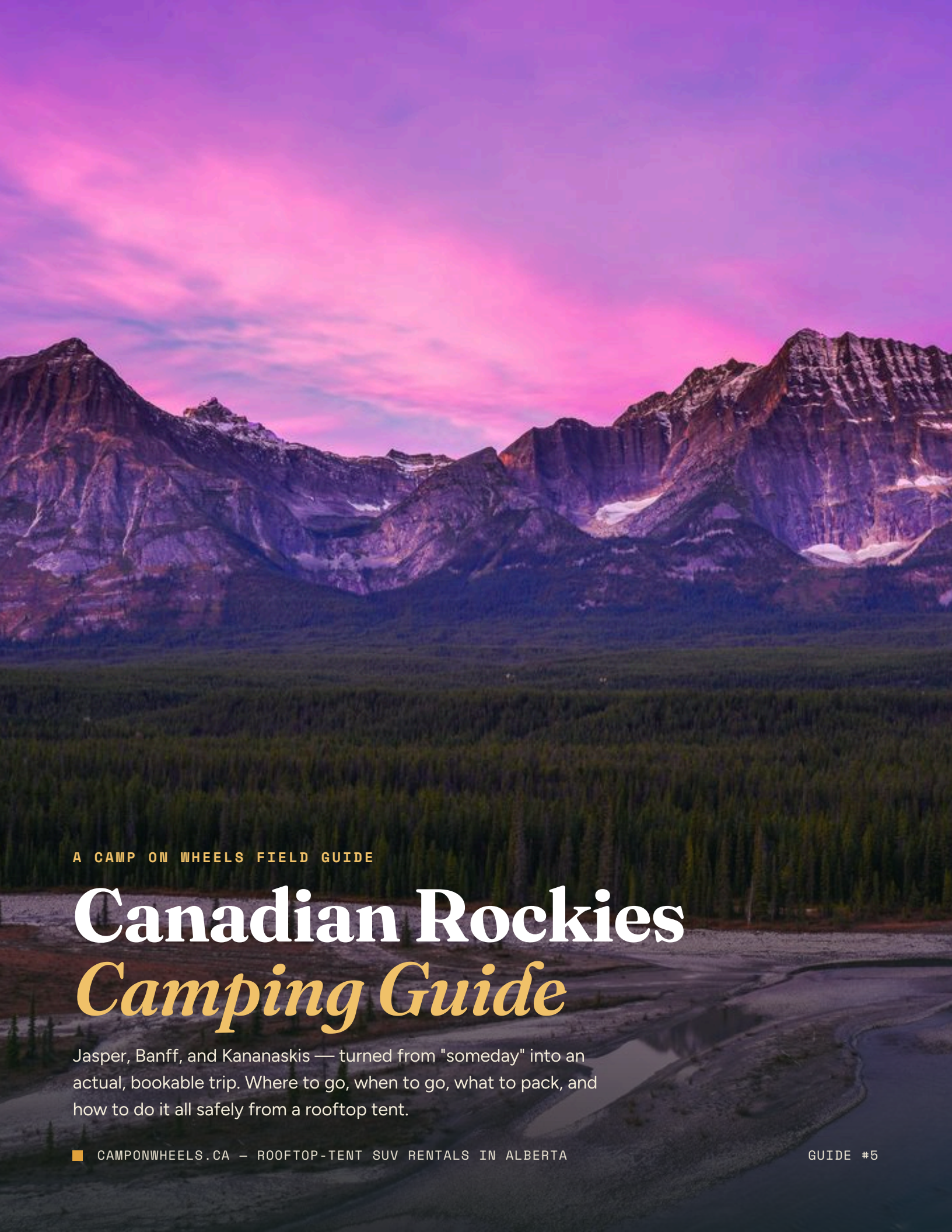




A CAMP ON WHEELS FIELD GUIDE

Canadian Rockies *Camping Guide*

Jasper, Banff, and Kananaskis — turned from "someday" into an actual, bookable trip. Where to go, when to go, what to pack, and how to do it all safely from a rooftop tent.



BEFORE YOU BOOK ANYTHING

So you want to see the Rockies.

Good. It's one of the best drives in the country from Edmonton, and it rewards a little planning more than almost any other trip we send people on. This guide is that planning, done for you.

We're Camp on Wheels, a family-owned business based in Edmonton, and "how do I actually plan a Rockies trip" is the question we get more than any other. Not whether to go — everyone already wants to go — but which park, which weekend, and what's different about camping at altitude versus a weekend at a prairie campground.

This guide assumes you already know how to camp. If you're newer to it, our beginner's guide covers the fundamentals — this one is entirely about the Rockies-specific decisions: Jasper versus Banff versus Kananaskis, when the passes get snow, what books up first, and how to share the woods with a grizzly without losing any sleep over it.

Consider this your route planner. Read it once front to back, then keep the itinerary pages in the glovebox for the drive.

See you out there.

— *The Camp on Wheels Family*

The Route Ahead

01	Why the Rockies, Why a Rooftop Tent	04
02	Best Time of Year to Go	05
03	Jasper vs. Banff vs. Kananaskis	06
04	Reservations & Permits: What Books Up First	07
05	Mountain-Specific Packing	08
06	A Sample 3-Day Rockies Route	09
07	A Sample 5-Day Rockies Route	10
08	Wildlife Safety in Bear Country	11
09	Driving the Mountain Passes	12
10	About This Guide	13

Five Questions First-Time Rockies Planners Ask

Jasper or Banff? Depends on your trip style — see the comparison on p.06.

How far ahead do I book? Popular sites go 3–4 months out. (p.07)

Do I need a pass? Yes — every vehicle needs a Parks Canada pass. (p.07)

Is it bear country? Yes, and it's very manageable. (p.11)

Will I be cold? Some nights, yes — even in July. (p.08)

How to Use This Guide

Read chapters 1 through 4 to pick your park and your dates, use chapter 5 to pack correctly, then pull out the itinerary page that matches your trip length on the drive. Chapters 8 and 9 are worth a re-read the night before you leave.

01

CHAPTER

GETTING ORIENTED

Why the Rockies, Why a Rooftop Tent

The Rockies aren't just a scenic version of your usual campground weekend — the terrain and weather are genuinely different, and that's exactly where a rooftop tent earns its keep.

- 🔥 **Ground is often rock, root, or slope.** Level, soft tent pads are rarer in the mountains than on the prairies. A rooftop tent doesn't care what the ground under your vehicle looks like.
- 🔥 **Mountain weather turns fast.** A dry afternoon can turn to a cold rain in twenty minutes. You're already packed and dry above the vehicle instead of scrambling to stake down a soaked ground tent.
- 🔥 **Elevation means cold nights, even in summer.** A rooftop tent's insulated floor and enclosed shape hold warmth noticeably better than a thin tent floor pitched on cold rock or gravel.
- 🔥 **Wildlife-aware camping is simpler.** Sleeping above ground level, away from anything left at a picnic table, is one more small buffer between you and curious wildlife.
- 🔥 **Set-up speed matters more here.** After a long mountain drive, being camp-ready in fifteen minutes beats fighting tent poles as the light fades and the temperature drops.



Ground Tent vs. Rooftop Tent, in the Mountains

GROUND TENT

- 🔥 Needs level, rock-free ground
- 🔥 Cold seeps up from below
- 🔥 Slower in sudden weather

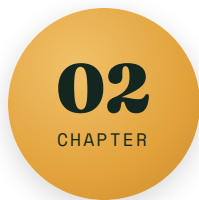
ROOFTOP TENT

- 🔥 Any legal parking spot works
- 🔥 Insulated floor, off cold ground
- 🔥 Camp-ready in under 15 minutes

The Rockies don't ask you to be a more serious camper — they just ask you to plan a little further ahead. That's what this guide is for.

PRO TIP #1

Book your campsite and your rooftop-tent rental at the same time. Popular Rockies campgrounds and popular rental weekends fill up on the same calendar — summer long weekends especially.



Best Time of Year to Go

The Rockies have a real camping season, and it's shorter than most people assume. Here's how each stretch of the year actually plays out.

Late May – June

Shoulder season. Thinner crowds and easier bookings, but higher trails can still hold snow and evening lows regularly dip near freezing. Pack like it's early spring, not summer.

July – August

Peak season, and for good reason — warm days, open trails, and the best odds of stable weather. Also the busiest and hardest-to-book stretch by far; plan months ahead.

September

Our favourite shoulder window. Fewer people, larch trees turning gold in late September, and still-mild days — but nights drop hard and an early snow is always possible.

October – April

Most frontcountry campgrounds close for the season and highway conditions turn serious. Not a rooftop-tent camping window for most visitors — save it for a townsite hotel trip instead.

The Shoulder-Season Trade

Less crowded, easier to book, noticeably colder overnight, and a real chance of a closed trail or an early snowfall. Worth it if you're flexible; skip it if this is your one trip of the year.

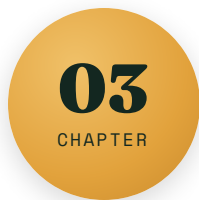
Our Pick for a First Trip

Early-to-mid September: warm days, cool but manageable nights, thinning crowds, and the best light of the year for photos.

PRO TIP #2

Whatever month you pick, check the mountain forecast (not the Edmonton or Calgary forecast) the week of your trip. Mountain weather is its own system and can differ wildly from the nearest city.

Overnight Lows to Actually Expect		
June	July–August	September
Can drop to 0–5°C at higher campgrounds, even after a warm day.	Typically 5–10°C overnight — still a genuine jacket-and-toque low.	Regularly near or below 0°C once the sun's down. Pack for winter camping, sleep in a summer campground.



Jasper vs. Banff vs. Kananaskis

All three are within a day's drive of Edmonton, and all three deliver real Rockies scenery. The right one for your trip comes down to distance, crowds, and what you actually want to do once you're there.

Jasper

~3.5 hrs from Edmonton — the closest of the three, and the quietest big-name park.

- ☐ Best for: fewer crowds, wildlife viewing, big scenery without the Banff traffic
- ☐ Highlights: Maligne Canyon, Pyramid Lake, the Icefields Parkway southbound
- ☐ Trade-off: fewer amenities in town than Banff

Banff

~4.5–5 hrs from Edmonton — the postcard park, and the busiest by a wide margin.

- ☐ Best for: iconic lakes (Louise, Moraine, Peyto), a full-service townsite
- ☐ Highlights: Lake Louise, the Bow Valley Parkway, Johnston Canyon
- ☐ Trade-off: book everything months out; parking lots fill by mid-morning in summer

Kananaskis

~3 hrs from Edmonton — provincial, not national, and the easiest to book on short notice.

- ☐ Best for: a quicker weekend trip, easier reservations, no national park pass needed
- ☐ Highlights: Mount Lorette Ponds, Troll Falls, Kananaskis Lakes
- ☐ Trade-off: slightly less dramatic peaks than Jasper or Banff, still genuinely beautiful

Quick Pick

Short on time? Kananaskis — closest, easiest to book, still stunning.

Want the icons? Banff — but book the moment reservations open.

Want quiet + wildlife? Jasper — our pick for a first Rockies trip.

PRO TIP #3

Can't get a Banff site? Book Kananaskis instead and day-trip into Banff for a few hours — you'll skip the reservation scramble and still see the lakes.

Reservations & Permits: What Books Up First

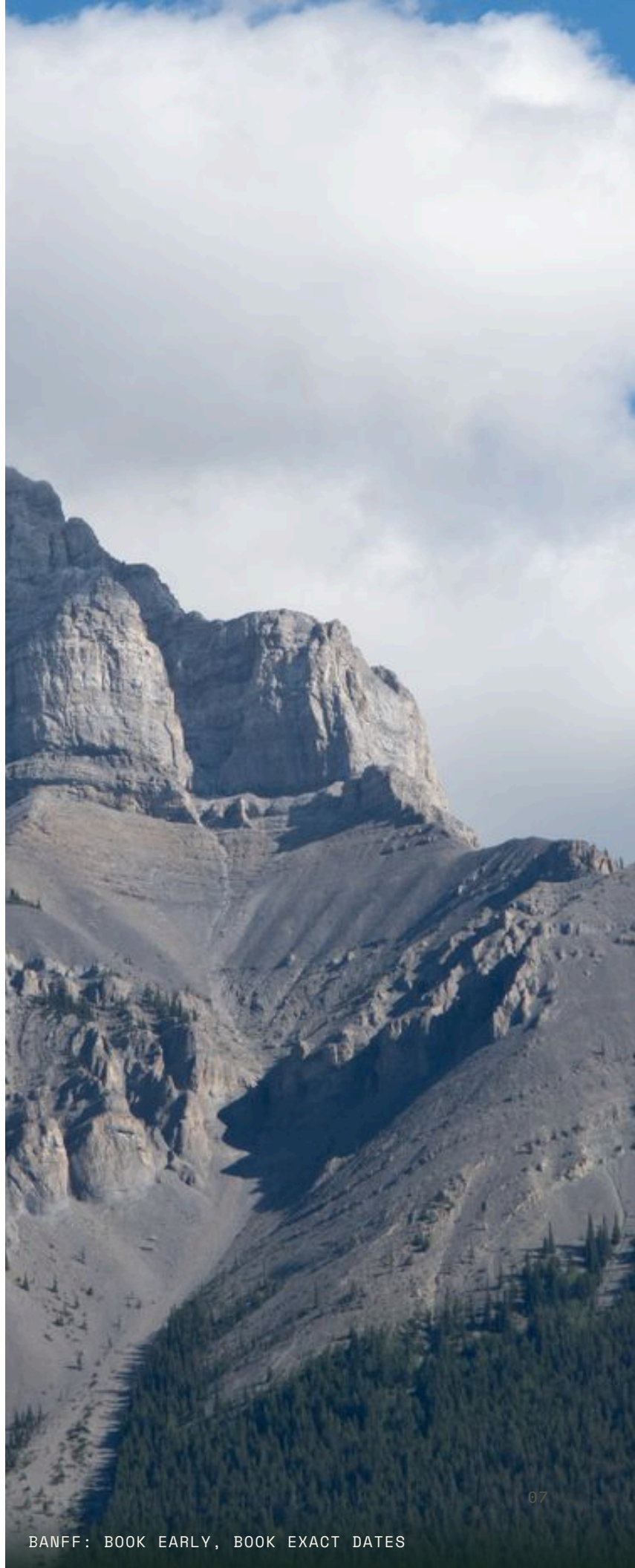
- 🔥 **Parks Canada campgrounds** (Jasper, Banff) open on a fixed rolling window, typically 3–4 months ahead — mark the date and book the moment it opens.
- 🔥 **Every vehicle needs a park pass** for Jasper or Banff — a Parks Canada Discovery Pass (annual, all national parks) pays for itself in about a week.
- 🔥 **Kananaskis Conservation Pass** is required for any vehicle parked in Kananaskis Country, separate from the national park pass — buy it online first.
- 🔥 **Kananaskis campgrounds** open on a similar window through Alberta Parks and are usually a little easier to land than Banff's top sites.
- 🔥 Backcountry permits, for a hike-in trip, are a separate booking — not covered by your campground reservation.

PRO TIP #4

Set a calendar reminder for the exact release date and time. Popular summer-weekend Banff sites have booked out within minutes of release.

If You Missed the Window

Check for cancellations, try first-come-first-served sites (arrive early, weekdays), or pivot to Kananaskis for better late availability.



Mountain-Specific Packing

If you've camped before, you already own most of what you need. These are the additions the mountains specifically ask for.

Cold-Night Extras

- ☐ A warmer sleeping bag than you'd use at a prairie campground — rated at least to 0°C
- ☐ A toque and warm layer for every person, every trip, regardless of month
- ☐ An extra blanket or the Thule insulator below
- ☐ Insulated sleeping pad — cold ground and cold air both pull heat

Altitude Considerations

- ☐ More water than usual — altitude and dry mountain air dehydrate faster
- ☐ Sunscreen with higher SPF — UV is stronger at elevation
- ☐ A day or two to acclimatize before a big hike, especially above 2,000m
- ☐ Basic headache relief on hand for mild altitude discomfort

Wildlife-Aware Food Storage

- ☐ A bear-proof food container or cooler, stored in the vehicle overnight
- ☐ Bear spray, one per adult, kept accessible — not packed away
- ☐ Scented items (toiletries, garbage) treated the same as food
- ☐ Never in the tent, rooftop or otherwise — see Chapter 8

PRO TIP #5

Pack your warmest layer in your day bag, not the bottom of a duffel. Temperature swings hit fastest right at dusk, exactly when you're least likely to want to dig through the trunk.

RENTAL ADD-ON



The single biggest difference-maker for Rockies nights: the **Thule Kukenam 3 Insulator** — a quilted liner that clips inside the tent and holds body heat all night, even when it's near freezing outside. Available as an add-on on every Camp on Wheels rental.

A Sample 3-Day Rockies Route

A tight, weekend-friendly loop from Edmonton to Kananaskis — the easiest of the three parks to fit into three days without feeling rushed.

1 Day One — Edmonton to Kananaskis

About a 3-hour drive. Fuel up in Calgary or Cochrane, arrive with daylight to spare, set up camp, and take the easy trail at Troll Falls before dinner.

2 Day Two — Exploring Kananaskis

A full day at Kananaskis Lakes — an easy paddle or lakeside walk, lunch at the picnic area, and a stop at Mount Lorette Ponds on the way back to camp.

3 Day Three — Home via Highway 40

Take the scenic Kananaskis Trail (Hwy 40) north, stop at a viewpoint pull-out, and be home by early evening.



Prefer a Different Direction?

Jasper route — swap in Maligne Canyon and Pyramid Lake for a quieter version of this same 3-day shape.

Banff route — doable in 3 days, but book every stop; summer parking lots fill by mid-morning.

Book Early

Kananaskis sites and your Conservation Pass — both sorted before you leave.

Fuel Up First

Top up in Calgary or Canmore — options thin out past the gate.

Cell Signal

Spotty past the park gate — tell someone your route and return day.

PRO TIP #6

Screenshot your campsite reservation, park pass, and an offline map before you leave home. Don't count on opening an email once you're out of signal range.

A Sample 5-Day Rockies Route

The full loop: Jasper and Banff, connected by the Icefields Parkway.

PIN
THIS
UP

1 Day One — Edmonton to Jasper

About 3.5 hours. Set up camp, stretch your legs at Pyramid Lake, and catch the sunset from the lakeshore.

2 Day Two — Jasper

Maligne Canyon in the morning, a quiet afternoon at camp, wildlife-watching drive at dusk (from the vehicle, binoculars ready).

3 Day Three — Icefields Parkway to Banff

The best drive in the country. Stop at the Columbia Icefield and Peyto Lake viewpoint, arrive in Banff by late afternoon.

4 Day Four — Banff

Early start for Moraine Lake or Lake Louise — parking lots fill by mid-morning in summer. Johnston Canyon in the afternoon.

5 Day Five — Banff to Edmonton

A relaxed morning, then the drive home via Calgary — about 4.5 hours, plus stops.

Running Short on Time?

Drop Day Two's Maligne Canyon detour and drive straight through to Banff — a solid 4-day version of the same loop.

Book These Months Ahead

- ☐ Both campgrounds, on their exact release dates
- ☐ Parks Canada Discovery Pass, ordered or bought at the gate
- ☐ Moraine Lake / Lake Louise shuttle, if driving isn't an option

On the Icefields Parkway

- ☐ Full tank leaving Jasper — services are sparse for 230km
- ☐ Build in extra time for wildlife jams and viewpoint stops
- ☐ Check road conditions the morning you leave, year-round

Five days is enough to see both icons and still feel like a trip, not a checklist — build the extra hour in wherever the drive tempts you to stop.



CHAPTER 08

Wildlife Safety in Bear Country

All three parks are home to black bears, and Jasper and Banff have grizzlies too. This is genuinely manageable, not a reason to stay home.

- 🔥 **Carry bear spray, one per adult**, within reach — not in the trunk. Know how to use it before you need it.
- 🔥 **Store all food, garbage, and scented items** in the vehicle overnight, never in the tent — rooftop or ground.
- 🔥 **Make noise on trails**, especially near water or blind corners — surprising a bear is the actual risk, not the bear itself.
- 🔥 **If you see a bear at a distance:** stop, stay calm, back away slowly the way you came. Never run.
- 🔥 **If a bear approaches:** stand your ground, speak firmly, use bear spray if it closes within range. Fighting back only applies to a predatory attack, which is extremely rare.

PRO TIP #7

Check trail and campground bulletin boards for wildlife activity notices when you arrive — closures and warnings are updated daily and are the single best local information you'll get.

Driving the Mountain Passes

The drive is part of the trip, but mountain highways ask for a bit more attention than the road out to a prairie park.

Fuel Planning

Fill up in Edmonton or your last real town — Hinton, Canmore, or Calgary. Services thin out fast once you're inside the parks, and the Icefields Parkway in particular has long stretches with none.

Sudden Weather

Clear skies at the trailhead can mean sleet at a higher pass twenty minutes later. Check the mountain-specific forecast the morning you drive, not the night before.

Winter Conditions, Any Month

Snow on high passes is possible even in June and September. Check drivebc.ca or 511 Alberta before departure if you're travelling in shoulder season.

SUV & RV-Specific Notes

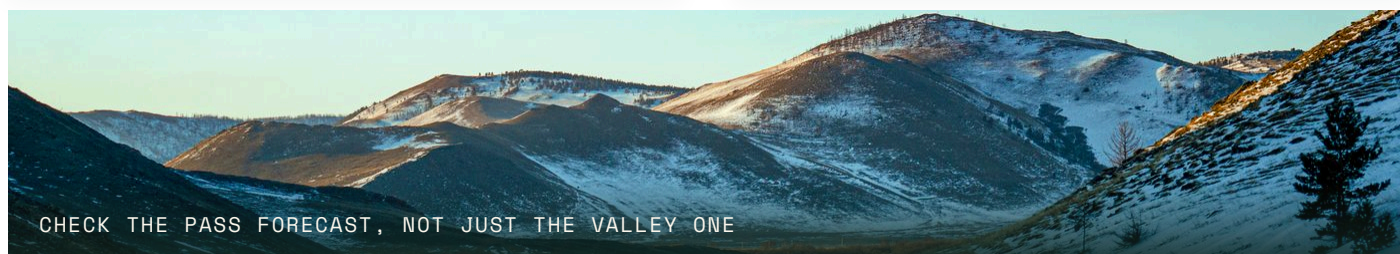
A rooftop tent raises your vehicle's profile and centre of gravity slightly — take switchbacks a touch slower. Larger RVs should check grade and length restrictions on some secondary routes before committing.

Wildlife on the Road

Elk, deer, and bears cross highways constantly, especially at dawn and dusk. Slow down in posted wildlife zones — it's the single most common cause of trip-ending accidents in the parks.

Build In Buffer Time

Wildlife jams, construction, and viewpoint stops all eat into a drive that looks short on a map. Add 30–45 minutes to any Google Maps estimate for a mountain-parks route.



PRO TIP #8

Download offline maps before you leave cell coverage — signal disappears for long stretches on the Parkway and through much of Kananaskis.

ONE LAST THING

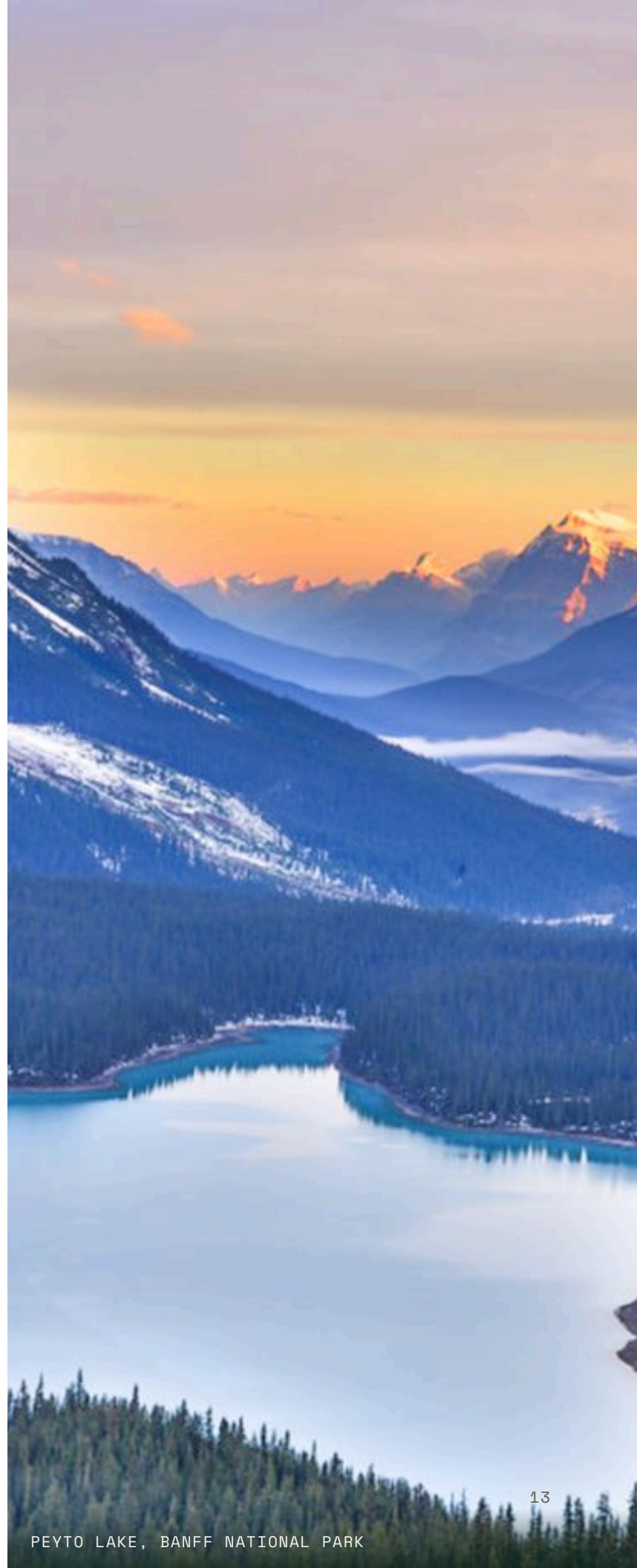
Where This Guide Came From.

This guide was put together by Camp on Wheels, an Edmonton-based, family-owned rooftop-tent SUV rental business. We've driven this route more times than we can count, and this is everything we tell customers before they head for Jasper, Banff, or Kananaskis.

Ready to book the trip? Rooftop-tent SUV rentals, insulated liners, and bear-aware add-ons are all ready for you at camponwheels.ca.

New to Camping Altogether?

If you haven't camped before, start with our beginner's guide first — it covers the fundamentals this one assumes you already know. Free at camponwheels.ca.



THANKS FOR READING

The mountains are ready.

Now go book the dates.

This guide is everything you need to turn "someday" into a date on the calendar.

One last tip: print whichever itinerary page matches your trip and keep it in the glovebox — cell signal will not be there when you need it.

The Whole Guide in Five Lines

- 🔥 Book your campsite and park pass the moment reservations open.
- 🔥 Pack for near-freezing nights, even in July and August.
- 🔥 Carry bear spray within reach; store food in the vehicle, never the tent.
- 🔥 Fuel up before the parkway — services thin out fast once you're inside.
- 🔥 Check the mountain forecast the morning you drive, not the night before.

WHO WE ARE



We are an Edmonton-based small family business built around a simple idea: the best camping experiences should feel easy to start and hard to forget.

After exploring Alberta and the BC Rockies with a rooftop tent, we wanted other families, couples, and first-time campers to feel the same freedom we felt: drive a comfortable SUV, keep the gear organized, sleep above the campsite, and wake up close to the mountains.

"Go outside and start collecting memories."

— THE CAMP ON WHEELS FAMILY