

5 Family Friendly Rockies Adventures

“You are in bear country,” sign after sign said serving as reminders to stay safe. 8 hours from when we left Saskatchewan via an over packed mini-van, me, my husband and our two sons, officially entered the foothills of Alberta’s Rocky Mountains, with an ambitious adventure packed itinerary.

Sleep in a tipi in Kananaskis

Kananaskis’ 4000 km of parks – would be our first stop, though it would be a quick one thanks to a mid-day arrival. We set up camp outside of our Sundance Lodge Tipi, unpacked the bikes from the van and made our way down trails winding in and out of deserted campsites, eventually following a backcountry trail to a cliff’s side that offered a sweeping view of magnificent Mount Lorette.

With tons more tolerance for the cold than me, my carefree sons skipped stones and played in the Kananaskis River’s chilly glacier fed waters. Later that night, we all huddled around the fire roasting hot dogs and marshmallows before playing cards in the cozy confines of the heated tipi.

TIP: Bring bikes along if you are traveling with kids. It’s the perfect way for them to both stretch their legs and exercise some freedom.

Head to the top of a mountain via horseback at Boundary Ranch

A well-suited outing for my first time riders, they seemed at ease atop horses as we wound up and around a mountain range. An old fashioned trail ride, the horses positioned nose to tail, moved a little too slowly for my liking but as we reached the top, my annoyance faded when we were rewarded with stunning views of the Kananaskis Rocky Mountain Range.

TIP: Choose a one or two hour ride if travelling with young kids – any longer may be too long.

Hiking in Banff’s Sunshine Meadows

In order to fit everything we had planned in, we were soon on the move again. Next stop was Sunshine Meadows for a guided hike. Just outside of Banff National Park, we hiked the manageable introductory trail for 1.5 kilometers, 2 hours in total, passing through alpine covered meadows and learning about local flora. We laughed each time we came across the abundantly found ‘hippy hair flowers,’ also known as western anemones.

The eventful hike also included spotting a pine marten, finding a recently overturned rock where a grizzly bear had been digging for flower bulbs, and interacting with an entertaining ground squirrel.

TIP: For hiking newbies or nervous parents, your best bet is to hire a guide to hike with you. Peace of mind can be enjoyed with the safety, knowledge and direction of an area expert.

Canoeing on iconic Lake Louise

I was a bit hesitant to hop into a canoe with my boys and my camera, but after numerous reassurances from Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise staff that the canoe was indeed sturdy (if no one stood up), I took the risk. I’m so glad I did as this was absolutely the best way to take in the iconic majesty of one of Canada’s most beautiful spots – from on it! We worked our way around the jeweled turquoise lake, taking time to rest and absorb the incredible surroundings. The

novelty of rowing wore off quickly for the boys but thankfully neither of them tried to stand.

TIP: Aim for the morning to avoid scores of tourists.

Columbia Ice Fields in Jasper

By 9 a.m., the next day we were instantly transported from summer to winter with a visit to Jasper's Columbia Ice Fields. Whisked away via Terra Bus, my awestruck boys were more than delighted with its monster truck appeal. Too bad I couldn't convince my youngest son to wear his boots. What a picture it made for however as he walked atop 200 million tons of ice, thick as it is tall (~ 900 feet), in his thongs.

We explored the barren, white landscape for about 20 minutes alongside a host of tourists who were better prepared than us, wearing winter gear and bringing empty water bottles to fill with fresh glacier water found trickling down icy crevasses.

TIP: It is not summer on the glacier with a temperature around 0 Celsius. Dress warmly.

Peeking out over the edge at the Glacier Skywalk Adventure

Our last stop in the Rockies would be the recently opened Glacier Skywalk Adventure, where the only thing that separated us from the glacier formed valley and waterfalls below, was the glass-floored observation platform jutting out 218 meters from the side of the mountain. The surface was slick that day due to fog, but besides one other person, we had the platform to ourselves. The boys skidded their way around the circular bend seemingly unfazed with this marvel of design.

TIP: Go as early as possible. Crowds grow significantly throughout the day.