

ALBERTA

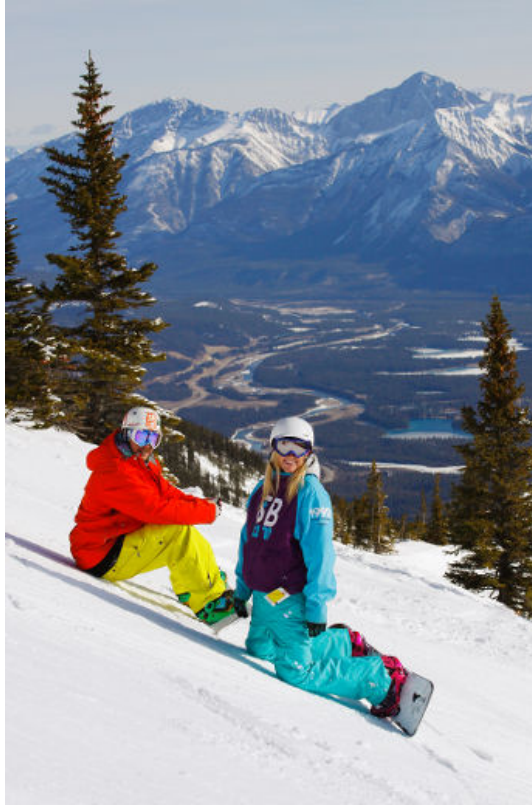
Rediscover Jasper

Upgrades put ski resort now in big leagues



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From the top of Marmot Basin, snowboarders and skiers enjoy a million-dollar view of Jasper National Park. PHOTO COURTESY MARMOT BASIN

There have always been at least four solid reasons to visit Alberta's Jasper National Park: Its town, its nature, its great Canadian railroad and its iconic grand hotel. Now skiers can add a fifth: Marmot Basin.

Jasper's local ski area has recently poured an astonishing \$25 million into upgrades, firmly placing it among Canada's top ski resorts. Here are five reasons to rediscover this magnificent, highly skiable section of the Canadian Rockies:

1. Marmot Basin

One of the most dynamic sights in skidom is from the top of Marmot Basin, the Canadian Rockies ski area perched at 2,612 metres, high above Jasper National Park. The Park, after all, is virtually untouched, with sprawling valleys, frozen lakes, thick green forests, abundant wildlife and diamond-cut mountain peaks that keep camera shutters in a constant whirl. It's not a new sight -- Marmot has been an established ski area since its first T-bar tow was installed in 1964. But in the past eight years, Marmot has dropped a mind-bending \$25 million into classing-up this ski joint, giving skiers valid reason to pay a visit.

Topping its reno list are two new lifts installed for this ski season -- a high-speed quad chair and a triple chair that replace an old T-bar and make it quicker to access the mountain's upper reaches. Since 2010, Marmot's been home to the Canadian Rockies Express, the longest high-speed quad in the Canadian Rockies at 596 metres; the Express leads the way to a myriad of trails best suited for both beginner and advanced skiers. And with the installation of an easy-to-ride Magic

Carpet surface lift for kids, expanded snowmaking and a competitive terrain park under the main base lift, Marmot now easily owns a spot among Canada's top ski spots, including Tremblant, Big White and the Banff resorts. See skimarmot.com.

2. Jasper Park Lodge

The Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge (JPL) is a destination in itself: A sprawling camp-like compound that's an odd mix of luxury and rustic. Originally known as a spiffy Tent City, JPL's legacy began in 1915 when well-to-do's arrived via the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway to sleep in fancy tents in the Rockies alongside Lac Beauvert. Fast forward nearly 100 years and JPL remains true to its roots, with sumptuous cabins dotting the mountain landscape, stewards to build roaring fires in each room's fireplace, and wild elk munching on its grounds. Throughout winter there's a skating trail and a hockey rink maintained on the hotel's lake, a new spa, a heated outdoor pool, and an indoor games room for kids and teens.

The whole thing is anchored by a magnificent main lodge complete with high timbered ceilings, more fireplaces and a collection of moose heads on the wall. For skiers, there's a twice-daily shuttle to ferry guests to and from Marmot Basin -- about 30 minutes up the side of a truly spectacular mountain. See fairmont.com/jasper.

3. The Railway

Jasper has always been a railway town, and many of its citizens are either retired or current railway employees. Passenger service still chugs into town from Edmonton -- a memorable way to arrive for a ski vacation. Fly into Edmonton, tour West Edmonton Mall and spend the night, then catch the early-morning, half-day VIA train to Jasper called The Canadian. You'll dine in style on white linen while the Rockies roll by. The train's Skyline and Park glass-dome cars were newly renovated in 2011. A limo from Jasper Park Lodge will be waiting at the station for your arrival. At the end of your stay, board a Sun Dog Tours four-hour van shuttle back to Edmonton. See viarail.ca.

4. Jasper townsite

Located inside Jasper National Park, the town of Jasper is officially referred to as the park's "townsite." It owes its name to Jasper Hawes, operator of a fur trading post in action more than a century ago. While the trading post is long gone, Jasper maintains its old time feel, with an historic railway station anchoring the town, a post office, an old fire hall, a museum and two main streets decked with galleries, souvenir shops, funky cafes and outdoor outfitter stores. For classic apres-ski, stop in at the Dead Dog Bar and Grill, a local hangout. See jasper.travel.

5. Jasper National Park

While on a ski vacation in Jasper, it's hard to forget you're inside one of Canada's national parks. The evidence is all around you in an abundance of wilderness and wildlife. Jasper National Park was established in 1907 and is largest park in the Canadian Rockies at 10,878 sq. km. One ideal way for skiers to experience its vast riches is via a nighttime Maligne Canyon Ice Walk. Sun Dog Tours runs guided hikes along the icy floor of Jasper's deepest canyon, past dramatic walls of sparkling ice.

Don't forget to look up! Jasper National Park is the world's largest Dark Sky Preserve. The three-hour night tour includes shuttle service, proper footwear, and fascinating info on local plants, rocks, rivers and wildlife. Kids over the age of six love it. See jaspernationalpark.com and sundogtours.com.

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