

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE IN THE FRASER CANYON

Ready for a road trip to remember? In BC's Fraser Canyon the river has eroded a deep gorge through the mountains and the highway clings to granite walls high above the frothing water. The drive, between Hope and Lytton, is short, but the memories will remain: ride the Hell's Gate Airtram down into the canyon, hike through abandoned railway tunnels, experience ancient Aboriginal traditions and feel the full force of the river on a whitewater rafting adventure.

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BRITISH COLUMBIA

Hell's Gate Airtram

At Hell's Gate, near Boston Bar, described 200 years ago by explorer Simon Fraser as "a place where no human being should venture," the river surges through a narrow gorge at 200 million gallons/760 million litres a minute.

Get a bird's eye view of the churning rapids from the Hell's Gate Airtram. One of the only descending gondolas in North America, it swings from the canyon's edge to the riverside at the Fraser's fastest and most furious point.

At the canyon floor, try your hand at gold panning, learn about the area's Gold Rush and First Nations history and perhaps grab a bowl of salmon chowder at the café. From the suspension bridge and observation decks, check out the fishways that help salmon navigate the rapids (the Fraser is one of the world's biggest salmon producing rivers) and watch for river rafts hurtling through the whitewater.

First Nations Traditions

Learn about life in the canyon centuries ago at Tuckkwiowhum Heritage Interpretive Village, a recreated Nlaka'pamux village near Boston Bar.

The village, complete with a traditional pit house, summer lodges and food caches, offers a glimpse into the traditions of the Nlaka'pamux (or Thompson) people. Tour the village, enjoy a traditional meal at the Tuckkwiowhum Restaurant, or book ahead to stay the night in a teepee.

Whitewater Rafting

Cruise beneath soaring cliff walls, watch for bighorn sheep on the canyon's edge, and hang on for a white-knuckle ride through the churning waters of the Fraser, Thompson,

Nahatlatch, Stein or Coquihalla river. Lytton, 3.5 hours east of Vancouver at the northern tip of the Fraser Canyon, is the rafting capital of Canada, with multiple rafting resorts and nearby access to all five rivers. Outfitters here have been riding these rapids since the 1970s and know how to handle some of the trickiest class IV and V whitewater around; they do a mean riverside barbecue too.

And, if rides like the Devil's Gorge, Witch's Cauldron, or Jaws of Death aren't quite your speed, there are gentler, family-friendly floats to enjoy as well.

Although day trips from Vancouver are an option, most Fraser Canyon operators offer accommodation – from camping on up – and a whole range of outdoor adventures, from mountain biking and hiking to kayaking and rock climbing.

The Othello Tunnels

The Othello Tunnels are a series of railway tunnels and bridges built into the sheer sides of the Coquihalla Canyon, a 300-ft/91-m deep granite gorge. This amazing engineering feat, completed for the Kettle Valley Railway in 1914, still counts among the most expensive miles of rail bed ever built.

The tunnels, abandoned by the railway in the 1960s, are now part of a flat, but dramatic, 3.5-km/2 mi round-trip walking trail in Coquihalla Canyon Provincial Park, near Hope, about two hours east of Vancouver.

Some tunnel trivia: The original engineer, Andrew McCulloch, was a Shakespeare fan. Watch for signs reading lago, Romeo, Juliet and Portia – they're all former stations along the old Kettle Valley Railway that runs along the Fraser Canyon and through the Okanagan Valley.

Accommodation

At Kumsheen Rafting Resort in Lytton relax between whitewater adventures in a safari-style canvas cabin — complete with antiques, wood floors and duvets — or opt for a furnished teepee. At Yale's Fraser River Raft Expeditions, share your tales of shooting the rapids on the covered porch at Teague House, a historic riverside bed and breakfast.

For a luxurious option (think five hot springs-fed pools and a full-service spa) head for Harrison Hot Springs Resort & Spa. This iconic inn on the sandy mountain-framed shores of Harrison Lake has drawn spa-goers since 1886.