

take the **HIGH ROADS**

The Canadian Rockies are as iconic as maple syrup but how do you plan a driving trip that takes you to both the key attractions and hidden gems away from the crowds? **Alex Wright** reveals all

The Canadian Rockies are best seen in the summer months, when the snow has retreated and the vibrant colours of the alpine lakes, limestone peaks, forests and meadows come to life.

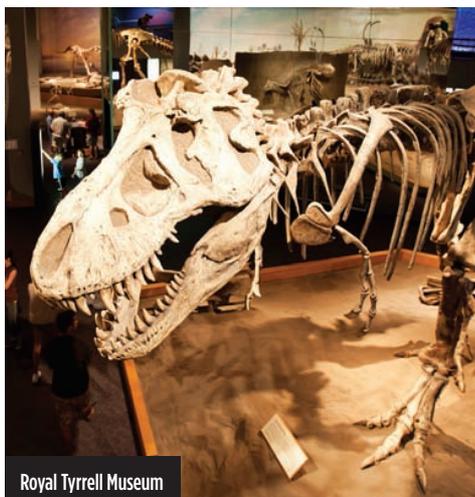
Banff, Lake Louise and Jasper are most people's image of the Rocky Mountains but look beyond these popular destinations and there are a host of hidden treasures waiting to be explored, both among the mountains and further afield – whether your clients are into driving, climbing, hiking, mountain biking or just strolling the multitude of trails or looking to spend cosy nights spent around a campfire.

And you don't have to travel far off those well-driven roads. For example,

the less-visited Vermillion Lakes are within walking distance from Banff and offer a stunning view of the iconic Mount Rundle at sunrise and sunset.

Climbing to the summit of Mt. Rundle, at 9,675 ft, is one of the most popular scrambles near Banff.

The two Parks Canada Red Chairs at nearby Mount Norquay Green Spot are another perfect selfie opportunity. Then there are the hidden caves and wildlife to explore at Johnston Canyon, one of the most popular day hikes in Banff National Park. It's fairly easy, making it perfect for families and people of almost any fitness level and age. The trail to the lower falls covers minimal elevation as it works its way through the forest. It then takes you over catwalks alongside Johnston creek and up into the canyon above the rushing



Royal Tyrrell Museum

waters below. As with many tourist attractions, for your clients to avoid the crowds suggest they arrive early in the morning or take advantage of the long daylight hours in the summer by turning up later in the day.

The farther you go on the trail the more the crowds will thin out. The upper falls trail is by no means a place of solitude in the summer, but the majority of people will not venture past the lower falls – and the large tour bus groups rarely have time to go beyond them.

Jurassic park

Perhaps start your journey by taking a step back in time with a visit to Dinosaur Provincial Park in south eastern Alberta's Badlands, about a two-and-a-half-hour drive east of Calgary.

This 81-square kilometre UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to the world's largest collection of dinosaur fossils and bones.

Take a guided tour or explore one of the five trails at your leisure before dropping in on the Dinosaur Visitor Centre to check out the impressive range of dinosaur exhibits.

Then head to Horseshoe Canyon, off Highway 9



Waterton Lakes



Hitting the trail

and 17km west of Drumheller, for a spectacular view of the Badlands.

Stand on the edge of this vast U-shaped canyon and survey the dramatic maroon-stripped landscape dating back almost 70 million years before picking a trail and hiking to the bottom.

The canyon contains some of the most significant rock art in North America. The Great Gallery, its best-known panel, includes well-preserved, life-sized figures with intricate designs. Other impressive sights include spring wildflowers, sheer sandstone walls and mature cottonwood groves.

Continuing the prehistoric theme, make a beeline for the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology: one of the world's preeminent dinosaur museums.

As well as housing one of the largest dinosaur displays on the planet, including 'Black Beauty', a 67-million-year-old T-rex, the museum also offers a range of fun and educational programmes that bring the past to life.

Avoiding the herd

The dubious-sounding Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump should be the next port of call. For almost 6,000 years the indigenous Blackfoot people used the cliffs 18km northwest of Fort McLeod to hunt buffalo and you can now walk (or run) in their footsteps along the cliff trail to the point where the buffalo plunged to the ground or watch the films of the real thing in next door's interpretive center.

Follow your compass south to Waterton Lakes National Park, where the prairies of Alberta meet the peaks of the Rocky Mountains.

Remember to pack your passport for a two-hour cruise across Upper Waterton Lake to the far shore of Goat Haunt in Montana, USA.

For a different perspective of this 525-sq km reserve, hike the Red Rock Canyon for a stunning view of the Blakiston Falls, mountains, wildflower meadows and, possibly, the odd grizzly.

Bunk down at the 1920s-era Prince of Wales Hotel on the lakefront for a spectacular room with a view the next morning.

The best way to explore this vast network ▶



Dinosaur Provincial Park



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This self-drive tour includes accommodation, return flights, car hire and insurance, running from May 1.



Hit the back roads

► of routes throughout the reserve is by foot, bicycle or car. There's everything from a leisurely 20-minute drive along the Akamina Parkway to a gruelling six-hour hike across Crypt Lake Trail, culminating in a crawl through a narrow rocky tunnel to Crypt Lake on the other side.

Those who enjoy taking things at a slower pace should grab their paddle and head north again for the Bow River. Paddling offers a great way to escape the crowds, enjoy some beautiful scenery all your own and keep fit at the same time.

Great outdoors

Tim Greathead, Canada Product Executive for Premier Holidays, recommends a trip to the less well-known Wells Grey Provincial Park in British Columbia, on the edge of the Rockies.

It's a stunning area of alpine wilderness, borne from volcanoes and carved by glaciers.

"It is definitely worth spending a day, or even an afternoon if you are short of time, in the park," he said. "Here you can hike through ancient forests, paddle in glistening lakes and raft on some of Canada's fiercest rapids all year round. The park also boasts some fantastic walking trails, 14



Paddle the Rockies



Glacier Skywalk

waterfalls, canoeing, kayaking and the chance to spot bears and other wildlife.

"It can be easily explored using Clearwater as a base, or alternatively you can stay a little closer to the park at Helmcken Falls lodge or one of a number of ranches that surround the park. Car hire is essential to get to and from Wells Grey."

Brian Hawe, Brand Manager at First Class Holidays, suggests visitors should explore Marble Canyon, which surrounds Tokumm Creek, just above its confluence with the Vermilion River, at the north end of Kootenay National Park in the Canadian Rockies of British Columbia.

"On the drive from Banff to Lake Louise head off the Banff-Windermere highway to hike along the Vermilion River valley and explore Marble Canyon," he said. "If you're in a motorhome perhaps stay overnight at the campground there and embrace Canada's wilderness."

For a real taste of the great outdoors, camp out under the stars in one of the host of campgrounds or RV parks.

For those who enjoy their home comforts stay in a hotel in the more underpopulated resorts of Canmore, Kananaskis or Waterton.

And the best way to get around? The beauty is that there are so many, said Denise Hunn, Manager – Canada and USA Portfolio, Prestige Holidays.

"Getting around the Rockies is very easy, either by car, motorhome or sightseeing coach services," she said. "Self-driving provides the freedom to stop anywhere along the journey for sightseeing or wildlife spotting, while the sightseeing coach services are great for those who don't want to drive." •



DON'T MISS...

- 1 Take a gondola ride up Whitehorn Mountain for stunning views of the picture-postcard Lake Louise.
- 2 Explore the 400-year-old Athabasca Glacier by foot or on a Snocoach.
- 3 Admire the spectacular mountain scenery of peaks, waterfalls and glacial lakes with a breathtaking drive across the Icefields Parkway. The 230-mile parkway between Jasper and Yoho National Park is one of Canada's great drives – but get up early and hit the road before the crowds do.
- 4 Feed your adrenaline with a trip up the glass-floored Glacier Skywalk, 280 metres above the Sunwapta Valley.
- 5 Enjoy some retail therapy in the shops and bars of Banff.

