

◀ EAST OR WEST ▶

CANADA is big. Really big. So unless you have a lot of time on your hands, you won't get to see it all. Broadly speaking, you have two choices: Head east where you'll find vibrant cities and pretty mountain towns. Or go west where gargantuan glaciers and mountainous wilderness wows. The choice is yours.

THE CITIES OF THE WEST

Victoria, the seaside capital of BC, is a low-rise and relatively low-key kind of place. It's also the jumping-off point for trips to other parts of Vancouver Island, from the vineyard-laced Cowichan Valley - the so-called Napa of the North - to the surf beaches of Tofino.

If you go west, odds are high you'll find yourself in Vancouver. Canada's west coast metropolis is new and shiny. That's not to say you won't find history - have a stroll around Gastown for a sense of its past - it's just that it takes a back seat to the magnificent nature around the city.

THE WILD WEST

In Canada's west, there are vast tracts of land where people are few and far between. The landscapes of the west, and in particular Banff, Jasper and Yoho national parks, are truly humbling - it's hard not to feel small surrounded by the Rockies.

What's more, the western provinces are decidedly outdoorsy, which means there are countless ways to get out and experience the wilderness. Cruise down Grizzly Bear Valley in search of the fuzzy beasts to whom the valley owes its name, or hop aboard an all-terrain vehicle for a spin on the Athabasca Glacier.

URBAN EXPLORATIONS IN THE EAST

The cities of Canada's eastern provinces are an eclectic bunch. French-speaking Quebec City feels like it's been shipped in from across the Atlantic. Wander the cobbled squares and sloping streets of its historic core, which is hemmed in by centuries-old walls.

Montreal has its own pretty Old Town full of architectural eye candy, but there's more to this city than a well-preserved past. It's also a place that feels very alive, with a vibe that blends French sophistication with Brooklyn-esque cool.

Just a short hop from Montreal brings you to Canada's capital, Ottawa. Though a touch more restrained than its Quebecois counterparts - blame the government bureaucrats - the nation's capital is nevertheless beautiful. Tour Gothic government buildings, stroll along the Rideau Canal and explore a rake of excellent museums.

Then there's Toronto, a multicultural metropolis that draws frequent comparisons to New York. And while it's true that, just like the Big Apple, Toronto has enough restaurants, shops and sights to fill a lifetime, we find it to be both friendlier and cleaner too.

EASTERN SPLENDOUR

Mother Nature hasn't exactly been stingy toward the eastern provinces. Quebec's Laurentian Mountains don't measure up to the Rockies, but they're lovely nonetheless. Plus they're home to alpine resort towns such as Mont-Tremblant, and log cabin-style sugar shacks where maple sap is harvested.

A little further up the St Lawrence River is the Saguenay Fjord, whose plankton-rich waters attract beluga and humpback whales.

Over in Ontario lies what may be Canada's most famous natural attraction: Niagara Falls. While the mere sight of the immense cascades is enough to impress, we recommend getting a little closer to the action. A helicopter ride or a boat trip to the basin beneath the falls makes you confront their considerable power and vast scale.





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