



MELISSA GRAHAM was born in Sunderland, in the north-east of England, and grew up only yards from a railway line. Along with half of County Durham, she claims to be a direct descendant of George Stephenson, the Father of the Railways. In 1988 she ventured south to read French and Spanish at Cambridge University. Subsequent travels took her rather further afield and have included large tracts of Europe, Southern Africa, South-East Asia and South America.

Melissa researched and wrote the first two editions of *Trans-Canada Rail Guide* in the 1990s – as well as co-writing *The Rough Guide to Chile* and *The Rough Guide to Ecuador*. Following the birth of her twin sons, Joe and Ben, and then her daughter Eleanor a few years later, travel took a back seat, and she worked for many years as a UK-based editor for Rough Guides Ltd.

Returning to Canada to update *Trans-Canada Rail Guide* for this sixth edition, she was thrilled to see the exciting changes that have taken place across the country – and delighted to find the railway has lost none of its charm.

On this trip she was joined by her 18-year-old sons **JOE AND BEN DANBURY**, who helped research the city guides for Montréal and Toronto – bringing a



youthful perspective to the task. Joe and Ben both fell in love with Canada – in particular the hospitality of the people, and the size of the breakfasts – while working on the book, and are already plotting future travels there.

Trans-Canada Rail Guide

First edition 1996; this sixth edition 2020

Publisher: Trailblazer Publications

The Old Manse, Tower Rd, Hindhead, Surrey, GU26 6SU, UK

www.trailblazer-guides.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-912716-07-4

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Text, maps and photographs (unless otherwise credited)

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Updated information will shortly be available on:  www.trailblazer-guides.com

Photos – Front cover and this page: *The Canadian* on its four-day journey between Toronto and Vancouver, on the section between Kamloops and Jasper. Photo © VIA Rail.

Printed in China: print production by D'Print (☎ +65-6581 3832), Singapore

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The Canadian heading into the Rocky Mountains (photo © VIA Rail).

Acknowledgements

First of all, a big thank you to my publisher, Bryn Thomas, for giving me the opportunity to update this book for a sixth edition – and for being so patient, flexible and kind at just the right moments. Thanks, also, to the rest of the team at Trailblazer, especially to Anna Jacomb-Hood for her exacting and thoughtful editing, which improved the book no end; to Nick Hill for redrawing so many maps; to Clare Weldon for her careful proofreading; to Jane Thomas for meticulously updating the index; and to Caroline Gray for organising publicity.

I am also extremely grateful to VIA Rail for supporting this book both logistically and by providing me with all the information I needed – a special thank you to Natalie Smith and Lee George in the UK, and Josephine Wasch and Denise Henn in Montréal.

I would like to thank the many Canadian tourist boards (and their UK representatives) that supported my research trip with practical assistance and by patiently answering my many questions. Particular thanks are owed to Kari Lewis from the Halifax Waterfront Visitor Information Centre; Robert Lancup from the Office du Tourisme de Québec; Daniela Resenterra from QuébecOriginal; Martine Venne from Tourisme Montréal; Olivia Ebeling from Tourism Toronto; Riley Chervinski from Tourism Winnipeg; Jillian Recksiedler from Travel Manitoba; Lily Davis from Travel Alberta; and Lindsay Gallant from Tourism Calgary.

Finally – my family: a very big thank you to my sons Joe and Ben for helping research the Montréal and Toronto city guides with enthusiasm and care; to my husband Richard for encouraging me to take on the project and holding the fort back home while I was away; and to my daughter Eleanor whose lovely text messages (and pictures of the dog and the cat) meant I never felt lonely while travelling alone.

A request

The author and publisher have tried to ensure that this guide is as accurate and up to date as possible. However, things change even on these well-worn routes. If you notice any changes or omissions that should be included in the next edition of this guide, please email or write to Melissa Graham at Trailblazer (address on p2). You can also contact us via the Trailblazer website (trailblazer-guides.com). Those persons making a significant contribution will be rewarded with a free copy of the next edition

INTRODUCTION & ROUTES

The overwhelming thing about Canada is its sheer size. How can one train ride in a single country take four whole days and nights? And you've still got further to go. No other mode of transport conveys such an acute sense of Canada's vastness, of its beautiful, desolate, wide-open spaces. Endless

No other mode of transport conveys such an acute sense of Canada's vastness, of its beautiful, desolate, wide-open spaces.

stretches of track take you through a wilderness scarcely touched by humans. You can travel for hours without seeing a road or a house, or indeed any sign of habitation – it's an incredible, almost haunting, experience. Back in 1872 an early traveller wrote a book about Canada's interior called *The Great Lone Land*. It captured the North



Mt Robson, at 3954m (12,972ft) the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies. There are great views of this iconic mountain in British Columbia from the train (see p219) on the Jasper to Kamloops section of the journey. Photo © VIA Rail.

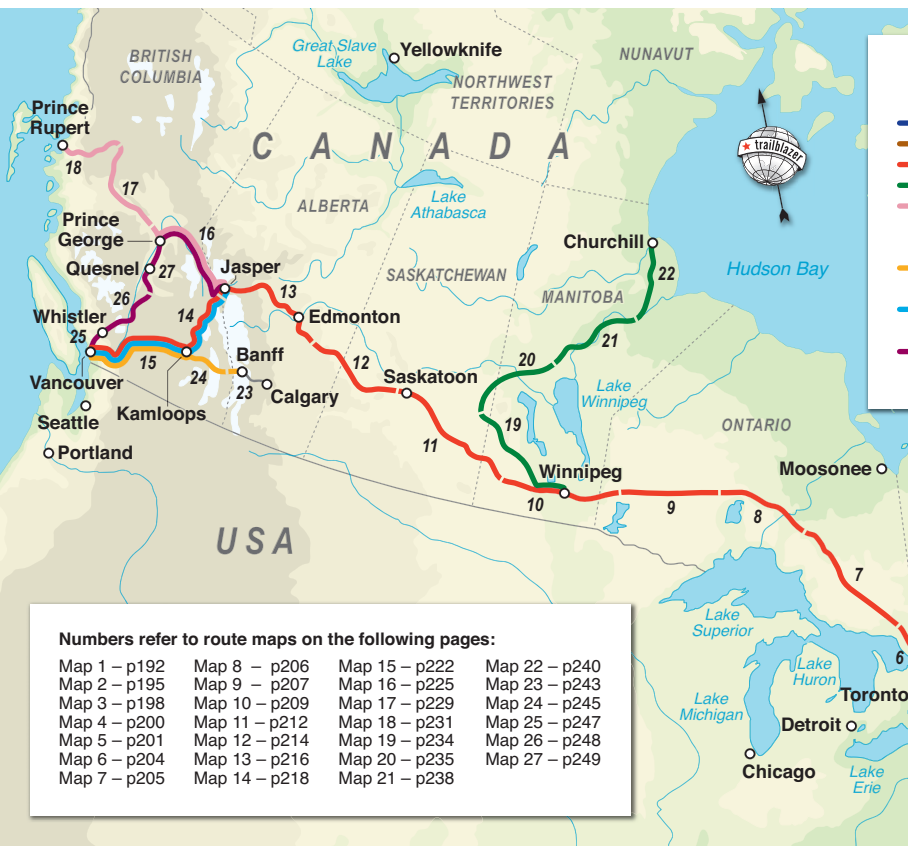
American imagination and became an instant bestseller. Today, much of Canada is still a 'great lone land' that continues to fire the imagination of the modern traveller; the huge iron artery stretching across the continent is truly the best way to cross it.

It is also the reason why this massive country exists at all. When the Dominion of Canada was created in 1867 it was no more than a set of loosely

The railroad ... gave the new country its life-blood and bound the provinces together into a transcontinental nation.

connected colonies with no sense of unity or nationhood. It was, moreover, under a very real threat of being swallowed up by its powerful southern neighbour. The railroad was the single

most important reason why this never happened: it gave the new country its life-blood and bound the provinces together into a transcontinental nation. When the last spike was driven in on 7 November 1885 it paved the way for rapid expansion, mass immigration and economic boom. Urban development ran parallel to



the tracks and the stops along the line became the backbone of a new nation – which makes a rail trip today a fascinating journey into this young country's history.

What you'll probably remember about the trip more than anything, though, is the dazzling scenery you travel through. In 1885 the General Manager of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company realised that travellers would flock from all corners of the world to ride through such magnificent landscape. 'If we cannot export the scenery,' he declared, 'we shall have to import the tourists!' And tourists have quite joyfully been imported ever since.

Imagine the snow-capped peaks towering right over the tracks; the sweeping panoramas of lakes, waterfalls and glaciers gliding past you. Better still, imagine looking out of the window onto a jade-green lake to find yourself staring at a moose. The whole thing takes your breath away.

A rail ride across Canada is a supremely relaxing experience, a rare joy in today's climate of rapid communications and jet travel

On top of all this, a rail ride across Canada is a supremely relaxing experience, a rare joy in today's climate of rapid communications and jet travel. In the words of Robert Louis Stevenson, 'the train disturbs so little the scenery through which it takes us, that our heart becomes full of the placidity and stillness of the country'. Nowhere is this more true than in Canada.

Rail routes

- Halifax to Montréal (*The Ocean*) —
- Montréal to Toronto (*Corridor*) —
- Toronto to Vancouver (*The Canadian*) —
- Winnipeg to Churchill —
- Jasper to Prince Rupert —

Rocky Mountaineer

- Banff to Vancouver via Kamloops (*First Passage to the West*) —
- Jasper to Vancouver via Kamloops (*Journey through the Clouds*) —
- Vancouver to Jasper via Whistler & Quesnel (*Rainforest to Gold Rush*) —



Routes

Travel a thousand miles up a great river; more than another thousand miles along great lakes; a thousand miles across rolling prairies; and another thousand through woods and over the great ranges of mountains, and you have travelled from Ocean to Ocean.

Rev Grant, Ocean to Ocean

ROUTE OPTIONS

Canada's **transcontinental through service** – known as *The Canadian* – runs twice a week in each direction between **Toronto** and **Vancouver**. Like all of Canada's inter-city trains, *The Canadian*

is operated by **VIA Rail**, the state-owned national passenger rail network. You can take **connecting trains** to extend or alter your route in several ways. For a start, if you want to make it a truly transcontinental journey from coast to coast, you can begin or end it in **Halifax** on the Atlantic coast. Alternatively you can make **Montréal** or **Québec City** the eastern terminus of your trip. Another option is to start or end in **Prince Rupert** on the Pacific coast instead of Vancouver; this is very popular with travellers who want to combine their rail trip with the Inside Passage ferry ride between Prince Rupert and Port Hardy on Vancouver Island. Finally, if you're short of time you may choose to do not the whole trans-Canada trip but only a portion of it, such as the scenic leg between Jasper and Vancouver – you can book tickets from and to any point on the line. And from May to early October a weekly service between Edmonton and Vancouver supplements the full Toronto–Vancouver twice-weekly service.

Traditionally, each rail route had its own special name, but VIA Rail recently stopped using some of them, but keeping *The Canadian* and *The Ocean*.

In addition to VIA Rail's national passenger trains there are the privately run **Rocky Mountaineer** trains, which cover four itineraries through the Rockies as part of train-and-hotel packages for tourists; see box pp28-9.



❑ VIA Rail

VIA Rail was created by the Canadian government in 1977 as a ‘Crown Corporation’ (a state-owned company) responsible for running all intercity passenger rail services in Canada. It inherited passenger networks from the Canadian National (CN) and Canadian Pacific Railway (now CP) companies, which it merged – and later streamlined – into a single network. However, VIA does not own the tracks its trains run on; these are owned and maintained by CN and CP, who operate a vast network of rail freight services, transporting a wide variety of goods across the country.

At the time of research, VIA’s fleet consists of 73 locomotives and 501 rail cars operating services across 12,500km of track, served by 121 stations across Canada. VIA employs 3115 staff, and has its head office in Montréal.

You’ll find more information on fares and booking tickets on pp21-6, and information about ticket classes and services on board the trains, including sleeping accommodation and dining options, on pp30-40.

Below and on the following pages is a brief overview of these trains and routes.

❑ Halifax to Montréal – *The Ocean*

The journey covers 1346km over 22 hours, with one night on the train.

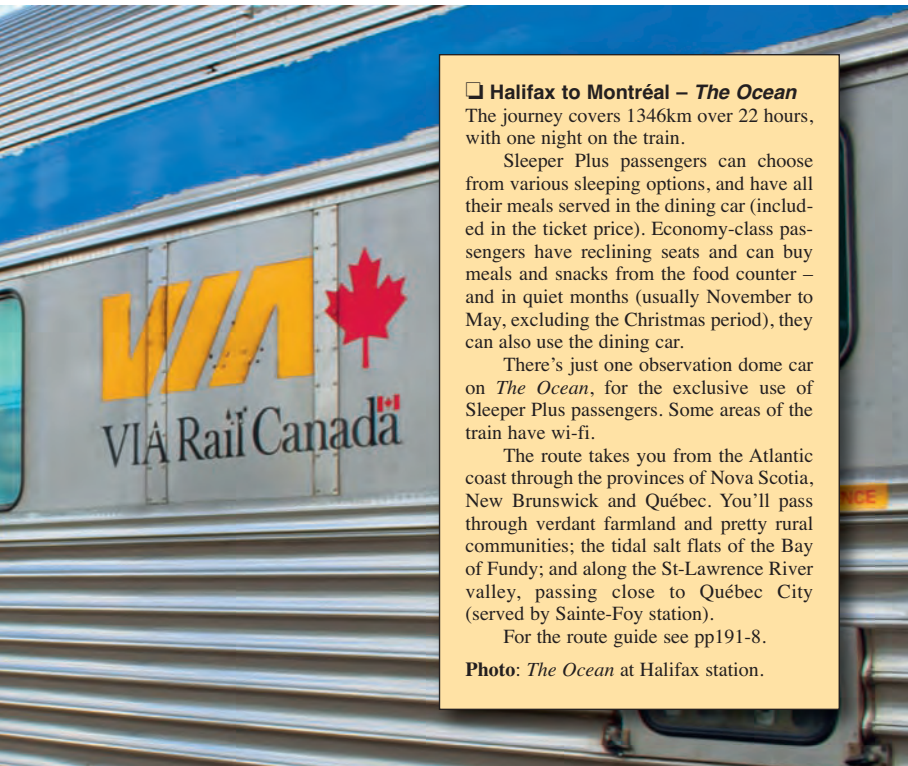
Sleeper Plus passengers can choose from various sleeping options, and have all their meals served in the dining car (included in the ticket price). Economy-class passengers have reclining seats and can buy meals and snacks from the food counter – and in quiet months (usually November to May, excluding the Christmas period), they can also use the dining car.

There’s just one observation dome car on *The Ocean*, for the exclusive use of Sleeper Plus passengers. Some areas of the train have wi-fi.

The route takes you from the Atlantic coast through the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Québec. You’ll pass through verdant farmland and pretty rural communities; the tidal salt flats of the Bay of Fundy; and along the St-Lawrence River valley, passing close to Québec City (served by Sainte-Foy station).

For the route guide see pp191-8.

Photo: *The Ocean* at Halifax station.



❑ Montréal to Toronto – *The Corridor route*

The area between and around Eastern Canada's most populated cities – including Toronto, Montréal and Ottawa – is served by what VIA Rail call their *Corridor* services. In this guide we cover the main route between Montréal and Toronto, which is 539km long and takes roughly five hours.

You can choose between Business class and Economy class, and there's free wi-fi throughout the train. There's no dining car; Economy-class passengers can buy light meals and snacks, while Business-class passengers have meals included in their ticket; all food is served at your seat.

The route is not particularly scenic – these trains are about getting from A to B, rather than taking in the views. For the route guide see pp198-202.

Photo: The CN Tower (see p120) soaring above the train in Toronto (© VIA Rail).





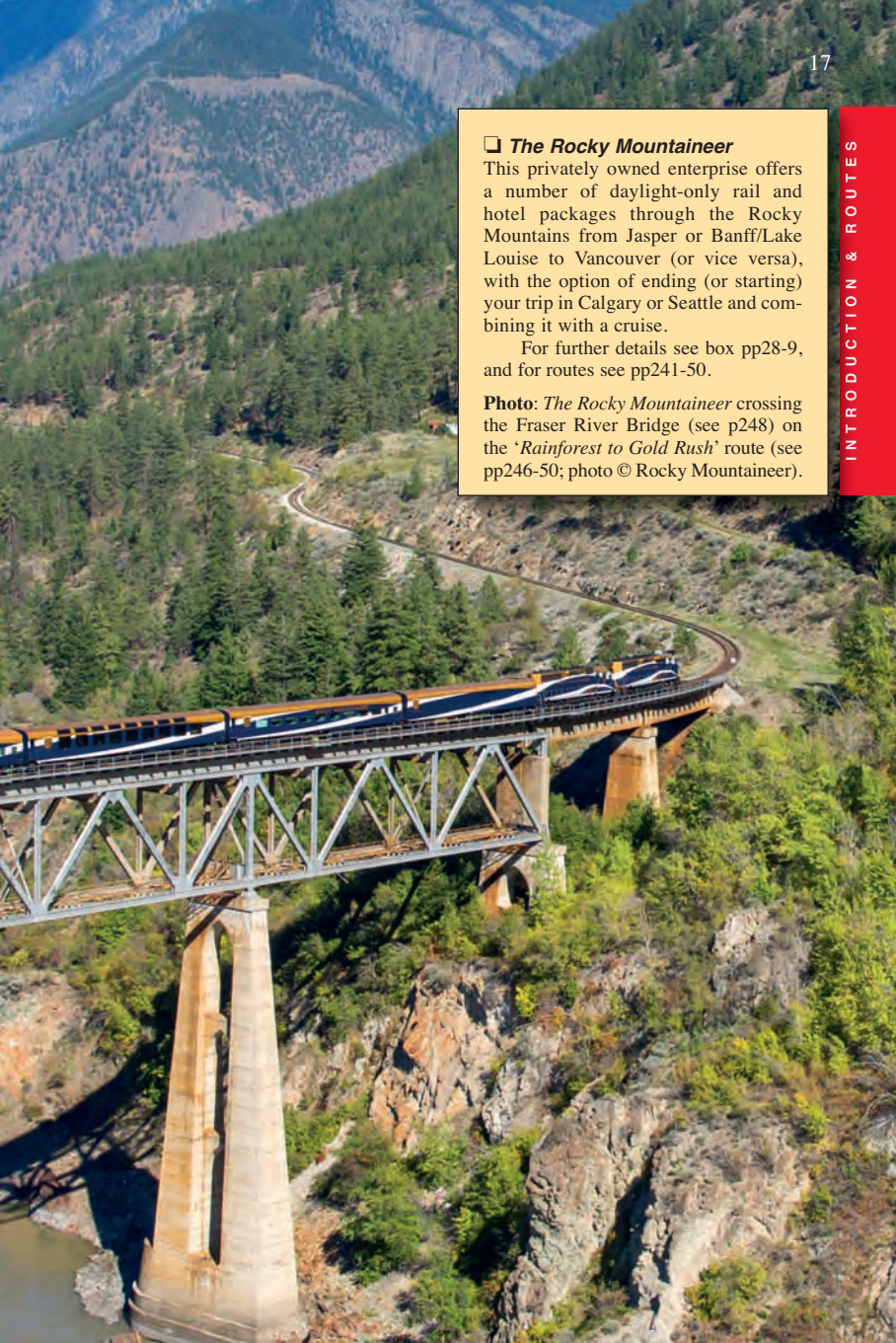
❑ **Toronto to Vancouver – *The Canadian***

VIA's flagship transcontinental service covers 4466km over four full days, with four nights on the train. It's also known as Train 1 (westbound) and Train 2 (eastbound). An **Edmonton to Vancouver** service (May-Oct 1/week; two days and one full night) was introduced in 2019. Various types of sleeping accommodation are available in Sleeper Plus class and Prestige class. Passengers with Sleeper class tickets have exclusive use of the dining car, where all meals are served (included in the cost of the ticket). Economy-class passengers have reclining seats and can buy hot meals, snacks and drinks from the food counter. All classes have access to a 'dome car', where upper-deck seating is surrounded by wrap-around windows giving panoramic views.

The route takes you through the lakes and forests of northern Ontario; the vast plains of central and western Canada; the soaring mountains, passes and canyons of the Rockies; and finally along the rugged Fraser Canyon to the Pacific.

For the route guide see pp203-23.

Photo: There are spectacular views from the dome cars on *The Canadian* as you pass through the Rockies (© VIA Rail).



The Rocky Mountaineer

This privately owned enterprise offers a number of daylight-only rail and hotel packages through the Rocky Mountains from Jasper or Banff/Lake Louise to Vancouver (or vice versa), with the option of ending (or starting) your trip in Calgary or Seattle and combining it with a cruise.

For further details see box pp28-9, and for routes see pp241-50.

Photo: *The Rocky Mountaineer* crossing the Fraser River Bridge (see p248) on the 'Rainforest to Gold Rush' route (see pp246-50; photo © Rocky Mountaineer).

BREAKING YOUR JOURNEY

Some of Canada's most appealing cities, notably **Vancouver**, **Toronto** and **Montréal**, are conveniently located at the beginning or end of a line, so spending time there is no problem as far as your ticket's concerned. In addition, most VIA Rail tickets include **one free stopover** per journey, which can be for as many days as you wish. This means you can break your rail journey while paying the same price as for a single through ticket. If you want to make more than one stopover, you get the longest stopover for free, but have to buy **separate tickets** for any additional extra legs of the journey, which works out more expensive than a through ticket. Alternatively, if you're planning to make multiple stops, you should consider buying a rail pass (see box p24).

The single most compelling stop on *The Canadian* is undoubtedly **Jasper**, in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. Otherwise, **Winnipeg** makes a good place to stop off, being right in the middle of the country – though some travellers find **Edmonton** more appealing. If you're travelling on *The Ocean* (Halifax–Montréal), you should try to stop off at **Québec City** (served by Sainte-Foy station), perhaps the most beautiful city in Canada.

The daylight-only train from Jasper to Prince Rupert includes an obligatory overnight stop at **Prince George**; no other stops are allowed on a through ticket.

When to go

Canada is beautiful in every season. **Spring** can be rainy, and sometimes windy, but you begin to see stable, mild weather once you're into May, when temperatures average 13–15°C/55–59°F in most cities.

Summer generally arrives mid June; the warmest and sunniest months are July and August, when temperatures average around 25°C/80°F in most places along the railway line. At this time of year a particular treat is seeing the alpine flowers bloom in the high pastures of the Rocky Mountains.

Autumn is a tourist attraction in itself, as the country's forests turn into a glorious blaze of reds and golds, especially in eastern Canada.

In **winter** the snow-covered landscapes (usually from late November to February) are stunning when seen from the comfort of the train – travelling through the Rockies, in particular, when the mountains and forests are covered in snow is absolutely magical. That said, once you get off the train you have to be prepared for sub-zero temperatures, which can make sightseeing quite a challenge. City centres are often depressingly empty during winter, when people often stick to the underground or covered walkways typical in many cities.

Of course, there's more than the weather to take into account in deciding when to go. An important consideration is the **cost** of the trip: sleeper rail fares and hotel rates are considerably cheaper out of the tourist season (with off-season generally considered to be between October/November and April). It's also much easier to get train reservations in the quieter months, whereas peak period

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

1

How much will it cost?

The price of your rail journey will depend on not only where you're travelling from and to, but also the type of ticket you get (in particular whether you travel Economy class or Sleeper class), the time of year you travel, and how far in advance you book your ticket. Prices vary according to demand, availability and how flexible you want your ticket to be, in terms of exchanges and refunds. For Sleeper-class tickets the cheapest time of year to travel is the winter season (November to March), followed by spring (April and May), with high season usually spreading from June to October. The price of Economy-class tickets is the same year-round.

Advance-purchase discounts are available on all trains year-round; availability is limited, and they're sold on a first-come first-served basis. These advance purchase fares are shown on VIA's website as 'Escape' fares in Economy class and 'Discounted' fares in Sleeper Plus class. To get discounted Sleeper-class fares on *The Canadian*, you should book as far ahead as you can – private cabins, in particular, are often sold out many months in advance. Note that 'Escape' and 'Discounted' tickets are less flexible than full fares, and usually carry fees if you want to change the date of travel or cancel the ticket (the booking page on VIA's website specifies the **cancellation and exchange fees** for each fare quoted).

The **sample fares** listed on the following pages **include all taxes** (with the exception of the fares for Canrail passes, to which 13% tax must be added). Fares given under '**Berths**' refer to upper berths; a supplement is added for lower berths (the exact amount depending on the length of journey and the type of ticket). '**Room**' refers to a private cabin per person in Sleeper class.

See also discounts and rail passes, p24.

RAIL CLASSES

You'll find a more detailed description of sleeping accommodation, dining facilities and other amenities onboard the trains on pp33-9.

Economy class

All trains offer Economy class. On the long-distance services, Economy-class passengers get a comfortable reclining seat, but usually no or limited access to the dining car.



facing each other across the central aisle of the carriage), or a private cabin for one, two (and sometimes for three or four). All meals are included in your fare and are served in the dining car – the exception is the Winnipeg to Churchill train, on which meals must be paid for separately. You also have access to various lounges and at least one dome car. For more information, see p33.

Prestige class


This is the most luxurious class of sleeping accommodation (for details see p37), and is available only on *The Canadian*. Rooms come with leather sofas which convert to a double bed, flat-screen TVs and high-quality en suite bathrooms. All meals are included. See p37 for more info.

Touring class

This class is available only on the Jasper to Prince Rupert train. It includes all meals (served at your seat), and access to the dome car.


DISCOUNTS AND RAIL PASSES

Special offers

As well as the normal advance purchase 'Escape' and 'Discounted' fares, VIA regularly publishes special offers on its website ( viarail.ca) – on the home page, click on 'Fares and products' on the top menu bar, then select 'Special offers' from the drop-down menu. It also releases special offers every Tuesday, all published on the 'Special offers' page of the website (look for the 'Discount Tuesdays' box).

Seniors, students, youths and children

Seniors (aged 60 and over) are entitled to a discount (normally around 10%) on all regular fares. **Students** (aged 12-17, or 18+ with an ISIC card) and **youths** (aged 18-25) receive a discount (normally around one-third) on Economy-class tickets. Youths also get a 10% discount on Business-class or Sleeper-class tickets.

Children aged 2-11 are given a 50% discount in Economy class and a discount (normally around 25%) on Business-class or Sleeper-class tickets; under-2s travel free when not occupying a seat. Older children are classed as 'students'. To find out the exact discounted fare for the dates and journey you want to travel on, check the Via Rail website ( viarail.ca).

Youth summer pass

This pass, available to travellers aged 12 to 25, offers 60 consecutive days of unlimited rail travel in Economy class (Escape fare only – subject to availability) across the VIA Rail network from May 1 to August 31. The pass costs \$599, excluding taxes (13% extra).

Canrail Pass


The Canrail Pass allows you to book seven or ten Economy-class tickets throughout the VIA national network within a 60-day period, starting from the first day of travel.

Passes including seven tickets cost \$822 for adults and \$747 for seniors, students and youths. Passes including ten tickets cost \$1068 per adult, or \$961 for seniors, students and youths. You can also buy CANRAIL passes that give you unlimited Economy-class travel within the 60-day period; they cost \$1543 for adult passes, and \$1389 for seniors, students and youths.


Note that these prices do not include taxes (13% extra).

Booking your trip

BOOKING YOUR RAIL TICKETS

It's very easy to book your tickets or rail pass independently using VIA Rail's **website** ( via.ca). If you prefer to do it over the **phone**, you can call VIA on ☎ 1 888 842-7245 free of charge from anywhere in Canada or the US – and for international customers, there's a choice of **overseas sales agents** (see p26). If you're based in Canada you can also, of course, buy tickets over the counter at most **railway stations**.

On VIA Rail's website or mobile app


You can use VIA's website ( via.ca) or mobile app to book your rail tickets or rail pass from anywhere in the world. The online booking engine is very easy to use, and clearly shows which classes and discounted fares are available on the dates you specify (to see the full fare, tick the 'show fares with taxes included' box). If there are no discounted fares for the date you've specified – and if you can be flexible with your dates of travel – it's worth trying several other dates to see if discounted fares are available.

Selecting a fare (then clicking 'Continue') brings up detailed information about the ticket, including the route, date, class, refund and exchange conditions and baggage allowance. If you go ahead with the booking, you'll get a booking confirmation email, and your ticket will be emailed to you as an electronic boarding pass, with a bar code. You can choose to print it out, or display it on your smartphone or tablet when you board.

You'll also be prompted to specify an email address and/or mobile phone number so you can receive alerts telling you about any disruptions or delays affecting your journey.

Through an overseas sales agent

VIA Rail has a number of sales agents dotted around the world – usually travel agents with an expertise in Canada. These act as VIA's representatives: they answer rail enquiries and book tickets for you, which you buy in local currency. Most of them also act as agents for *Rocky Mountaineer* (see box p28) and can advise on and book accommodation as well. See overleaf for a selection of overseas agents; you'll find a full list on VIA's website (on the home page, hover over 'Travel information' in the top menu bar, then click on 'International travellers' in the dropdown menu).

 **Prices in this book – Canadian \$** Note that all prices in this book are given in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated. At the time of writing, the exchange rate was Canadian\$1 to US\$0.75 or UK£0.59. For more rates of exchange see p60.

■ **The Rocky Mountaineer**

In 1989, the Armstrong Group took over *The Rocky Mountaineer* from VIA Rail and launched Rocky Mountaineer Railtours (now Rocky Mountaineer Vacations). It subsequently (and with some justification) dubbed its daylight-only routes as 'the most spectacular train trips in the world', becoming a roaring success.

Routes The flagship *Rocky Mountaineer* train travels along four routes, three of which include overnight stops in either Kamloops, or Whistler and Quesnel, in the basic package; the *Coastal Passage* route also includes Vancouver.

The train routes operate between mid April and October (*Coastal Passage* to September only) in both a west- and east-bound direction, and packages of various lengths (anything from 2 to 14 days) are offered.

Most passengers do this route on a package tour but it is possible to do any route as an independent traveller.

● **First Passage to the West** – (Calgary to) Banff/Lake Louise to Vancouver via Kamloops (or vice versa); this is a 2-day daylight-only journey with overnight accommodation in a hotel included. Anyone starting in Calgary is taken by coach to Banff. From Banff to Kamloops travellers take the original, southern route on CPR tracks; this is the only passenger train to travel along part of Canada's first transcontinental line, completed in 1885 so it is the most historic but also it is thought to be the most scenic. Passengers spend the night in Kamloops; from there the route is similar to that followed by *The Canadian* and for most of the route they use the same tracks. In this book *The Canadian* is described in a westbound direction so the route follows the CNR tracks on the eastern side of Fraser River. To travel on the original CPR tracks on the western side of Fraser River both *Rocky Mountaineer* and *Canadian* passengers need to do the journey west to east.

● **Journey Through the Clouds** – Jasper to Vancouver via Kamloops (or vice versa); as with the above, this is a 2-day journey with overnight accommodation in a hotel in Kamloops included. From Jasper trains take the same route as *The Canadian* through Yellowhead Pass to Kamloops. On the second day the train follows the *First Passage to the West* route to Vancouver (Vancouver North). This book describes the journey in a westbound direction (see p246); see the notes above regarding the direction of travel.

● **Rainforest to Gold Rush** – Vancouver (Vancouver North) to Jasper via Whistler and Quesnel (or vice-versa); this two-night journey starts with a 3-hour journey to Whistler; the afternoon is free for sightseeing. The next day the route follows the old Pacific Great Eastern (which later became BC Rail) tracks along what was called the 'Cariboo Dayliner' line to Prince George, where it joins the tracks used by VIA Rail between Prince George and Jasper.

Note: Unlike the other routes in this guide this is described in a west to east direction (see p246) following the direction of construction and the mile markers).

● **Coastal Passage** – Banff/Lake Louise/Kamloops to Seattle (USA) via Vancouver. The 6hr journey between Vancouver and Seattle is not described in this book; see *The Rocky Mountaineer* website for details.

SilverLeaf and GoldLeaf

There are two ways of travelling on *The Rocky Mountaineer*: SilverLeaf or GoldLeaf service. **GoldLeaf** passengers travel in an ultra-luxurious dome car, which seats 74 people who are assigned seating there for the whole of the journey. Downstairs there's an open-air observation platform and a dining area which serves hot gourmet meals (included in the price).

What to expect on your rail trip

THE FLEET – RAIL CARS AND ENGINES

Most of VIA's long-distance trains use the company's fleet of **stainless steel railcars** built in the US by Budd Manufacturing Company in the mid 1950s. They were originally used by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company (see p79), and at the time were considered the latest in railway technology. In the 1990s VIA spent over \$200 million **refurbishing** the rail cars: steam heating was converted to electric; new wiring and lighting were installed; air conditioning was introduced; showers were fitted in each sleeping car; ventilation was improved; mechanical components such as brakes and bogies were completely overhauled and the interiors were recarpeted and reupholstered throughout. Several further upgrades have followed since then – and in 2018, VIA pledged \$46 million to refurbish 25 rail cars used by *The Canadian*.

The scenic dome



The glass-roofed, upper-deck **observation domes** – often referred to as the ‘scenic dome’ by VIA Rail – are probably the most famous feature of *The Canadian*. Each dome has 24 seats and wrap-around windows offering panoramic views. Sitting in the comfortable seats, gazing out of the windows, is supremely relaxing, especially if you're lucky enough to find yourself there when it's quiet. Perhaps the best time to come is at dawn. No one's around, the only

sound is the movement of the train and Canada's vast, wide open space is at its most haunting. (At busier times, on the other hand, you should show consideration to your fellow passengers and not hog your dome seat for too long.)

On *The Canadian* there's always one dome in Economy class – upstairs in the Economy Skyline car – while in Sleeper class there are usually two: one in the sleeper class Skyline car (next to the dining car), and one in the Park car, at the end of the train. Note that the dome in the Park car has some seats reserved exclusively for Prestige-class passengers – and in peak season (May-Oct) Sleeper Plus class passengers can only access that car between 4pm and 10.30pm.

Besides *The Canadian*, there are dome cars on VIA's other long-distance trains as well, though not always year-round. On *The Ocean* (Halifax to Montréal) there's a dome in the Park car at the back of the train, year round, exclusively for Sleeper Plus passengers. The **Winnipeg to Churchill train** often has a scenic dome from July to November, for Sleeper Plus passengers only. And the train from **Jasper to Prince George** has a dome in the Park car (see photo opposite p37), reserved for Touring-class passengers from mid June to end September, but accessible to everyone during the rest of the year.

Still, it's important to manage your expectations – passengers who arrive expecting the level of comfort seen on trains such as Switzerland's Glacier Express may be disappointed. VIA's trains are comfortable, well-run and extremely charming – but, with the exception of Prestige class, they're not luxurious. They are, after all, sixty-odd-year-old state-owned trains serving a mixture of metropolitan and remote rural communities spread over many thousands of kilometres.

The number and combination of rail cars used to make up each train will vary according to requirements – at busy times of the year, there'll be more cars than during quiet periods. Generally, most of VIA's long-distance trains include: an Economy-class passenger car; a couple of Skyline dome cars (usually one in Economy and one in Sleeper class); a dining car; several sleeper cars; and a 'Park' car at the rear of the train with a bullet-shaped lounge sporting panoramic windows. On *The Canadian*, the Prestige sleeping car is towards the rear of the train, just before the Prestige Park car (a traditional Park car upgraded to Prestige class standard).

Engines

VIA uses two types of locomotives to pull its trains. The most common is the 3000-horsepower **General Motors F-40PH-2** locomotive, of which they have 53. These have a top speed of between 145 and 153km/hr (90-95 miles/hr). They also have 21 **General Electric P42DC** locomotives, which have a horsepower of 4250 and a top speed of 160 km/hr (100 miles/hr).

THE CREW

VIA's on-board staff are almost without exception helpful, efficient and friendly. They're usually very knowledgeable about the train and the places it takes you through, particularly the older people who've worked on the railway for many years. Don't feel shy about asking them questions – they're more than happy to talk about anything to do with the journey. During the peak season, however, *The Canadian* gets packed out and things can get rather hectic, which leaves the staff with little time to sit around and chat.

On *The Canadian*, there's an entire **change of crew at Winnipeg** in both directions – so if you want to leave a tip for anyone (see box p32), remember to do so before they get off. Sometimes the new staff can bring a whole different atmosphere to the train – for example, you may get a crew member joining (or leaving) the train with their guitar or another musical instrument, which they'll play periodically. And some crews are keener than others at organising entertainment such as bingo or cocktail hour.

● **Service Manager** This is the boss of the train, responsible for managing the crew and making sure that everything runs smoothly. The service manager will often introduce him/herself to passengers at the beginning of a trip, and give an overview of the journey ahead. Service Managers are supported in their role by an **assistant service coordinator**.



mentally and logistically prepared for delays. Above all, leave at least 24 hours between your scheduled arrival time and any **connecting journeys**, and make sure you can easily cancel any hotel bookings for the date of your scheduled arrival.

Keeping informed of delays

When you book your train ticket, you'll be prompted to specify an email address and/or mobile phone on which you can be sent **notifications** alerting you to any disruptions or delays affecting your journey. In addition, you can **follow your train's progress** in real time on VIA's website or mobile app, and track its location, speed and anticipated arrival time at the next couple of stations. This is especially useful when you're joining *The Canadian* midway through its journey at somewhere like Jasper, by which time the train may have accumulated a substantial delay. To find this service on the website, on the home page click on 'Plan your trip' on the top menu bar, then select 'Arrivals and departures' from the drop-down menu. You'll need to know your train's number. *The Canadian* is always 1 (westbound) and 2 (eastbound).

What to take

CLOTHES

If you're going in winter, warm **clothing** is absolutely essential and should include a heavy coat (or a good down jacket), a hat, gloves and generous supplies of thermal underwear. You should also take a pair of warm, waterproof boots. The key thing to remember when dressing comfortably for a Canadian winter is to wear lots of layers which you can easily remove when inside heated buildings and then throw back on when you head outdoors again.

For the rest of the year the weather is more or less comparable to that in the UK, though if you're taking the train up to Prince Rupert in spring or autumn or to Churchill at any time of the year, be sure to pack the hat, gloves and thermals.

One of the most important things to get right is **footwear**. Sightseeing is a tiring business and shouldn't be attempted in anything other than a pair of very comfortable shoes. Good-quality walking shoes may be your best bet as these can double up for walking in the Rockies if you plan to get off the train at Jasper.

MONEY

While it's useful to take some Canadian dollars with you, it's worth bearing in mind that ATMs/cash machines are widely available in all Canadian cities, so withdrawing cash won't be a problem once you get there, though commission may be charged. For more on money, see p60.

Facts about the country

BACKGROUND

Great stretches of wilderness, so that its frontier is a circumference rather than a boundary; a country with huge rivers and islands that most natives have never seen, a country that has made a nation out of the stops on two of the world's longest railway lines.

Northrop Frye, *Sudia Varia*, 1957

Canada is the second largest country in the world (after Russia), covering a vast 9,970,610 sq km (almost four million square miles). It's flanked by the Atlantic on the east and the Pacific on the west, with some 6000km in between. Its southern boundary is the US border, which follows the 49th parallel from the Pacific to the Great Lakes, then loops all over the place between Lake Ontario and the Atlantic. To the north Canada stretches all the way up to Ellesmere Island in the Arctic Ocean, 4400km away from Toronto. In the north-west is the other US/Canada border, separating the Yukon and British Columbia from Alaska.

This colossal area is divided into ten provinces and three territories: Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Québec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, North West Territories, Yukon Territory and the territory of Nunavut (see p44). The capital of Canada is Ottawa; its largest city is Toronto.

CLIMATE

In 1881 a British periodical called *Truth* described Canada as 'frost-bound for seven or eight months in the year...[and] as forbidding a country as any on the face of the Earth', a familiar but slightly unfair stereotype that persists to this day. Admittedly, it does get rather chilly in winter (everywhere except the west coast has average January temperatures well below freezing point and continuous snow cover) but the populated stretch along the south has very good springs and warm summers. A typical July on the prairies, for instance, is dry and hot (usually mid 20°C / 70°F) while an average summer in Québec and Ontario will be warm and humid. West coast summers tend to be temperate rather than hot but winters here are the mildest in the country, thanks to the influence of the warm Pacific Ocean (Vancouver's average January temperature is 3°C / 37°F, compared to Winnipeg's -20°C / -4°F).



The division of Québec

In contrast to the treatment meted out to the Acadians who were forcibly deported in the 1750s, the **Québec Act of 1774** safeguarded the rights of the French Canadians to speak their own language, practise Catholicism, hold civil appointments and keep their seigneurial land-owning system. However, they soon found themselves deluged with 10,000 Loyalist settlers (following the American War of Independence) who clearly did not expect to be governed according to the French system.

In an attempt to get round this problem, the province of Québec was divided into **Upper Canada** and **Lower Canada** in 1791. This way the French speakers, concentrated in Lower Canada, could remain separate from the English-speaking Protestants in Upper Canada with each side controlling their own local affairs.

The 1837 rebellions

In practice the French Canadians were increasingly discriminated against and the ensuing tide of resentment resulted in a violent but short-lived rebellion in 1837 led by **Louis-Joseph Papineau**. Upper Canadians had their own political grievances, too, expressed in a more scaled-down and equally abortive rebellion led by **William Lyon Mackenzie** in the same year. The British government's response was to reunite the two provinces in 1840, forming the **single province** of Canada which would be granted greater powers of self-government. It was hoped that this would bring the French Canadians into line and curb their demands for self-rule. As time would show, it was to do nothing of the sort.

Confederation

Britain's North American colonies got bigger and bigger as immigration stepped up in the 1840s. Many politicians recognised that the separate provinces would be economically and politically stronger if they were to unite



Native settlement, Queen Charlotte Island, late 19th century.

olds around the world in reading, maths and science. In the most recent rankings Canada is one of a handful of countries in the top ten for all categories, alongside East Asian educational powerhouses such as Singapore and Hong Kong.

Canadians are proud of their **social welfare system**, which provides free medical care, old age pensions, family allowance and unemployment insurance. The costs of these programmes are shared by the federal and provincial governments, and Canadians can generally take advantage of them whether they're in their own province or an outside province.

RELIGION

Religious mythology and ceremony were highly developed among the native peoples before the arrival of the Bible-brandishing Europeans. Beliefs and practices often differed from tribe to tribe but some were shared by many groups such as the **myth** of the Earth Diver in which the Transformer plunges into the ancient waters and gathers the mud from which he moulds the earth. Another common myth told of the mischievous Trickster who steals fire, light, water and food and sets them all loose to create a chaotic world.


Catholicism was, of course, imported by the French as soon as they arrived. Indeed, the Catholic Church provided the foundations for the society of New France and continued to be a dominant power in Québec until recent decades. British settlers, on the other hand, were **Protestant** and set about populating the country with more of their ilk. The resulting pattern continues today: over 90% of Québécois are Catholic, while Protestantism (of various sects) dominates all the other provinces. All in all, some 67% of Canadians identify as Christian. These include significant numbers of Orthodox Christians, particularly in the prairie provinces.

Almost a quarter of Canadians have no religion, with the rest of the population made up principally of Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists, large numbers of whom are centred in or around Toronto.

Practical information for the visitor

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Americans aren't officially required to show a passport when crossing the border (just solid ID), though it's very much preferred. For everyone else, a full passport is mandatory, valid for the duration of the planned trip. Most visitors to Canada can stay up to six months without a visa; instead, they'll need an **Electronic Travel Authorization** (eTA) if they're arriving by air (see box, p26).

Visitors from some countries, however, will need a **visa**. To find out more, visit the official Canadian government website ( canada.ca).

If you're a senior citizen (usually aged 65+ in Canada) or a fulltime student, be sure to bring senior or student ID, for discounted admission at most attractions.

cities, using your debit card. The amount you withdraw is then automatically debited from your account back home.

Most debit cards can be used worldwide at ATMs displaying either a Cirrus or Maestro symbol (for MasterCard withdrawals) or a Plus symbol (for Visa cards). Note that many banks add a **handling fee** (typically 1.5%) to the amount you withdraw; check with your bank before you go – and consider using one of the new app-based banking products instead (see box, below). In addition, some banks apply a **minimum charge** per transaction, making it more cost-effective to withdraw relatively large amounts of cash at a time; check with your bank before travelling. Make sure, too, that your card is affiliated to either Visa or MasterCard before heading to Canada.

Payments with debit or credit cards

Cash accounts for fewer than 30% of payment transactions made each year in Canada, with that figure decreasing year on year. The most widely used payment method in Canada is with a debit or credit card, using an **electronic card reader**. Most readers accept both **contactless** payments (where you simply touch your card against the reader, no PIN required), and **chip and pin** payments, where you verify the payment by keying in your PIN. The maximum spend using contactless is \$100 per transaction. Most retailers have readers, and there's usually no minimum spend. Just make sure your plastic card is affiliated to either **Visa** or **MasterCard**, the most widely accepted payment

□ App-based banking products

Before heading to Canada, it's definitely worth checking out the app-based banking products now on the market provided by so-called 'challenger banks'. UK options include Monzo (monzo.com), Starling (starlingbank.com) and Revolut (revolut.com), while popular US-based challenger banks include BankMobile (bankmobile.com), Chime (chimebank.com) and Denizen (denizen.io). Their services are particularly good for use while travelling, as they offer much lower (sometimes zero) fees for converting currency when using your debit card abroad.

types. It pays to find out about currency conversion or handling fees associated with your card before you travel – generally credit cards offer better value for money, so long as you pay the balance off in full by your payment due date. Check out, too, the new app-based banks, which all come with plastic debit cards linked to the account.

Banking hours

Standard banking hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am–4pm (often until 6pm on Fridays). Some banks stay open later during the week and on Saturday mornings as well.

Tipping

There is a strong tipping culture in Canada and the US, much more so than in Europe. In restaurants it is practically obligatory – if you pay by card, the electronic card reader will normally prompt you to add a tip, often with a range of

Building the first trans-Canada railway

What tempted the people of Canada to undertake so gigantic a work as the Canadian Pacific Railway? The difficulties in the way were great, unprecedented, unknown... We were under the inspiration of a national idea, and went forward. We were determined to be something more than a fortuitous collection of provinces. **The Century** (1885)

The story of Canada's first transcontinental railway has a plot as thick as a Hollywood movie novel. The only thing missing is sexual

The story of Canada's first transcontinental railway has a plot as thick as a Hollywood movie novel.

intrigue; everything else is there: corporate greed, political skulduggery, brave men, bankruptcy, war, danger, death, glory... It's a

story that has gripped Canadians for more than a century spawning countless books, an epic poem and, of course, the inevitable TV mini-series.

Canada's ongoing preoccupation with the railway is due not only to the drama surrounding its construction but also to the crucial role it played in shaping Canadian history. For the CPR did more than build a railway: it built a nation. 'It can be argued,' reads a display in Winnipeg's Union Station, 'that November 7th 1885 – the day on which the last spike was driven on the CPR line at Craigellachie – is a more appropriate day from which to date the existence of Canada than July 1st, 1867.' Rather a tall claim for a railroad. But to understand this railroad's significance it is necessary to abandon one's concept of modern Canada and take a look at the young dominion of the 1860s and '70s.

CANADA BEFORE THE RAILWAY

The infant country

Canada officially became a country when Queen Victoria signed the British North America Act on 1 July 1867, but in no way did it resemble the country we know today. The new 'dominion' was basically a disparate collection of eastern colonial provinces with no real sense of unity or nationhood. It covered a relatively small chunk of a vast territory, for the most part uninhabited. British Columbia, which remained under the jurisdiction of Great Britain, lay 3000 miles west



over existing lines in eastern Canada and on 28 June 1886 the first regular passenger train, the '**Pacific Express**', left Montréal at 20:00 hours. On 1 July it reached Winnipeg and on 4 July it reached Port Moody at 12:00 hours – exactly on time. This was the first scheduled trans-Canada rail trip and at the time the longest scheduled passenger train trip in the world. With the extension of the line from Port Moody to Vancouver in May 1887, the main line was 4675km long.

The first travellers

Until 1899, transcontinental trains ran on a daily basis; the westbound train was known as the **Pacific Express** and the eastbound train as the **Atlantic Express**.

The carriages were extremely luxurious with all sleeping cars boasting bathtubs, an unheard of novelty in North America at the time. The dining cars served fine international cuisine and vintage wines and were generally

The carriages were extremely luxurious with all sleeping cars boasting bathtubs

patronised by passengers travelling First Class. Coach passengers usually dined in the much cheaper Canadian Pacific restaurants located at division points along the line, while the train was being serviced or the locomotive was being changed. It was the popularity of these restaurants that gave birth to the famous Canadian Pacific hotels, still flourishing today.

As Macdonald had predicted, the railway carried droves of settlers out to the now accessible west. Special 'land seeker' tickets were offered at reduced rates to encourage people to go and investigate areas under development. By the end of the railway's first decade of operation it had changed the lives of thousands of Canadians and, in turn, had changed the face of Canada itself.



The rear platform on an early CPR train

Halifax

I am neither a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, yet ... I believe that many in this room shall live to hear the whistle of the steam engine in the passes of the Rocky Mountains and to make the journey from Halifax to the Pacific in five or six days.
Joseph Howe, Speech in Halifax, 15 May 1851

Halifax, the hub of the Maritime Provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island), is exactly as you'd expect it to be: bustling, lively streets clustered around the waterfront; brightly painted clapboard houses; fish stalls; quayside bars; the smell of salt in the air; and old-fashioned charm. It's the capital of Nova Scotia and is located on the second-largest natural harbour in the world. The downtown core – a jumble of Victorian buildings and modern office blocks and shops – is extremely compact and most attractions are within easy walking distance of each other. With its large student population, it's also a lively and youthful city boasting a vibrant restaurant and nightlife scene. In short, it's an easy city to like and makes a great place to start, or end, your trans-continental rail trip.

HISTORY

The Mi'kmaq

The first people to live here were the Mi'kmaq, who named the settlement **Chebucto** meaning 'great long harbour'. Their fishing and hunting communities proliferated throughout the region until contact with European fishermen in the early 16th century exposed them to new diseases which seriously depleted their numbers. These fishermen came over to take advantage of the area's prodigious supplies of cod, discovered by **John Cabot** in 1497.

Britain and France vie for power

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, Britain and France vied for power in the region, which they wanted to use as a base from which to control the North American colonies.

The British founded Halifax in 1749 to minimise the threat from the French naval base of Louisbourg. They named it after the second **Earl of Halifax** and built a fort on the town's hill overlooking the harbour. Halifax quickly grew into an important garrison town and port.





a dazzling spectacle of gold leaf and stained glass; note also the beautiful vaulted ceiling and the huge 5772-pipe Casavant organ.

A dramatic sound-and-light show, **AURA**, takes place every evening inside the basilica (📄 aurabasilique.montreal.com; Mon-Thur 6pm, Fri 6pm & 8pm, Sat 7pm and 9pm, additional shows July & Aug; \$26.50); it's very popular, so it would be best to buy a ticket in advance.

● **Pointe-à-Caillière** Located at 350

Place Royale, this excellent, modern **archaeology and history museum** (📄 pacmusee.qc.ca; Tue-Fri 10am-6pm, Sat & Sun 11am-5pm; \$22) takes you through the evolution of Montréal from the 14th century to the present day, using slick audiovisual displays and original artefacts. It's spread over several adjacent sites, including a restored sewer.

● **Hôtel de Ville** Just off Place Jacques Cartier, the handsome Hôtel de Ville (**City Hall**) dates originally from 1878, though it was substantially rebuilt after a major fire in 1922. The balcony above the entrance marks the spot where a visiting President General de Gaulle cried 'Vive le Québec libre!' ('Long live

📄 **Passeport MTL**

Passeport MTL covers entry to 28 of the city's attractions, plus unlimited public transport. The Passeport is valid for either 48 hours (\$85) or 72 hours (\$100). It's on sale in the Infotouriste centre in Square Dorchester (see map p113) and the tourist information office in Vieux Montréal (see map below), plus at many hotels. You can also buy them online at 📄 passeportmtl.com.





Its centrepiece is its huge, grand lobby, complete with glittering chandeliers. Summertime rates start at around \$425, but in winter you can get the same room for \$167 with advance booking.

A less swanky but more affordable option close to the railway station is **The Strathcona Hotel** (☎ 416-363-3321, 📧 thestrathconahotel.com), at 60 York St, where the clean, standard business-type hotels go for \$259 in high season.

A seven-minute walk from the station, at 56 Yonge St, is **Hotel Victoria** (☎ 416-363-1666, 📧 hotelvictoria-toronto.com), a friendly boutique hotel with good-quality bathrooms and smart – if slightly small – rooms (\$250).

Novotel Toronto Centre (☎ 416-367-8900, 📧 novoteltorontocentre.com), at 45 The Esplanade, is less than a 10-minute walk from the station. It offers spacious, comfortable rooms from \$252, in an attractive building. There's a good choice of restaurants right opposite the hotel, and it's a five-minute walk from St Lawrence Market.

Other hotels **Radisson Admiral Hotel Toronto-Harbourfront** (☎ 416-203-3333, 📧 radisson.com), at 249 Queen's Quay West, has a lovely lakeside location, plus smart, contemporary rooms (from \$370 in summer) and an outdoor pool (only open in the summer).

For something more inexpensive, a good bet is **Super 8** (☎ 647-426-8118, 📧 super8downtowntoronto.com), which sits above a small shopping mall in the heart of Chinatown at 222 Spadina Ave. The 91 rooms are spacious and clean, with good-quality bathrooms and breakfast included in

the rate (from \$166), and there's an on-site coin-op laundry.

Over at 89 Avenue Rd is **Hotel 89** (☎ 416-964-1220, 📧 hotel89toronto.com). The rooms (\$199, including breakfast) are a bit dated and faded, but the Yorkville location, a few blocks from the ROM, is great.

Hostels and student residences

Toronto has some excellent hostels. At 76 Church St, **HI Toronto** (☎ 416-971-4440, 📧 hihostels.ca) has a friendly atmosphere, an on-site bar and offers activities like pub crawls and quiz nights. Dorms range in size (4-14 beds; beds from \$45) and there are a few private en suite doubles (\$145).

There are several choices in the Chinatown/Kensington Market area. At 357 College St, **Planet Traveler** (☎ 647-352-8747, 📧 theplanettraveler.com) is a great hostel, with small, clean dorms (beds from \$53, including breakfast) and a rooftop patio with fantastic views of the Toronto skyline. Nearby at 403 Spadina Ave, **Two Peas Podshare** (☎ 416-809-1175, 📧 twopeas.me) offers beds in 'pods' (timber bunks you climb into, with curtains) rather than dorms – all with flatscreen TV, headphones and charging station. The design is very Scandi, and there's a cute rooftop deck; pods cost \$59/person, including breakfast.

From May to August you can rent rooms in student residences in various locations. The University of Toronto's **Massey College** (☎ 416-946-7843, 📧 masseycollege.ca), at 4 Devonshire Place, is set in a delightful, leafy campus, a short walk from the ROM and the subway; the rooms are peaceful and spacious, and include breakfast in the rate (from \$70).

☐ Accommodation prices

Unless otherwise stated, accommodation prices quoted are for a double room in **high season** (normally May or June to September). In low season many hotels offer substantial discounts. For information on single/twin rooms, see p56.

Note that rates quoted do not include **tax** (in Ontario this is 13% HST, Municipal Accommodation Tax 4%; see p67).

There is also usually an extra charge for **breakfast**.

Where to eat

Toronto is home to a hugely diverse range of restaurants, spread far and wide around the city. Below are a few recommendations that are handy for the main tourist attractions.

Besides these, **St Lawrence Market** (see p124) is a great place to put together a picnic or buy a cooked meal; some vendors have small seating areas, and there are benches dotted around the outside of the market.

Lakeshore On a sunny summer's day, there's no nicer lunch spot in Toronto than the waterfront – Queens Quay West is dotted with several restaurants with outdoor seating overlooking the lake.

A popular choice is **Amsterdam Brewhouse** (☎ 416-504-1020, 📧 amsterdambeer.com; daily 11am-10pm, later Thur-Sat), at 245 Queens Quay, which serves craft beers and casual food such as burgers, pizza and chicken schnitzel (mains around \$16-22).

With similar prices is **Goodman Pub and Kitchen** (☎ 647-341-2337, 📧 fab-restaurants.ca; Mon-Thur 11am-11pm, Fri to midnight, Sun to 10pm), 207 Queens Quay West, where you'll find an attractive, light-filled interior, a large deck and decent pub food.

Downtown There's a concentration of restaurants along King St West, starting at John St and heading west. One of my favourites along here is **Kit Kat** (☎ 416-977-4461, 📧 kitkattoronto.com; Mon-Wed 11am-10pm, Thur & Fri 11am-11.30pm, Sat 4-11.30pm, Sun 4-10pm; at No 297), an old-fashioned family-run Italian restaurant with a cosy dining room, checked red tablecloths, and a mahogany bar lined with bottles of wine and spirits. It's been going strong for over 30 years, and is just a five-minute walk from the CN Tower; pasta dishes are around \$18-24.

A couple of blocks east of the railway station, at 33 Yonge St, **Fran's** (📧 daily 6am to midnight) is a friendly diner with some modern touches that's been serving up decent-value all-day breakfasts, burgers,

steaks, ribs, pasta and other comfort food for forty-odd years.

There are plenty more options as you head north up Yonge St. At No 132, **Sud Forno** (Mon-Fri 7.30am-10pm, Sat 8.30am-10pm, Sun 9am-5pm) is a large and popular bakery-deli-café with a reasonably priced menu and a trendy industrial-chic dining room. Just beyond, at No 140, **Dineen Coffee** (📧 dineencoffee.com; Mon-Fri 6.30am-7pm, Fri & Sat 8am-6pm) is a peaceful oasis of artisan teas, coffees, macarons and cakes, served in a small but elegant dining room with huge windows and majolica tiles.

One block north, at No 176, **Leña** (☎ 416-507-3378, 📧 lenarestaurante.com; Mon-Sat 7.30am-11pm, Sun 10am-3pm) offers South American tapas (from \$10) and ceviche (\$19) plus more mainstream fish and meat dishes (\$21-47) in a beautiful Art Deco dining room that was once a department store.

Another memorable dining room awaits you at **Canoe** (☎ 416-364-0054, 📧 canoerestaurant.com; Mon-Fri 11.45am-2.30pm & 5-10.30pm), on the top floor of the Toronto Dominion building, 66 Wellington St, where the wrap-around windows give dazzling views out to the lake and islands – especially memorable on a blue-sky, sunny day. It's an upmarket venue with starched linen table cloths and a menu specialising in contemporary Canadian cuisine, such as Québec red stag (\$54) or Atlantic lobster tail (\$62).

The menu at **360** (daily 11am-2.15pm & 4-10.15pm), the restaurant just above the Lookout Level in CN Tower (see p120), features Canadian food such as BC sablefish chowder and Ontario lamb – and if you have the prix fixe (lunch \$60/74 for two/three courses; dinner \$65/79).

Uptown/Yorkville Those visiting the ROM or other uptown attractions will find plenty of dining options in swanky Yorkville. A delightful choice on a summer evening is **Sofia** (☎ 416-479-8974, 📧 sofia-yorkville.com; daily 5-10.30pm, plus Sun brunch 11am-3pm) at 99 Yorkville Ave; it's a smart Italian restaurant (pasta from \$24,





with equally charming staff, selling everything from Inuit jewellery and furs to local crafts and produce.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Arrival and departure

By train The train from Winnipeg to Churchill takes two nights (45 hours).

Churchill's railway station has been designated a 'heritage station', and evokes

the days when the line was completed, in 1929, with its pale cream walls and gabled roof.

The station and ticket counter are open for business on days the train arrives and

❑ When to see when in Churchill – and tour operators

● **Polar bears:** October and November, when the bears move back from the tundra onto the frozen Hudson Bay.

● **Beluga whales:** late June through August, when thousands of belugas feed in the Seal and Churchill rivers that empty into Hudson Bay. Tours are expensive at around \$117, but from the boats you'll also get to see **Fort Prince of Wales**, built in the 18th century and now a National Historic Site. If you're feeling very adventurous, you can kayak or snorkel with the whales.

● **Birds:** April-June and October-November, when migratory birds such as snow and Canada geese head north or south. Native birds include peregrine falcons, snowy owls, tundra, terns and gulls.

● **Iceberg tours:** June.

● **Dogsled rides:** November to May.

Other wildlife you might spot here includes Arctic fox, ptarmigan and caribou. If you visit between January and April you may also see the **northern lights**, while you can enjoy the **Arctic wildflowers** from late June to early August.

Tour operators

The following is a selection of established operators, many of which offer a spread of activities and tours. For a complete list see everythingchurchill.com.

● **Churchill Nature Tours** (☎ 204-636-2968, churchillnaturetours.com) Wildlife safaris and birdwatching tours led by experienced naturalists and ornithologists. Most tours are packages, including flights from Winnipeg, starting at \$4200/person.

● **Frontiers North** (☎ 204-949-2050, frontiersnorth.com) Offers day tours on the tundra to view polar bears (\$489), plus a range of all-inclusive packages, including stays in their tundra lodge outside Churchill.

● **Great White Bear Tours** (☎ 204-487-7633, greatwhitebearstours.com) Tundra buggy tours for \$472 per day. They also offer all-inclusive package tours, staying in their tundra lodge.

● **Lazy Bear Expeditions** (☎ 204-663-9377, lazybearlodge.com) Attached to Lazy Bear Lodge, and offering a range of tours and packages; rates start at \$577 including two nights at the lodge (see p188).

● **Nature 1st** (☎ 204-675-2147, nature1sttours.ca) Adventure walking tours around Hudson Bay with local naturalist guides. You'll get to explore the subarctic habitat and observe wildlife (including polar bears in October and November); half days cost \$105, full days \$180.

● **Sea North Tours** (☎ 204-675-2195, seanorthtours.com) Beluga whale tours aboard zodiacs on the Churchill River and Hudson Bay, at \$117 (2-3hrs). Also offers kayaking and paddleboarding trips (\$170).

● **Wapusk Adventures** (☎ 204-675-2887, wapuskadventures.com) Award-winning operator offering dog-sled tours (from \$95).

ROUTE GUIDE & MAPS

5

Using this guide

You can follow your route on the maps in this guide and read about the points of interest along the way in the accompanying text. Where something of interest is on only one side of the track, it is identified by the letters N (north), S (south), W (west) and E (east). Note that in some cases these compass directions are only approximate. Since the direction of travel from Toronto to Vancouver is due west, when you're on this journey north is on the right-hand side of the train.

Railway subdivisions

Each line is divided into subdivisions; these are usually about 125 miles long, which was the average distance a steam train could travel in 12 hours when the railways were built. If you take the train all the way from Halifax to Vancouver, you'll pass through 20 subdivisions. These are shown as — **RAILWAY SUBDIVISION** — in the text.

Mile markers

The mileage within each subdivision is indicated by mile markers at the side of the track. Subdivisions run from east to west or south to north, so Mile 0 will always be at the eastern or southern terminal of a subdivision. When you reach the end of a subdivision the next one begins. This is known as a railway divisional point and the miles go back to '0'. The mile markers are usually white rectangular boards on metal posts or telegraph poles and they can be on either side of the track. See also box below.

Signal masts

You'll also notice numbers marked on signal masts along the way. You can work out which mile you're at by inserting a decimal point

Miles or kilometres?

While travelling in Canada you may well be struck by the odd mixture of kilometres and miles, feet and metres in use throughout the country. Conversion to the metric system from the British Imperial system began here in 1971 and while the process is more or less complete, many traces of the old method of measurement remain. The result can be a little confusing; for instance, the railway subdivisions are still broken down by miles and marked by mileposts at the side of the track yet VIA gives distances in kilometres when it lists them (ie occasionally in timetables).



❑ Speed calculations

You can work out how fast you're travelling by measuring the time it takes the train to get from one mile marker to the next one, then consulting this table.

TIME Seconds	SPEED	
	kph	mph
36	170	100
38	153	95
40	145	90
42	138	86
44	132	82
46	126	78
48	121	75
50	116	72
52	111	69
54	108	67
56	103	64
58	100	62
60	96	60
65	88	55
70	82	51
80	72	45
85	68	42
90	64	40
95	61	38
100	58	36
105	55	34
110	53	33
115	50	31
120	48	30
130	45	28
150	39	24
160	37	23
170	34	21
210	27	17
240	24	15

before the last digit. For instance, if the number on the signal mast is 562 that means you're at Mile 56.2.

Station names

Of course the foolproof way to find out where you are is to look out for the names of the stations you're passing. These are conveniently announced on signposts a mile before each station. The names of sidings or junctions are often displayed by the track as well.

Stops

Most stops are for only a few minutes, giving the crew just enough time to whisk passengers on and off. Longer stops are always indicated in the timetable and are shown in this guide in brackets after the station name. You'll notice that many of the stops in the timetable have asterisks after them; these are 'flag stops' which means the train will stop here only when someone wants to get on or off – requests must be made well in advance. Flag stops are also marked by an asterisk in this guide, eg **Clearwater***.

Time zones

Most of the routes described take you through at least two time zones; *The Canadian* takes you through four. When you enter a new time zone this will be indicated in the text using the following abbreviations: AT (Atlantic

Time); ET (Eastern Time); CT (Central Time); MT (Mountain Time); PT (Pacific Time). See p60 for more on time zones.

sight that it is peopled at all. In appearance, it is little better than a vast sand and gravel pit, bounded by broken hills, bald and arid except on a few summits that support a scanty growth of scrub pines. The cattle had eaten off all the bunch-grass within three or four miles of the road, and a poor substitute for it chiefly in the shape of a bluish weed or shrub, called 'sage grass' or 'sage brush' has taken its place.'

Mile 59: You'll cross a 258m-long bridge high above Thompson River, giving vertiginous views down to the canyon 21m below.

Miles 85-90: The canyon narrows into what is known as **Jaws of Death Gorge**. Look down to the racing waters of **Suicide Rapids** at Mile 87.

Miles 90-95: The walls of the cliffs of **Rainbow Canyon** are suddenly striped with pinks, greens and greys creating a beautiful rainbow effect. This was one of the most challenging stretches of the route to build, thanks to the sheer drop of the rockface on both sides of the canyon.

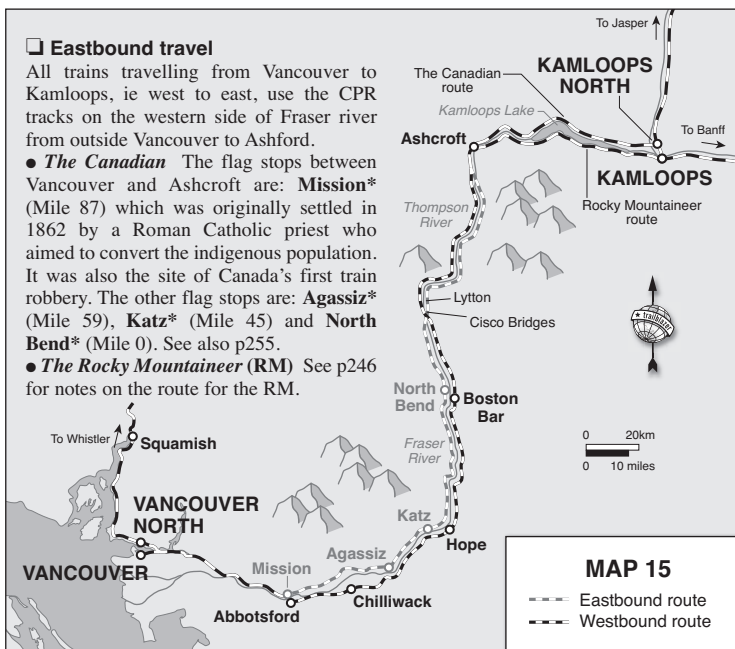
Mile 97: At the small village of **Lytton**, the Thompson River meets the mighty **Fraser River**. It is said that you can sometimes see a clear line dividing the Thompson's clear waters from the Fraser's murky waters for some distance after they meet.

Eastbound travel

All trains travelling from Vancouver to Kamloops, ie west to east, use the CPR tracks on the western side of Fraser river from outside Vancouver to Ashcroft.

● **The Canadian** The flag stops between Vancouver and Ashcroft are: **Mission*** (Mile 87) which was originally settled in 1862 by a Roman Catholic priest who aimed to convert the indigenous population. It was also the site of Canada's first train robbery. The other flag stops are: **Agassiz*** (Mile 59), **Katz*** (Mile 45) and **North Bend*** (Mile 0). See also p255.

● **The Rocky Mountaineer (RM)** See p246 for notes on the route for the RM.



Mile 35: Burns Lake Settlers established a town here in the 1870s when the Overland Telegraph line to Alaska and Siberia was being built (the line was never completed). When the GTP arrived it began to grow quite rapidly and is still flourishing today with four mines, including a molybdenum mine, and two large sawmills.

Mile 51(E): Rose Lake's waters flow in two different directions: east through the Endako and Nechako rivers and west to **Bulkley River**. The train now follows the Bulkley westwards.

Mile 85: Houston Originally called Pleasant Valley, the settlement was renamed in 1910 after John Houston who established Prince Rupert's first newspaper. About 4000 people live here today, most of them employed in the town's sawmill or pulp mill. It's also a thriving centre for recreational fly fishing in the numerous lakes and rivers nearby.

Mile 105: Look north as the train travels up Bulkley Valley for your first view of the snow-capped **Skeena Mountains**.

Mile 116: Telkwa* Another small settlement established by the Overland Telegraph as it advanced towards Alaska.

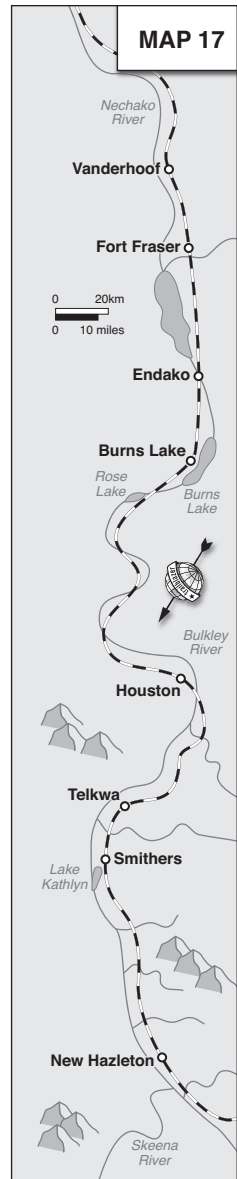
Mile 125: Smithers Nestling in Bulkley Valley and surrounded by four mountain ranges, this busy little town (population about 5000) has an idyllic setting.

The mountains behind the station are part of the Skeena Range, and opposite the station you can see the Hudson Bay Range.

RAILWAY SUBDIVISION

Mile 3(E): This lake used to be called Chicken Lake but this was deemed inappropriate by the GTP who changed it to the somewhat duller **Lake Kathlyn**.

Mile 5: For some time the train has been getting closer and closer to **Hudson Bay Mountain (W)**; at this point you get a superb view of **Kathlyn Glacier** on the mountain, a giant slab of ice more than a hundred metres thick.



Mile 79: Togo* This little mixed farming village lies just in Saskatchewan.

Mile 100: Kamsack Named after a prominent local Indian, this village (population about 2500) was on one of the fur-trading routes for many years.

[MAP 20]

Mile 108: Veregin This town was founded by the Doukhobors in 1899 and named after the movement's leader, Peter Vasilevich Veregin. The Doukhobors were Russians who dissented radically from the Orthodox Church, believing that God is found not in churches but within each man. They rejected secular governments, advocated pacifism and believed that The Bible should be communicated orally rather than through the written word.

Following periodic persecution in Russia the Doukhobors were permitted to emigrate to Canada in 1898-99, in some part thanks to the efforts of Leo Tolstoy and the Quakers. Over 7000 sailed over, most of these settling in western Canada which the government was doing its best to populate at the time.

Mile 117.5: Mikado* Tiny Mikado had a population of just 25 listed in the last census (2016); it's safe to say this flag stop doesn't get used too often.

Mile 124: Canora Take the first two letters of each word in 'Canadian Northern Railway' and what do you get? Thus the town was established and named by the aforementioned company in 1904 when they located a divisional point here.

RAILWAY SUBDIVISION

The line is still in the province of Saskatchewan as it continues its journey, passing a series of flag stops as it heads north: **Sturgis*** (Mile 22), **Endeavour*** (Mile 39.5), **Reserve*** (Mile 63) and finally **Hudson Bay*** (Mile 92). The latter is still a very long way from the bay itself; the little town was named by the Canadian Northern Railway in 1908 to commemorate the first phase of Hudson Bay Railway.

RAILWAY SUBDIVISION



Kellet* (Mile 417.7); **O'day** (Mile 426); **Back*** (Mile 434); and **M'Clintock** (Mile 442).

Miles 450-80: When morning breaks you'll be travelling through the **Barren Lands**. Pull up your blinds and prepare to be dazzled by snow (for most of the year, anyway). The trees have nearly all vanished and the ones that are left are stunted and shrivelled. You've gone beyond the tree line into the subarctic tundra. Look out for Arctic ptarmigan and silver fox.

Amazingly, there are still scattered, isolated communities along the line, all of them dependent on the railway for supplies and public transport: before arriving at Churchill, you'll pass **Belcher*** (Mile 451), **Cromarty*** (Mile 460), **Chesnaye** (Mile 469), **Lamprey*** (Mile 477.6), **Bylot*** (Mile 485), **Digges*** (Mile 493), and **Tidal** (Mile 501.7). The latter takes its name from the fact that this is as far as the Hudson Bay's tide reaches inland.

Mile 509: Churchill At long, long last! Churchill, the end of the line. For a guide to Churchill, see pp184-8.

The Rocky Mountaineer

The privately owned *Rocky Mountaineer* runs along four routes:

- **First Passage to the West** – (Calgary to) Banff/Lake Louise to Vancouver via Kamloops (or vice versa); see below
- **Journey Through the Clouds** – Jasper to Vancouver via Kamloops (or vice versa); see p246
- **Rainforest to Gold Rush** – Vancouver North to Jasper via Whistler and Quesnel (or vice-versa); note that unlike the other routes in this guide this is described in an eastbound (north) direction; see pp246-50.
- **Coastal Passage** – the Calgary/Banff/Lake Louise to Vancouver via Kamloops (or vice versa) journey is the same as for *First Passage to the West* (see below). The Vancouver to Seattle section is not described in this guide.

FIRST PASSAGE TO THE WEST (CALGARY TO) BANFF/LAKE LOUISE TO VANCOUVER

This route can be started/ended in either Calgary, Banff or Lake Louise.

Calgary (MT) Home of cowboys, stampedes and oil-wells, Calgary is Canada's most famous prairie city. It's also the city closest to the Rocky Mountains – they are about 70km away – that has an international airport, with plenty of scheduled and charter flights arriving from all over the world. For more information on Calgary see pp160-7.



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now held by the 9-mile long **Mount McDonald Tunnel**, built underneath Connaught Tunnel; it is used by westbound freight trains.

Note the concrete snowsheds (N) above the train at Mile 94; there are frequent avalanches in this area.

Mile 125: The small city of **Revelstoke** (around 8000 people) was named after Lord Revelstoke, an English banker who helped bail the CPR out of their financial difficulties in 1884.

RAILWAY SUBDIVISION

Miles 1-2: The line crosses the **Columbia River**.

Mile 5: The train is now on its way up the last big climb, this time up the **Monashee Mountains** which it will cross via Eagle Pass. There are waterfalls at this point on both sides of the train.

Mile 28: No fanfare marked the occasion when, on 7 November 1885, Donald Smith drove the last spike of the CPR trans-Canada railway in the ground here at **Craigellachie** in **Eagle Pass**. The only monument to that triumphant completion is a plaque (see photo opposite) on a cairn by the side of the track (N).

Mile 44: For the next 25 miles the train skirts the Salmon Arm of **Shuswap Lake**, which boasts prodigious quantities of Dolly Varden and kokanee salmon. Note the colourful **houseboats** moored in the lake.

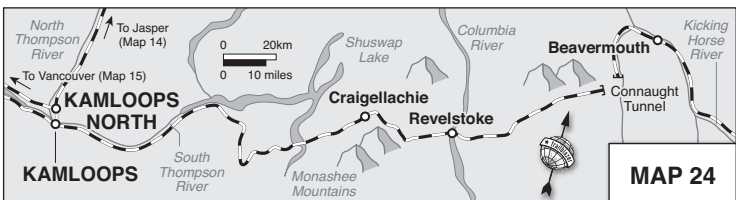
Mile 82: Look south for a glorious view over Shuswap Lake.

Mile 100: At this point the train starts to move away from the forested mountains into a landscape of gently rolling hills.

Mile 103(N): Look for the **hoodoos** standing on the hillside. These fantastic pillars of rock have been eroded into strange shapes by wind, rain and running water.

Mile 111(S): If you're wondering what's growing in these fields it is, in fact, **ginseng**. Once grown only in Korea and Manchuria, this plant is now thriving in British Columbia.

Mile 114: This is the site of Bill Miner's least successful train robbery. Miner, known as the Gentleman Bandit, was a famous Canadian train robber in the



(Opposite) **Top:** Looking down to Lake Louise (see p159) and the perfectly-placed Fairmont Château Lake Louise Hotel in Banff National Park. **Bottom left:** Lake Louise in winter. **Bottom right:** The plaque at Craigellachie (see text above).

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Price in UK UK£15.99

DISTRIBUTED IN USA BY NBN
☎ 1-800-462-6420 nbnbooks.com

Price in USA US\$22.95

ISBN 978-1-912716-07-4



52295 >



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