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Golden, British Columbia

Story and photographs by **Melanie Votaw**

| |
|------------------------|
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| Cleveland |
| Colorado Springs |
| Golden, BC |
| Louisville, Kentucky |
| Mexico City |
| N. Orleans Christmas |
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| St. Augustine |
| Tucson |
| Vancouver, BC |
| Yaletown, Vancouver |



A GOLDEN SPOT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The scent of sweetgrass wafted past my nose as the wolf raced excitedly down the path. I was hiking in a forest in [Golden, British Columbia](#) with two wolves – a singular experience if ever there was one. The wolves are two of six captive animals at the [Northern Lights Wildlife Wolf Centre](#) in Golden, which is one hour from Banff National Park and less than three hours west of Calgary.

It was August, and the temperature was comfortably in the 70s Fahrenheit. Our two wolf companions were named Maya and Wiley. Maya was very reticent and kept her distance, while Wiley was almost as friendly as a puppy. At one point, he became interested in my fanny pack and began to chew on it. I wasn't at all afraid, however. Wiley was raised in a zoo and is very accustomed to people. I wasn't afraid of Maya either, but she was certainly a bit afraid of me and wanted to know where I was at all times.

Wolves may look like dogs at first glance, but if you pay just the slightest bit of attention, you can tell that these are not really domesticated animals. In fact, wolves sometimes eat dogs. While the wolves at Northern Lights were all born and bred in captivity and cannot be released into the wild as a result, they still maintain most of their wild nature. Northern Lights serves as a sanctuary, adopting animals that would otherwise have nowhere else to go.

The Centre takes the animals into schools to educate children about wolves, and it allows visitors to view the animals in their 1.25-acre enclosure. Admission is just \$10 for adults and \$6 for children, with a price break for seniors and

families. This includes a 20-minute talk about wolves.

My experience was the more expensive romp in the woods with the animals through an organization called Blackwolf Photography. For \$295, two of us could spend 1-1/2 hours with the wolves, taking all the photographs we wanted. Even with a simple camera, you can get images that will be the envy of all your friends, but it's the experience of walking in this majestic setting with these equally majestic animals that is priceless and indescribable.

Casey Black, who runs the Centre, says that many visitors are moved to tears from the experience. I don't know of any other place where you can stroll with wolves in the woods off leash, so it's certainly something I will never forget and will gladly return to experience again. For safety reasons, children are not allowed on these hikes, but mature teens 16 and up can participate. Nevertheless, the wolves came to Casey immediately whenever he called them, and he carried meat with him to feed them periodically.



Of course, the wolf experience is not all that the town of Golden has to offer. Golden is set in the heart of six national parks and three mountain ranges within the Canadian Rockies, and the landscape alone makes it worth the trip. But this small town of 4,000 people has an almost staggering number of available activities for the active traveler. In winter, there is downhill and cross-country skiing, backcountry skills training, snowboarding, snowmobiling, ice fishing, snowshoeing, and ice climbing. In summer, you can explore in a 4x4, golf, raft, tube, mountain bike, kayak, canoe, paraglide, hike, heli-hike, climb, fish, ride horses, or enjoy a river and wetland tour. Wildlife viewing is a year-round activity.

Of the few manmade sites in Golden, there is the [Golden & District Museum](#), which chronicles the history of the town and its connection to the Canadian Pacific Railway. Kicking Horse Pedestrian Bridge spans the Kicking Horse River in the town and is the longest freestanding timber frame bridge in Canada. Incidentally, Kicking Horse River is one of Canada's fastest whitewater rafting rivers. There is also a Swiss Village called Edelweiss. Considering the alpine landscape of this region, it's no surprise that many people from Switzerland felt comfortable in Golden and decided to settle there.

While in town, I stayed at Golden's spectacular [Kicking Horse Mountain Resort](#), a four-season resort with the highest sightseeing gondola in British Columbia at more than 8,000 feet. The Kicking Horse Bike Park has the highest elevation and longest vertical in Canada.

I had lunch one day at The Eagle's Eye Restaurant, which stands at 7,700 feet on



the grounds of the Resort and is the highest restaurant in the entire country. The restaurant features a 360-degree view, so you can enjoy the gorgeous scenery while you munch on delicious food. I ordered something simple and had the best burger I believe I've ever had. This was one of three burgers that I ate while in Golden because there is simply nothing like Alberta beef. Golden

is very close to the border of British Columbia and Alberta, so the restaurants all serve Alberta beef. Ordinarily, I eat very little red meat, but this beef is just too flavorful and juicy to pass up.

While the Resort is primarily a skiing destination in winter, it has become an increasingly popular mountain biking destination in summer. Kicking Horse is largely self-contained with several restaurants and a village with a group of shops that carry sporting gear, food, and toiletries. I stayed at the Palliser Lodge, one of four lodges on the Resort grounds. There are also condominiums and the Eagle's Eye Suites at 7,700 feet that include penthouse accommodations.



My suite at Palliser was like a one-bedroom apartment. It contained a lovely bedroom with a television, a spacious living room with a second television, and a full functioning kitchen that included a small washer and dryer. I really appreciated the ability to wash my clothes. As a New Yorker accustomed to small apartments, I could easily have lived there, especially considering the view of mountains and tall coniferous trees outside my windows.



The Resort also maintains the largest grizzly bear refuge in the world. It contains just one bear named Boo, who was orphaned by a poacher. His large refuge is fenced so that visitors can watch him safely (when he's in sight.) The Resort periodically drops food into the refuge from the ski lifts so that the bear can still hunt for his food as he would in the wild. The ski lifts are not the only way to get to the mountaintops at Kicking Horse, however. The Golden Eagle gondolas transport about 600 skiers and visitors every hour, and each one holds eight people.

The Resort provides special packages that can include ski instruction and personal valet service. Prices vary greatly depending on the accommodations you choose, and there is quite a bit of variety available.

Golden was on the Olympic torch path, and the town celebrated the 2010 Winter Games with numerous events. This town is one of those places that's off the beaten path but which has much to offer if you love the outdoors. I visited in summer but hope to go back in winter to see that beautiful landscape covered with snow and perhaps romp with the wolves once again – this time in the white powder.

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