

People ride a train at the heritage Bavarian City Mining Railway at Sullivan Mine in Kimberley.



TRIP IDEAS

FAMILY VACATIONS IN THE KOOTENAY ROCKIES

Go back in time at Fort Steele Heritage Town, visit wolves and a grizzly bear in Golden, see prehistoric sea life at the Burgess Shale fossil beds, or travel underground on Kimberley's Underground Mining Railway — BC's Kootenay Rockies region, home to four national parks, endless bike- and hike- friendly trails, and a string of natural hot springs, is prime family vacation country.

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History and Heritage

Ever wondered how they made ice cream in the 1890s? Find out at Fort Steele Heritage Town, a living museum near Cranbrook where more than 60 restored and reconstructed heritage buildings, plus train rides, horse-drawn wagons, and actors playing townsfolk recreate life before the turn of the last century.

History also lives on at Three Valley Gap Heritage Ghost Town near Revelstoke, where buildings from around BC have been gathered to recreate a 19th century gold rush town, complete with a schoolhouse, a jail and a railway roundhouse.

One of BC's prettiest historical sites is in Kaslo, where the SS Moyie, the world's oldest intact passenger sternwheeler, is dry-docked on the shores of mountain-framed Kootenay Lake.

Kimberley

In the little Bavarian-themed town of Kimberley, join the locals browsing on the Platzl, a pedestrian-only stroll, check your watch against Canada's largest freestanding cuckoo clock, then catch a ride on Kimberley's Underground Mining Railway. This little locomotive chugs along a scenic mountain valley before heading underground to the Sullivan Mine interpretive centre, where miners using real equipment show what the hard rock life was like.

The Burgess Shale

Rockhounds, take note. The Burgess Shale, part of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks UNESCO World Heritage Site, is one of the world's best-known fossil beds. To see it, learn about the Cambrian sea creatures fossilized here, and even hold some of the half-billion-year-old treasures, join Parks Canada interpreters on a guided hike through

Yoho National Park to the fossil beds. The day-long hikes are scenic and challenging, but not recommended for younger kids.

Wildlife Viewing

Mountain goats, deer, birds and bears are all part of the scenery on a Kootenay Rockies vacation, but to get a little closer and learn more about the big carnivores, head to Golden. Besides being a top outdoor adventure centre, Golden is home to two important wildlife sanctuaries.

At the Northern Lights Wildlife Wolf Centre visitors can visit, photograph and learn about grey wolves. And, up on the mountain, Kicking Horse Mountain Resort's Grizzly Bear Refuge, the world's largest enclosed and protected grizzly bear habitat, is home to an orphaned grizzly bear named Boo.

Feeding time? Grab brunch at the Eagle's Eye. At 2,347m/7,700ft, this gondola-accessed eatery is the highest restaurant in Canada.

Railway History

One of the longest railways in the world (all 4,800km/3,000 mi of it) came together in the mountains just west of Revelstoke. Craigellachie (pronounced craig-AL-icky) is the precise spot where, on November 7, 1885, railway financier Donald A. Smith hammered in the last spike to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway. That one piece of iron helped connect BC to the rest of the country and helped make Canada what it is today.

For more railway history, visit the Revelstoke Railway Museum to learn what it takes to build a railroad through a mountain range; in Yoho National Park, stop at the Spiral Tunnels viewpoint to see how it was actually done. For more than a century, these looped tunnels, visible from the highway, have helped trains navigate the treacherous grades of Kicking Horse Pass. The luxury cars displayed at the Trains Deluxe - Canadian Museum of Rail Travel in Cranbrook celebrate the golden age of the railways.

Family Friendly Accommodations

Spa-equipped mountain resorts, historic national park lodges, and lakeside campgrounds abound in the Kootenay Rockies. Some family friendly picks include Panorama Mountain Village near Invermere with its fully equipped condos, mountain-view hot pools, kids' day camps, and awesome lift-accessed mountain bike park (think 20 trails and 380m/1,247ft of vertical). Trickle Creek Lodge at Kimberley Alpine Resort has suites with kitchens, a heated pool, and a cozy river rock and pine vibe.



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