

THE CANADIAN: RAIL JOURNEY FROM TORONTO TO VANCOUVER

In the early 20th century, Canada's popularity as a tourist destination was beginning to surge. Companies such as the Canadian Pacific Railway, commissioned talented illustrators and designers to create eye-catching posters that beckoned visitors to explore the country's natural beauty and urban attractions. Promising world-class adventure, spectacular scenery and luxury, these ads targeted globe-trotting tourists and Canadians alike. This Canada Post stamp pictures the famous transcontinental train, the Canadian, winding its way through the Rocky Mountains



# My amazing 4 day journey aboard 'The Canadian'

By Denise Bacon

Oh Canada! How lucky we are to call this our home and native or chosen land. A train trip on VIA's The Canadian train from Union Station, Toronto to Pacific Central, Vancouver, a journey across 4,466 kilometers, showcased the vastness and majesty of our country. (This article does not in any way take away the beauty and character of Canada from Ontario east of Toronto right to Newfoundland! That feature will be for another time.)

A tiny bit of apprehension about being "stuck" on a train for 4 days and 4 nights was quickly put to rest as the welcome started right in the VIA Passenger Lounge at Union Station. We had only carry-on luggage so we got to stow away our things in our sleeper car just as we boarded so we could start exploring the train. Sipping welcomed Mimosas (Champagne & orange juice) while sitting in the domed car relaxed us immediately while we watched the train start its westward journey promptly at 9 a.m., leaving behind the CN Tower and familiar city sights. Crossing the provinces, across trestle bridges, through ridges and canyons, across the tremendous prairies and through the mountains was a reminder to pay homage to the thousands of people who laid these tracks to connect our nation in the late 17th century.

The journey across Ontario highlighted that the 2nd largest of Canada's provinces is truly massive! We were thrilled to stop and stretch out our legs in -30 degree temperature in Sioux Lookout, a place until this trip was just a place on a map. A couple of passengers on the train disembarked here to go back to their homes after they shared their happy life stories about living in Sioux Lookout.

A good lesson learned on this train journey was to simply enjoy the moments. Train time was different from "real time" as we passed from Eastern to Central, to Mountain to Pacific time zones. It was important to pay attention to "Train Time" as meals and activities ran according to this special clock! Speaking of meals, we were treated to gourmet dining complete with white linens and menus for every meal. The dining car had three seatings for each meal which passengers selected in advance. Staff were the epitome of grace and service with the added bonus of great senses of

humour. Breakfast while watching the sun break across the Prairie horizon was simply magical.

We learned about Manitoba pride and their special sense of humour. "If you can see your dog outside, it's summer. If you can't, it's snowing!" Elk and wolves ignored the train as they continued doing what they do best – just being.

Saskatchewan is known for producing potash and mining operations which dotted the countryside as the train made its way across the province.

As the train left the snow-covered prairies where the horizon was almost beyond sight, the train came upon the gigantic Rockies in Alberta – gradually at first, but there they were in their magnificence, draped in snow and looking down on us.

Coming into Jasper was a reminder of the devastating fire that ripped through the region and half this town in July 2024. 25,000 residents and visitors were evacuated at that time. It was heartening to witness the spirit of the people and to see the town rebuilding. The countryside will take longer to heal as new growth is visible among the charred remains of still-standing trees.

The Rockies guided us into British Columbia. Mount Robson, the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies, graced us with a full un-clouded view. Pyramid Creek Falls, rivers and lakes filled our senses.

"Train time" is actually quite a magical concept. The Canadian often had to stop and wait for freight trains. Passengers simply relaxed into this rhythm of stop and go, without worry, making friends, sharing stories, joining activities, reading or by simply enjoying the stillness. The train was about eight hours behind schedule as it pulled into Saskatoon, but magically, it made up time and arrived in Vancouver at 4 a.m., four hours ahead of schedule!

Tim, one of the activity managers, regaled us with stories about The Canadian train which was built in 1955. The stainless-steel cars remain gleaming, 71 years later, with past glories seeping out of every corner. Prior to the pandemic, travel on The Canadian was a luxury primarily enjoyed by a seniors who saved for this bucket-list trip across the country. Today, because of the power of social media, people of all ages and from different parts of the world get on board. We met a

young couple who fled eastern Ukraine to settle in Canada just after the war started. Having good educations, each of them got good jobs in Halifax and are eagerly awaiting their Canadian citizenship. They learned first-hand how fleeting life can be, so they are living life to the fullest now and they loved traveling across their new homeland in the intimate setting of The Canadian.

A Mennonite family, Mum, Dad and three little ones aged one to four were travelling back from visiting family near farm country in St. Mary's to their new homestead in Manitoba, about 300 kms north of Winnipeg.

Twin sisters from Australia disembarked in Jasper to snowboard. Fred Frailey, a renowned author on railroads was an interesting fellow traveller. Travellers bonded over this shared experience on The Canadian with hopes and plans that our paths will cross again.

We ended this fabulous train adventure in Vancouver, four days after we left Toronto, with our last delicious breakfast in the dining car, saying adieu to staff and new friends.



The Canadian approaching Valemount B.C., a beautiful village surrounded by the peaks of the Rocky, Monashee and Cariboo Mountains. A couple from the train loves living here now. They moved from Toronto to "their paradise" here in Valemount 10 years ago.



A friendly VIA lineman jumped up onto the wheels of the Club Car to wave hello as the train stopped in Jasper. He was checking rail switches which allow trains to move across tracks so other trains may pass by.



Stopping at Pacific Central Station in Vancouver was bitter sweet as it marked the end of our great train adventure. Built in the early 20th century, the current name of "Pacific Central Station" was selected through a naming contest in 1991. The station was designated a federal heritage railway station in late 1991 under the Heritage Railway Stations Protection Act.



The train slowed down to a crawl to allow passengers to take in the stunning Pyramid Creek Falls in B.C. Access to these falls within Pyramid Creek Falls Park is very limited as the park is on the east side of the North Thompson River. It is visible from Hwy 5 and from CN tracks. We were very lucky to see this wonder up close!



Mount Robson in B.C. is in Mount Robson Park which borders Jasper National Park, all part of the grand Canadian Rocky Mountains. Mount Robson is the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies at 3,954 metres or 12,972 feet above sea level. Its grandeur is something to behold!

Passengers were able to explore Jasper for about an hour. This town was originally a trading post along the Athabasca River in the crook of the Rocky Mountains. Today, it is a beacon to tourists who seek adventure and beauty. Jasper National Park is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site.



For more information: [viarail.ca](http://viarail.ca)  
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The Club Car, here at Sioux Lookout train station, was a favourite gathering place for travellers to chat and have a drink from the adjacent bar. The view, especially from the back window, watching the tracks speed off behind us was mesmerizing.



Richard, my hubby, was the first to arrive in the Club Car after breakfast one morning. Soon the Car was filled with stories and laughter as passengers shared their lives with each other. This was an ideal spot for photographers in the group.



The Canadian made a scheduled stop in Sioux Lookout where the temperature was around -30 degrees. This is a key point along the journey to refuel with about 6,000 litres and to give passengers an opportunity to stretch their legs outside. The station itself is closed, but this stop is an important link for passengers particularly between Sudbury and Winnipeg.



Menu for the first lunch on the train near Washago, Ontario. The seafood ravioli and beet-cured salmon were scrumptious. This meal whet our anticipation for all the other meals to come! The highly trained chefs on board took great pride to create and beautifully present every dish.



A quick stop in Capreol, Ontario for passengers to board and disembark. Capreol is the northern most community of the greater Sudbury area. It is known for its early roots as a railway junction for the Canadian Northern Railway, as well as its rich lumber, mining and railroading heritage.



Crossing over the Uno Trestle Bridge over the Red River Valley near Beaulah in Western Manitoba. It is the longest trestle bridge in Manitoba, a significant historical landmark constructed in 1929. The Uno Trestle Bridge is a key crossing point for trains with crossings at least every hour. It felt like being in mid-air as we crossed this span across the valley.

Photo credit: Denise Bacon