

Canada – Banff Lodge Horse Ride

Banff Lodge Ride in the Alberta Wilderness

Early in the morning, I set off northwards from Calgary in a hire car. The road runs straight ahead, drawing ever closer to the Rocky Mountains. At first, you can see the peaks – some still snow-capped – in the distance, but gradually I get closer and am eventually right in the heart of it all. This year, Canada is celebrating its 150th anniversary, so entry to almost all national parks is free. Banff National Park is stunning: forests, clear rivers, snow-capped peaks and Banff, the town that gives the park its name, right in the heart of it all. This pretty town, with a population of around 8,000, is home to up to 40,000 people during the summer months!

I arrive at the stables around 9 am and am greeted. The luggage is loaded onto mules. The animals are harnessed together in a line and led by a guide directly to our next accommodation – a very economical and environmentally friendly means of transport.



I meet the other guests: two women from Germany, a couple from North Carolina, a woman from New York, and two wranglers (guides and helpers) who will be riding with us. First, everyone is given a raincoat, which is fastened behind the saddle, and anyone who wants to can also borrow a riding hat. Then we head over to the horses. I'm given Deuce, a pinto. Once the saddlebags are packed and everything is sorted, we set off into the countryside.

Leaving the stables, we head towards the forest; here, you only come across walkers at the start and rather rarely, or the occasional cyclist – motorbikes, quads and cars are banned here! This is the only stable with a licence to ride in the national park, so

after half a day you're practically on your own – just nature all around you, absolutely brilliant!

Around midday, we reach a river where we enjoy salads and steaks fresh off the barbecue, against a stunning backdrop!

Afterwards, we ride a little further uphill, through a few rivers against the backdrop of the peaks, until we arrive at the lodge after a total of about 5 hours.

The mules are already there with our luggage; the horses are unsaddled and given a rest, whilst we explore the beautiful lodge. Crossing a small bridge, we reach a wooden house standing in a meadow, idyllically situated beside the river. The neighbouring little cottage is currently being used by marmots to sunbathe. One is lying on the roof, stretching out, whilst the other is sitting on the green meadow, grazing – quite a special welcoming committee!

Everyone is free to choose one of the ten or so rooms, which are furnished in the Canadian log cabin style. There are also two bathrooms, a large lounge with a fireplace, a dining room and a wraparound veranda. There, we can enjoy the sun with a cool drink; it's currently very warm for this time of year.

In the evening, there's a magnificent meal with salad, fish or stuffed peppers for vegetarians, homemade mashed potatoes, vegetables, home-baked bread and lukewarm chocolate cake for dessert!



Full and happy, we round off the day cosily in the fireside room before drifting off to sleep to the steady murmur of the river.

The coffee is ready, so you can enjoy a cup on the veranda before breakfast and welcome the dawning day. Around 8.30 am, breakfast is served with eggs, mushrooms, bacon, scones, toast, muesli, juice, tea, coffee and so on – once again, there's plenty to eat; you really can't go hungry here.

A wrangler packs the luggage onto the mules, loading the animals expertly and leading them to the next stop on the route.

The group mounts up and rides on towards the second lodge, further up into the wilderness of the Rockies.

Unfortunately, for me it's time to head back via a different route. Through rivers, forests and along smaller, winding paths to the lunch stop, where this time there are hot dogs with freshly grilled sausages or sandwiches for vegetarians, biscuits and apples – once again by the river against a mountain backdrop.

After about 5 hours, we reach the home stable again (this stage corresponds to the final day of the lodge ride), where the horses are looked after by the wranglers and we collect our luggage.

The logistics are truly incredible: as there is a strict ban on cars and there are no passable roads to the camps or lodges anyway, absolutely everything is transported in and out by mule! Food, dirty laundry, even fridges or windows that need replacing. I say goodbye to Deuce, who has guided me confidently along all the trails, and to Julie, the manager, who rode with me today and gave me lots of information about Banff, the flora and fauna, and life in the Canadian wilderness. The tour is ridden at a walking pace and is therefore slow, but the scenery is breathtaking and definitely worth it!

Banff is a charming place in the heart of the Canadian wilderness and definitely worth a visit! I'll certainly be back – next time with more time to spare!

A travel report by Julia Wies | Pegasus Reiterreisen Further information here: <http://www.reiterreisen.com/rtab17.htm>