

## MOUNTAINS

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# The Scaredy Cat's Guide to the Mountains

You know that guy who can summit a peak, build a shelter, fight a bear and catch lunch in a stream? Yeah. You're not that guy. Not even close. In fact, the very idea of venturing out into the mountain areas makes you feel uneasy when you start thinking about all the things that could go awry. But guess what? The mountains aren't only for the rugged. They're for everyone — even those who are a bit softer around the edges. So what if you're more scaredy cat than bobcat, here's how you can get out there and still enjoy the Rockies in a way that makes you feel at home.



Photograph by Shannon Martin



Skywalk photograph by Mike Seehagel; hotel photograph courtesy of Pursuit Collection

## How to Get Up Close to a Glacier Without the Worry that You'll Fall into a Crevasse

Even those who haven't read any Jon Krakauer know instinctively that glaciers are not to be taken lightly. The very word sends a cold shiver down the backs of seasoned mountaineers and street-level civilians alike. Terrible and beautiful, enthroned among craggy peaks and riddled with deep and deadly crevasses, glaciers are our merciless alpine overlords.

Although intrepid alpine adventurers might live for the thrill of exploring such a fearsome natural phenomenon, for the rest of the normies out there who have no desire to flirt with danger, the optimum way to get up close to a glacier is the Columbia Icefield Adventure tour.



LEFT The Columbia Icefield Adventure offers guests the experience of walking on glacial ice.

TOP The Columbia Icefield Skywalk is an architectural marvel jutting out over the Sunwapta Valley.

ABOVE The Moraine Lounge at the Glacier View Lodge on the Icefields Parkway.

The Columbia Icefield is situated along the Icefields Parkway, the highway that joins Banff and Jasper National Parks, just past the halfway point on the Jasper side. Comprised of multiple glaciers, the Icefield has long been an attraction for Park tourists, who arrive by the busload during the summer months to be ferried up onto the Athabasca Glacier (a welcome mat of sorts for the Icefield) via Ice Explorer buses fitted with gargantuan snow tires.

Now part of the portfolio of the international experiential travel company Pursuit, the Icefield Adventure, which operates mid-April to mid-October, continues to draw busloads, even as the Athabasca has experienced significant recession. Return guests who last visited several decades ago are uniformly shocked by the expanse of moraine — gravelly banks formed by glacial movement — that now separates the ice sheet and the Parkway.

While you can certainly join the hordes on one of the standard tours during the daytime, a far better way to get up on the Athabasca is to book the Glacier View Experience, a private evening tour packaged with an overnight stay at the Glacier View Lodge. Since being bought by Pursuit, the formerly unremarkable hotel has undergone an all-out renovation into a minimalist alpine-modern stunner with decor elements inspired by glacial motifs. Along with the accommodation and private tour, Glacier View Experience guests get a three-course dinner at the in-house Altitude restaurant and buffet breakfast the next morning, followed by a visit to the nearby Columbia Icefield Skywalk, an architecturally impressive glass-floored viewing deck along the Parkway jutting out over the Sunwapta Valley 900 feet below.

The Glacier View Experience kicks off with a charcuterie and sparkling-wine welcome reception in the Moraine Lounge, where a huge wall of windows provides exceptional views of the main attraction. The tour embarks as the sky begins to show hints of sunset, bathing the surrounding peaks with the palest pink glow as you meander the ice sheet and sip hot chocolate or cider.

True, getting used to a glacier visible from a highway after being served charcuterie is not exactly hard-core mountaineering. But there's still a visceral thrill to getting so close to an ancient and ever-changing force of nature. As an Albertan, standing on this moving, living, breathing sheet of ice moves something inside you. To a glacier, you may be about as significant as a piece of moraine, and yet, you feel drawn to protect it. —S.A.

## MOUNTAINS

### Four Hiking Trails in the Mountains Where You Couldn't Get Lost Even if You Tried

You don't have to be an expert in orienteering to enjoy these easy hikes, all with obvious places for parking, clearly marked routes and well-trodden paths. No doubt, they're beautiful, which is why they're popular — rather than "hidden gems," consider these hikes mined and polished and on display in the case of a major jewellery retailer. The price of popularity is that these trails are bound to be crowded on weekends, so for optimum enjoyment try to go mid-week.



#### SNOWSHOE HARE

Pull into the West Bragg Creek day use area north parking lot and you'll be greeted by a large map describing the area's trail system. On the five-km Snowshoe Hare loop, dogs can roam off-leash once you're officially outside the boundary of Bragg Creek Provincial Park (just minutes from the trailhead). The path is forested with a few small hills — an easy trek in either direction. The loop's west side allows horseback riders and cyclists, so be sure to share the trail. Grab coffee afterwards at Moto Café in Bragg Creek.



#### TUNNEL MOUNTAIN

The parking lot for this 4.3-km out-and-back trail in Banff is on St. Julien Road, the road that connects downtown Banff to the Banff Centre for Arts & Creativity campus. The trail is somewhat steep, but it has lots of switchbacks (another one where you'll be happy to have micro-spikes with you in the event that you need them). At the top, you'll be rewarded with incredible views of town, Mount Rundle and the Bow River hoo-doo. Afterwards, escape the Banff Avenue crowds at the Juniper Bistro, located just up from town on the road that leads to Mt. Norquay ski resort. Their special "graze" menu is available from 2:30 p.m. on weekends and 4 p.m. on weekdays.



#### TROLL FALLS

Off Highway 40 (Kananaskis Trail), turn up Mount Allen Drive then onto Stoney Trail for parking lot access. This 3.4-km out-and-back hike is a family favourite. The tree-lined trail is mostly flat and features a stunning waterfall at the end that freezes in the winter (if you're feeling adventurous, there's also a well-marked off-shoot trail that allows you to ascend higher than the main falls). After your hike, head to Blacktail Bar in the Pomeroy Kananaskis Mountain Lodge, which also offers a kids' menu. —A.B.

**FEAR**  
DISORIENTATION

**HOW TO**  
**DEAL**  
Do a guided hike.

**Kananaskis**  
**Outfitters**  
kananaskisoutfitters.com

**Canadian Rockies**  
**Alpine Hiking**  
canadianrockiesalpine.com

**Great Divide Nature**  
**Interpretation**  
greatdivide.ca



### GROTTO CREEK CANYON

Park at the Grotto Mountain day-use lot between Exshaw and Canmore for this 4.2-km out-and-back hike. If it's still feeling a bit like winter, you'll want to have micro-spikes (metal grips that slip on over your shoes or boots) for the walk along the frozen canyon floor. Watch for pictographs on the left as you hike in.

## FEAR RUNNING LOW ON ENERGY

### HOW TO DEAL

When you're out being active in the mountains, sometimes all it takes to turn a bad time into a good time is the right snack. Here are a bunch that are easy to stash away in your pack or pocket, and most importantly, taste great.

**Clif Bars** The O.G. of energy bars has been at it since 1992. Clif's old-school flavours like chocolate chip and crunchy peanut butter are still around, but the company has also kept current with a line of fruit-smoothie-filled bars in flavours such as wild-blueberry acai and tart cherry berry. —S.A. [clifbar.ca](http://clifbar.ca)



### Empire Provisions

**Beef Jerky** We southern Albertans *loooove* our jerky, and the local charcuterie wizards at Empire Provisions make some of the best beef jerky in town. Stash some strips of maple-mustard in your pocket for a one-way ticket to flavour country. [empireprovisions.com](http://empireprovisions.com)



**Little Tucker** These plant-based snacks were developed here in Calgary by Aussie expat Laura Incognito, who grew the company from a grassroots operation into a national brand. Try her snickaroo squares, made with nut butter, maple syrup, sea salt and raw chocolate. [littletucker.ca](http://littletucker.ca)



**Moon Cheese** Cheese isn't always the best trail snack, but Moon Cheese is a revelation. It's basically legit cheese with the moisture removed, a process that leaves it looking like moon rocks. Crunchy, savoury, packed with protein, it's as addictive as popcorn. Dogs dig it, too. [mooncheese.com](http://mooncheese.com)



### Shameless Energy Balls

These get the vote for cheekiest packaging (blurred-out sections suggest the featured ingredients have something to hide). Tuck a package of "sassy lemon coconut" in your pocket for a gluten-free, vegan, keto-appropriate snack that will also make you chuckle. [nakedcoconuts.com](http://nakedcoconuts.com)



**ViaBars** ViaBars are gluten-free, 100-per cent vegan and loaded with super-healthy raw seeds. And, they're made just down the road in High River. Grab a 16-bar variety pack to figure out whether you're more of a coconut crave type or a mucho mocha type. [viafoods.com](http://viafoods.com)





## The No-Stress All-Inclusive Wellness Experience in Kananaskis Country that will Leave You Feeling Relaxed and Refreshed

From your perch looking out at the Kananaskis Country Rockies your “adventure guide” implores you to envision the word that embodies your current state of mind. As you straighten your spine and take a deep breath of the crisp mountain air, you can’t help but feel grounded, serene in your spectacular surroundings.

Many people dream of achieving such an idyllic experience, but don’t know how or where to start. The appeal of the all-inclusive wellness retreat is that it takes the guesswork out of planning, handling the logistics of all of the dining, lodging and activities for a truly restorative mountain getaway. Co-founded by Calgary physician Dr. Ingemaud Gerber, Evolve Retreat Co. offers comprehensive wellness experiences ranging from one-day mini-retreats to weeklong immersives.

The retreats incorporate fitness training, adventure activities, clean-eating, restorative yoga nidra sessions (sometimes accompanied by live

cello) and personal wellness seminars on how to get better sleep, manage your stress and more. Evolve has hopped around various venues in the Rockies and the Foothills, but it recently found a home at Crosswaters Resort, the renovated lodge tucked behind the Pomeroy Kananaskis Mountain Lodge in Kananaskis Village.

Before even setting foot in K-Country, guests go through a pre-retreat consultation to create a customized itinerary. Eliminating the stress of having to work out the details allows you to redirect the focus on yourself — and your wellness. “It’s really about providing a plan and being that support system for the people that come to our retreats,” says Tina Green, Evolve’s co-founder and director of experience.

Evolve is billed as a wellness retreat, but adventure is a key part of the programming. A typical day includes the option to pursue activities such as hiking (both at a relaxed pace or an advanced level), horseback riding and kayaking or canoeing.

You’ll also have the opportunity to engage one-on-one with specific members of the Evolve team, whose areas of expertise range from strength and mindset training to meditation.

You can spend your individual time with a nature walk along the Village Rim Trail, journaling about your experiences or reading that book that’s been on your nightstand for months. But undoubtedly, the best perk of the Kananaskis Village location is the proximity to the Kananaskis Nordic Spa, conveniently located beside Crosswaters Resort. After grueling workouts with renowned trainer Tommy Europe or an all-day hike up into the alpine, the spa’s hot-cold-rest cycle is the ideal way to recuperate.

The ironic thing about trying to individually plan a wellness-focused getaway is that it can end up being overwhelmingly stressful — especially in the mountains. Between the fear of getting lost on a trail, being ambushed by sudden weather changes and trying to figure out where to stay and how to plan adequate meals, it’s not surprising if, in the end, you’d rather stay in the city. But, with every detail of your visit, from the curated menu and personalized workout plan, to the yoga nidra and workshops, signing on for an Evolve Retreat means you can definitely sleep easier. —*M. W.*



## What to do When There's a Bear Warning Sign at the Start of Your Hiking Trail

So, your day pack is stocked with energy bars, your cellphone and an extra layer of clothing, your water bottle is full and you've parked and secured your vehicle in the lot or whatever roadside parking there is (and yes, you've got your keys). Your hiking shoes are tied up the way you like them and you're 100-per cent ready to hit the trail.

But there's a sign: "Bear in Area."

How ominous. What now?

Unlike an official Alberta Parks or Parks Canada trail closure, which legally restricts anyone from entering an area due to bear activity, a warning still allows hikers to proceed. A closure is a bummer, but at least it's clear. With a warning, just because you technically *can* still do the hike, the bigger question is: should you?

A closure is often a proactive measure to keep people away from areas ripe with intensive production of bears' favourite food, or a response to reports of a bear acting aggressively toward people while protecting cubs or a carcass. A warning, on the other hand, means there have been multiple sightings of a bear near the trail as recent as 24 hours ago. "[With] a warning, we don't have knowledge of an imminent danger, but we have an elevated level of concern," says John Paczkowski, an ecologist with Alberta Parks. "We warn people there has been above-average bear activity in a spot, and they should proceed with more caution than they would typically."

If you do decide to proceed, it's important to know how to be safe. Number one, is not to be alone — groups of four or more are far less likely to have a serious bear encounter, Paczkowski says. If you're flying solo and really don't want to turn back, ask another hiking group if you can

tag along. Additionally, if you have your dog with you, it might be best not to venture forth. Even on leash, dogs can exacerbate the aggression level of bears, or escalate intensity, Paczkowski says.

When you're out on the trail, making lots of noise is key to helping avoid a surprise bear attack. Also key is every member of the group carrying bear spray — and knowing how to use it. Both Parks Canada and Alberta Parks have instructions on their respective websites on how to properly use bear spray, or if you're buying bear spray at an outfitter such as MEC or Bass Pro Shops you can always ask the staff.

While you're hiking, keep an eye out for signs of bears. If you see lots of digging marks or scat (bear poop) consider turning around. It's not fun admitting defeat, but it's better to be safe than stubborn. If you find you're frequently venturing into areas that have bear activity warnings, consider taking a bear awareness course from an organization such as Calgary-based Bear Safety & More, which offers customized workshops and bear assessments for the oil and gas, forestry, construction, transportation and tourism sectors. The Outdoor Centre at the University of Calgary presents regular bear-safety lectures (the Outdoor Centre website also links to an instructional video on how to use bear spray).

Official warning or not, the regional mountain areas require bear awareness at all times. "Anytime you set foot out of your vehicle, or travel in the natural environment of Kananaskis, you are, in fact, in bear country," Paczkowski says, "so you need to be alert and prepared, and you need to anticipate having a bear encounter. With that in mind, you want to avoid that eventuality." —T.B ☺

### WHAT IS BEAR SPRAY ANYWAY?

Bear spray is a mix of substances including capsi-cum, an oily resin derived from hot peppers, in a pressurized canister. When sprayed at an approaching bear, the capsi-cum causes temporary eye irritation and breathing difficulty, which is no doubt awful for the bear, but ultimately not fatal. A canister will spray for a duration of about eight to 10 seconds. Bear spray is similar in makeup to pepper spray, though pepper spray is classified as a prohibited weapon as defined by the Firearms Act, while "bear deterrent spray" is legal to possess and carry (so long as it's not being used on humans). The canisters expire, so it's important to check the dates from season to season. —S.A.

## FEAR THE UNEXPECTED

### HOW TO DEAL

Read some books about wilderness survival. In addition to preparing you to deal with those not likely to happen (but just what if it did?) situations, wilderness survival books look badass on your coffee table.



### Bush Craft 101: A Field Guide to the Art of Wilderness Survival

by Dave Canterbury  
(Simon and Schuster),  
a classic of the genre.



### Outdoor Safety Handbook

by Buck Tilton (Stackpole Books), because Buck Tilton seems like the name of someone who knows how to get things done.



### Outdoor Safety & Survival

by Mike Nash  
(Rocky Mountain Books), because the author is from Prince George so he'd be especially knowledgeable about survival in the mountains of Western Canada.

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