

VACATIONS



All Aboard The Rocky Mountaineer

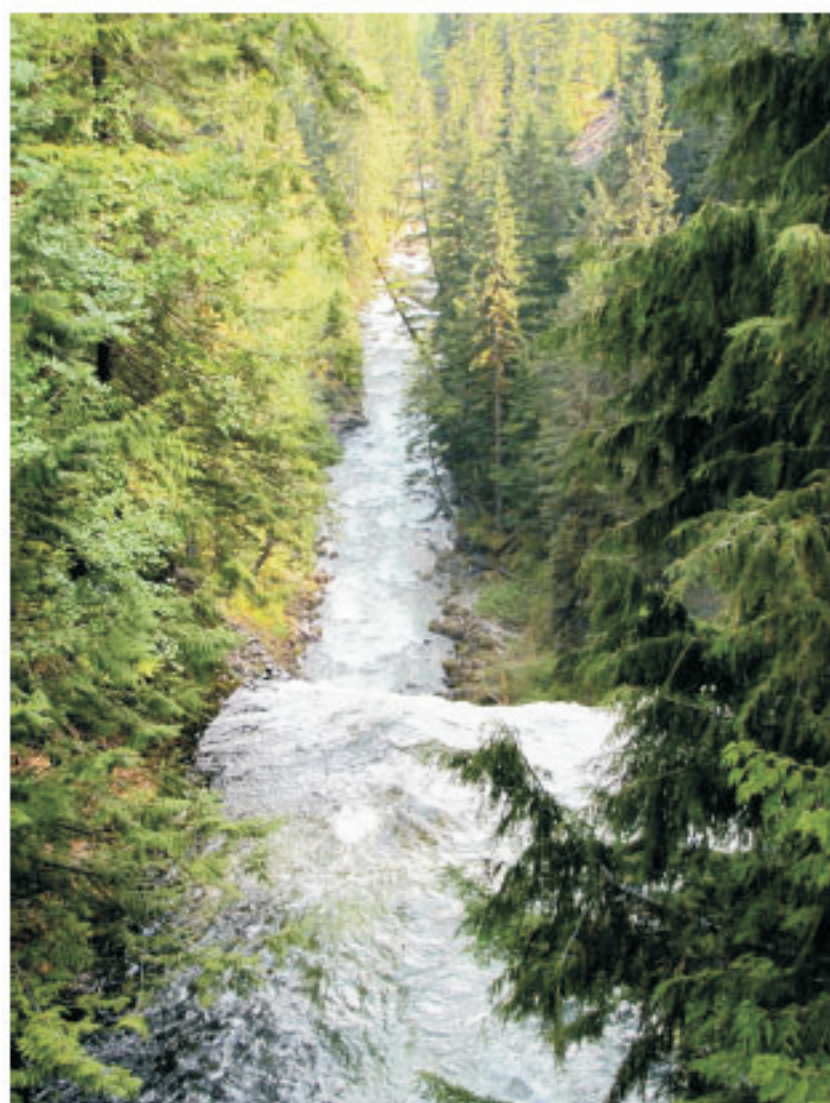
This train takes you on a journey through the Rockies of Western Canada

By Kalpana Sundar

Travelling in the luxurious Glacier Dome compartment of the blue and gold Rocky Mountaineer train feels like first class air travel. The train has reclining seats and glass windows that present a panoramic view of the mountainscape. This route follows the Pacific Great Eastern (PGE) Rail line built to connect Vancouver with Prince George. Back in 1912, when the construction of the line was started, it was criticised as the line from 'nowhere to nowhere'.

Pulling out from Nita Lake, the train passes the Alpha Lake - four lakes surrounding Whistler, Canada. Through the forests of spruce, firs, wild ferns and foxgloves, the tracks then lead to the Brandywine Falls, so named as the result of a bet about the height of the falls — one surveyor bet brandy against the other group's wine.

The attendant, Elizabeth, beckons the guests on to the open Heritage Observation Car, where one can trace the



path of the train as it runs above jagged rocks and thundering waters. This is Cheakamus Canyon, situated along a narrow gorge created by glacial action. In the distance, the iconic Black Tusk volcanic mountain comes into view. Throughout the scenic journey, the passengers are plied with finger sandwiches, buttery cones with Devon cream and strawberry jam and Earl Grey tea.

Next destination is the town of Brackendale, famous for its population of 3,000 bald eagles. In the distance, there is the saw tooth of Mount Garibaldi, named by an Italian sailor after his hero.

Gradually, the landscape becomes rugged, with huge monoliths of granite, as the train reaches Squamish (meaning, the birthplace of the winds), a place renowned for wind surfing.

The gigantic 700-metre-high glacier polished granite rock is called the Stawamus Chief and is a favourite with rock climbers. It's said to be the second largest freestanding monolith in the world, after the Rock of

Gibraltar. Squamish's recent claim to fame is that the latest offering in the 'Twilight' series was filmed here.

For the next forty minutes, all you see are the green glacial waters of Howe Sound and the distant mountains, parallel to the Sea-to-Sky Highway.

The train moves at a snail's pace at the 'Kodak crawl', sometimes slowing down further to allow the passengers to take photographs of the train, the hills and dales. Then the train passes Porteau Cove, a provincial campsite and the rim of the Howe Sound. Porteau Cove is famous with divers, as large shipwrecks have been sunk to create an artificial reef attracting marine life.

Slowly, the Rocky Mountaineer approaches civilisation, passing through the Horseshoe Bay tunnel. The journey ends at West Vancouver, a beach community with multi-million dollar homes. ☀

Getting To The 'Route' Of It

Rocky Mountaineer offers passengers a number of scenic routes and packages. The Canadian Rocky Mountain Route packages include the:

- a) **Circle Rail Packages** which offer a two or three-in-one route. These vary from 9-11 days.

- b) **First Passenger to the West** is a history buff's dream come true. It traces the steps of 19th century explorers right down to the last spike that was driven by the Canadian Pacific Railway. It covers Vancouver - Kamloops - Banff - Calgary, and is the only passenger train to do so. This trip takes place between 4-5 days.

- c) **Journey through the Clouds** covers the Vancouver - Kamloops - Jasper route, and one can experience Canada's highest peak Mount Robson and the famous Pyramid Falls en route among others. This journey takes place between 4 and 10 days.

- d) **The Rainforest to Gold Rush** explores the wild side, and the route takes you through Whistler - Quesnel - Jasper. From lakes to canyons, it has it all.

- e) **Coast to Coast** starts off at the Pacific and ends at the Atlantic ocean. One of the more longer train journeys, it takes between 12-13 days.

- f) **Rocky Mountaineer and Alaskan Cruise**; a combination of rail and sea, this trip takes 13 days and 12 nights.