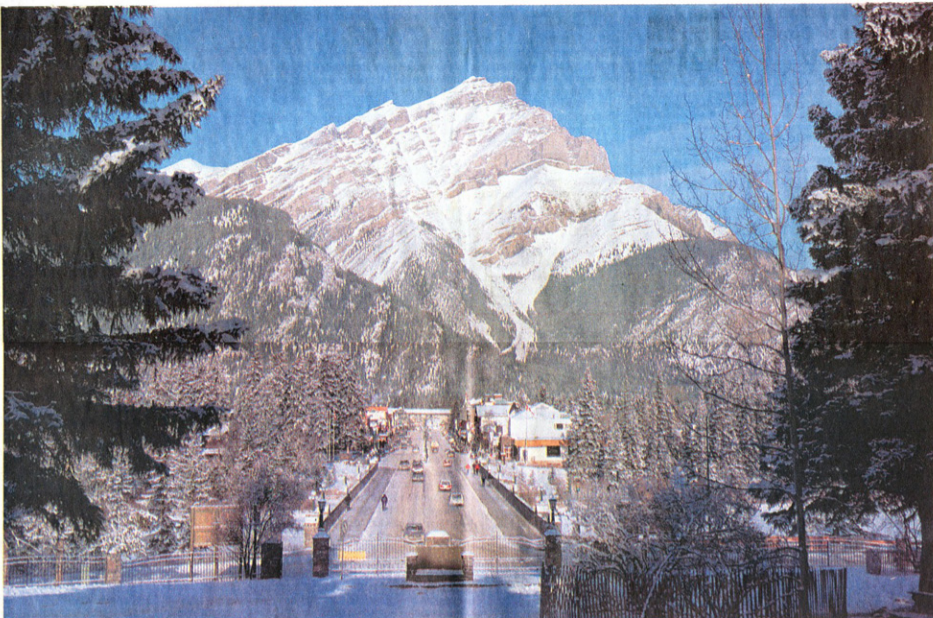


# TRAVEL

**INSIDE** Texas welcomes spring with sidewalk art, rattlesnakes and azaleas. 36

CANADA



Art galleries, bistros and boutiques line Banff Avenue, which runs the length of the village framed by the Canadian Rockies. About 7,500 people live in Banff.

BANFF LAKE LOUISE TOURISM/DOCUS LEGSTON

**THE ITINERARY**  
Tips and tips for the week ahead

**Spring planner**

Looking for a romantic spring hideaway? Two Texas bed and breakfasts made the cut for BnBFinder.com's Guest Favorite Awards. In Jefferson, the Delta Street Inn ([www.BnBFinder.com/DeltaStreetInn](http://www.BnBFinder.com/DeltaStreetInn)) was named for "romantic and comfortable guestrooms, the delicious breakfasts and the inviting atmosphere." In Austin, guests at 1110 Carriage House Inn ([www.BnBFinder.com/1110CarriageHouse](http://www.BnBFinder.com/1110CarriageHouse)) liked the hot pool and waterfall. The awards are given based on independent guest reviews.



The Delta Street Inn in Jefferson made BnBFinder.com's list.

**Train travel reminder**

New rail security procedures starting between Washington and Boston will eventually be expanded to cover all of Amtrak's routes, according to The Associated Press. Look for mobile teams that randomly arrive at stations and set up baggage screening areas. Passengers will be randomly pulled out of line, and their bags searched with a swab that detects explosives. Anyone who refuses the search won't be allowed to board, but their ticket price will be refunded. The plans were drawn from the measures used on New York City subways.

**Armchair thrill-seeking**

Tonight at 6 p.m., National Geographic airs its *Most Thrilling Moments*. Driving into a hurricane. Jumping off the world's tallest building. Dropping into a volcano. Or people who "suspend themselves from hooks driven into their flesh," according to the online program description. If you're in, check your local listings for the channel number.

—Staff and wire reports

# Beauty hits its peak in Banff

When the snowflakes fall, this town becomes a study in winter perfection — from dogsledding through the pristine snow to tucking into a flawlessly cooked bison tenderloin at dinner



Husky-malamute mixes are the stars of dogsledding excursions in Banff National Park.

By JUNE NAYLOR  
Special to the Star-Telegram

**BANFF** Alberta — When I first visited this fairy-tale village, with its yin and yang of tree-hugging cool and wealthy resort elan, it struck me as the single-most beautiful place in western Canada. Coming from the stifling August heat of Texas, I found its temperate noons and light-sweater evenings as magical as hikes through alpine meadows and beside blue lakes crowned by Rocky Mountain peaks. Nothing, I thought, could top this.

Until I saw Banff in snow this winter. A pure and endless white blanket transformed this hamlet into one straight out of the Swiss Alps. Somehow, the snow, which lasts through April, seems to intensify the appeal of all my initial impressions, even at the center of town. The elements that dazzled me that summer 20 years ago, the effortless balance of ath-

More on BANFF on 66

## Banff: Active types can take in snowshoe tours, ice walking and cross-country skiing

**CONTINUED FROM 16**  
Lethes with art and ecology with gluttony, strike me as utterly organic within the framework of winter's drama. Settled in the 1800s when the Canadian National Railway was brought westward through Alberta's Bow Valley, Banff was almost immediately a resort. Railroad workers happened upon hot springs on the side of Sulphur Mountain, home today to one of the most popular enduring attractions, Banff's Upper Hot Springs. Canada's first national park was built around this natural wonder. Named

by a railroad director for his home in Banffshire, Scotland — plenty of residents come from British families — Banff grew up as one of the country's favorite leisure stops on the transcontinental highway and railway. No longer owned by Banff National Park, Banff has become its own township of about 7,500 residents inside the nature preserve. Only people who work or own businesses in town can live there, and because the park boundaries and restrictions are absolute, over-development isn't a threat. Protecting the environment

ranks as the first priority, and while there is a Gap and a Starbucks, they blend in easily with the multitude of home-grown businesses. In the Canadian fashion, everything is clean as a whistle, but in Banff it gets the sense everything is the best of the best. The locals even brag about the fine hospital, where the care is such that people living just outside of Calgary will come here instead, for the exceptional medical attention.

Here's how to make the most of time spent in Banff, and why I'll always want it white:



The Banff Springs Hotel is one of Canada's great rail-road hotels. BANFF LAKE LOUISE TOURISM



Early morning drives are best for spotting elk at Banff National Park in wintertime. In the morning, the elk should be moving around, searching for breakfast; this guy must be sleeping in. BANFF LAKE LOUISE TOURISM

**Outdoors**

Whatever your fresh-air pursuits, keep an eye out for abundant wildlife; animals are revered in Banff, which is at the confluence of five valleys and a natural animal pathway. As soon as I passed through the gates into Banff National Park on the Transcanadian Highway, I spotted my first elk behind the fencing that lines the highway. Just inside this national park, there are two overpasses and two dozen underpasses strictly for elk, moose, deer and other creatures to roam reaches on either side of the roadway.

**A real workout**  
Dave Booth, the guide who took me on a snowshoe tour on the Continental Divide, gave me the most perfect piece of advice I'd receive in a month: "Leave your dignity in the van." Retired from the Royal Air Force, this adventurer led me through forest in the Vermillion Pass, near Radium Hot Springs at the Alberta-British Columbia border, where hiking trails were deep under several feet of snow. Plodding along in old-fashioned snowshoes tethered to my hiking boots, I fell into snowbanks a number of times before I got the hang of it.

The altitude, at 5,382 feet elevation, was kicking my backside, and my toes — despite two pairs of insulated ski socks — were almost numb. Still, it was about 0 degrees Fahrenheit. It was, I was enthralled at the majesty enveloping me and at Booth's astounding knowledge of the flora and fauna. He pointed out rabbit and other small animal tracks, relayed ancient Indian uses for the bark, needles and berries we found on myriad evergreens and plants, entertained me with tales of taking visitors on cross-country skiing and hell-snowshoeing journeys.

**Other**  
Ice walking is among popular diversions, either at Johnston Canyon, where steel walkways bolted to canyon walls give you extraordinary views of the huge, frozen waterfalls, or at Grotto Canyon, where your trek on a frozen creek takes you past ancient rock art. Ice cleats and hiking poles are provided by outfitters, along with hot chocolate and cookies. Cross-country skiing is widely available in parklands reaching in every direction from Banff, and downhill skiing is nearby at Ski Norquay, Sunshine Village and Lake Louise. Sleigh rides through the Bow River Valley last less than an hour but score big both for romantic twosomes and for families. If you book a private sleigh ride, you can get locally-made chocolate as part of the deal.

**Shopping**

With the exception of Banff Avenue, the main drag, animal names are given to all streets on the Banff townsite grid. Even in winter, you'll see deer and elk up close. Shopkeepers are friendly and the fancy places welcome looky-loos who don't want to spend a fortune. Dawdle in a coffee shop and you're likely to encounter visitors from New Zealand, Australia and the U.K., as I did.

**Break the bank**

Go to Jacques Cartier Clothier on Banff Avenue for Qiviuk sweaters and scarves; these are gorgeous and teardrop-shaped. The sweaters are \$500 and the scarves are \$200. There are more items woven from musk-ox fur. At Phyllis, Banff Avenue, there are temporary gold creations studded with Canadian diamonds and the locally mined, multicolored iridescent stone called ammolite. Art galleries abound; Canada House Gallery on Bear Street exhibits and sells work by Canadian artists, with media including the expected paintings, sculptures and carvings, but also handmade jewelry and fruit art. Don't leave town without checking out Bernadette Calabatt, the chocolatier on Banff Avenue, with more than 48 flavors.

**For more modest budgets**

The Willcock & Sax Gallery is a Banff National Park operation. Here, you find a cool collection of historical artwork, and many pieces are relatively affordable (as low as \$295). All artwork shown and sold here — block prints, woodwork, black-and-white photography, folk art — pertains to the environment. One of my favorite shops was The Bear & The Butterfly, a Banff Avenue shop wholly supporting Banff National Park. Here, Canadian handcrafts range from housewares and decor to clothing and toys. My favorite items were the children's books telling stories of local Indian culture. T-shirt and souvenir shops are plentiful, but I found all the take-home gifts I needed at Hudson's Bay Co., the Canadian department store on Banff Avenue, and at Banff Wine Store — a Canadian eiswein is very popular — on Caribou Street.

**If you go**

**Getting there**  
There are nonstop flights from Dallas/Fort Worth Airport to Calgary, starting at about \$475. The drive to Banff from Calgary is barely more than one hour. Car rentals — you will want a four- or all-wheel drive vehicle in winter — start at about \$50 daily.

**Staying**  
Banff Springs Hotel is an elegant old rail-road hotel rising like a castle above the town with a gorgeous spa and plenty of posh shopping; rooms from \$289, [www.fairmont.com](http://www.fairmont.com), 800-441-1414.

**Less fancy but still upscale**, Buffalo Mountain Lodge offers comfortable rooms with fireplaces, clawfooted tubs and heated floors; from \$169; [www.cmr.com](http://www.cmr.com), 800-661-1367. Outside of town, excellent choices include the lovely Storm Mountain Lodge, a collection of renovated 1920s cabins with a great restaurant on site, starting at \$140; [www.stormmountainlodge.com](http://www.stormmountainlodge.com), 403-762-4155.

**Dining**

Like all better resort towns in North America, Banff can pamper the palate.

**For gourmets**

The Maple Leaf on Banff Avenue won me over with its pan-Canadian menu, particularly its charbroiled lamb burger topped with cranberries and brie on big, toasted planks of rustic bread. At Saltik on Bear Street, I sat next to a roaring fire, sipped a cucumber-garnished martini and tucked into a chipotle-laced sirloin steak with a giant side of sauteed broccoli. At Bison Mountain Bistro, also on Bear Street, I swooned over the bison tenderloin with roasted wild mushrooms, wilted spinach and roasted potatoes with braised oxtail.

**Casual food**

Wild Flour is a bakery-cafe on Bear Street where homemade breads, pastries and exceptional breakfast panini get the day started right. Breakfast is served all day at Phil's on Spray Street, and at Melissa's on Lynx Street, the kids' menu, Alberta steaks and British Columbia salmon are popular picks. Italian restaurants abound, and the town has a few sushi spots, too. Lots of sandwich and coffee shops will pack box lunches for you, which are handy when heading out for a day of snowshoeing or sightseeing.

**How to Do**  
Howling Dog Tours offers several kinds of outings. The two-hour sledding excursion is the most popular. It's \$140 per person (kids ages 2-5, \$30; ages 6-9, \$80), including transportation from Banff and snacks. [www.howlingdogtours.com](http://www.howlingdogtours.com), 877-364-7533. White Mountain Adventures offers personalized snowshoe, ice-walking and cross-country ski tours with private guides; rates start at \$330 whether you have one or six people in your group. [www.whitemountainadventures.com](http://www.whitemountainadventures.com), 403-760-4403. Snowshoe and icewalk tours also are offered by Discover Banff Tours, starting at \$64 per person (\$50 for kids, ages 8-12); [www.banfftours.com](http://www.banfftours.com), 403-760-5007.

**When the snow melts**

Banff and Lake Louise have plenty to amuse you in late spring and summer. There's golf, fishing, horseback riding, hiking, mountain biking, white-water rafting, caving, kayaking and canoeing and gondola rides to mountaintops. Get every possible detail and information on Banff sightseeing, lodging, dining, shopping, spas, arts and festivals at the Banff/Lake Louise Tourism Web site, [www.banfflakelouise.com](http://www.banfflakelouise.com). — June Naylor

Nelson and the other guides encouraged us to make friends with the dogs, all of whom are abundantly affectionate — but always howling for more work. After cups of hot chocolate and bits of jerky, dried fruit and cheeses, we bundled back into the blankets in our sleds and went tearing back into the wild.