

A Year In Golden BC



Fall is in the air

Wound like a top, summer is slow to go to sleep in Golden. It'll have taken all its energy to melt the winter's snow, and won't have done so until the very end. Some years, there will be too much to fully wipe away. But with the sultry season's heat now at bay, and winter yet to frost the peaks, the fall is the best and most colourful time to get up high. [At the heart of six national parks](#)—Glacier, Yoho, Kootenay, Banff, Jasper and Mount Revelstoke—autumn in Golden is all about cool air, unfettered access and endless vistas.

Cresting Abbott Ridge in Glacier National Park (locally known as Rogers Pass), Laura Crombeen takes in the payoff of a three-hour tour past Selkirk Mountain lakes and meadows to gain a view out of a fantasy novel. Once up high, the alpine amphitheatre of peaks, glaciers and ice fields extends in a massive horseshoe. For Laura, who fills her fall with [new hikes](#), this classic route never gets old. She never gets tired of seeing Mount Sir Donald, Mount Eagle and Mount Uto holding court together in the sky, the sharpest and tallest in the park.

Over in the Rockies, Mount Assiniboine dominates Kootenay National Park's skyline in an equally pronounced way. And Yoho's Iceline Trail offers multi-day vistas of one of the youngest mountain chains in the world, its towering layers on display as though torn from a textbook.

Across the divide, in the Purcells, the sleepy poplar and birch serve as a yellow apron to a set of smooth mountain spires bursting from glaciers like canines through gums. The Bugaboos, set in a provincial park of the same name, aren't just gobsmacking, they're a history lesson. This is one of the places the famed Conrad Kain made his name, blazing first ascents as early as 1916, and sending news of North America's mountain riches home to Europe.

A hundred years after him, [climbers](#) from around the world now scale the same rock in impressively long pitches. One is Golden alpinist Andrea Eitle, who's honed grip has delivered her to the top of these granite monoliths on many occasions, none of them enough to satisfy. There's always a new route, a new way, and—unlike many places—no crowds. In between trips here, Andrea keeps strong on local crags back in Golden, with new ones emerging every year.

Meanwhile, somewhere in the nebula of lakes, rivers and creeks below, Dave Burns is knowingly casting lures in exactly the right spot, reeling in bull trout, rainbows and more. Like

Andrea, he's been studying the area for years. If you want to catch the big ones, mountains or fish, this time of year is when to do it. Local knowledge like Dave's (a professional fishing guide), is clutch.

But [anglers](#) aren't the only ones filling their boots. For bears and eagles, this time of year is a feast. While it takes savvy and a bit of luck to come across these creatures in the wild, scores of people back in Golden will take the occasion to visit the [Northern Lights Wildlife Wolf Centre](#), or catch the tail end of the season to visit Boo, the resident bear at [Kicking Horse Mountain Resort](#) grizzly refuge. The largest enclosed grizzly refuge in the world, which closes at the end of September.

As the days grow shorter, the [animals](#) across the ranges will fatten up and prepare for the coming winter. The shades draw closed, and they put their heads down as the nighttime cools and hints at the blanket of snow to come.

[Welcome to our winter playground](#)

To the west, the Selkirk Mountains let out a stampede of glaciers and rock. To the south, the Purcells line up like a row of siblings, their soft backs draped in snow-caked evergreen. To the east, the Rockies stand guard cold, crisp and clear. In the centre of them all, a small town howls at the inevitable cascade of winter, and the waltz begins. When the snow finally falls, Golden gets its dance shoes on, and there's no better dance floor out there.

For Brenna Donaldson, it's easy to take the lead. [Kicking Horse Mountain Resort](#) bends and sways at her command; she knows its 1,314 vertical metres (4,314 feet) of nooks and crannies intimately. Moving in perfect time with them, she traces a long ridgetop across a series of north- and south-facing runs. CPR Ridge points her into the Marley Chutes, and instinct takes over. She moves between cliffs and rows of spruce seamlessly, from top to bottom. Having snagged first tracks, she'll fan out farther in each direction now, chasing each new bowl as it opens throughout the day—five of them in total.

Farther to the north, Ty Mills and his group click their splitboards together in anticipation of a similar run, but longer, earned in sweat, and with nary a soul to compete with. As an ACMG snowboard guide, the entire Dogtooth Range is Ty's domain—and beyond. Be it the summits of Rogers Pass, or the home pull of his native Purcells, Ty, like many these days, finds his flow in the [backcountry](#). He's spent his life learning these mountains so he can wander freely in them, and bring others. Steeped in the tradition of the Swiss mountain guides that founded Golden, Ty is part of a new generation that gets as much satisfaction going up as coming down—walking calmly through postcard scenes, and then gliding effortlessly down blank mountainsides in long drawn-out swoops, like calligraphy.

Another few bowls over, Aaron Bernasconi is in search of the same thing, only with a lot more power. Roaring through billows of powder on his [snowmobile](#) gives him a feeling he hasn't found anywhere else. The groomed trail into the bowl at Gorman Lake provides access to just one of 13 zones the Golden Snowmobile Club maintains. It's in this sea of terrain that Aaron

learned to work his throttle and throw his body weight; now there's no Golden zone he can't ride. From the valley bottom to the savagely steep mountainside, he's still finding new corners all the time.

Farther afield, someone [hangs from ice](#) with axes and crampons, a family walks with [snowshoes](#) through the calm forest, and [Nordic skiers](#) lope in long strides over 33 kilometres of trails. At the end of each of their days, they'll take their dance shoes off, put them by the fire to dry, and then wake to do it all over again.

[Long spring days](#)

Margaret Atwood once wrote, "In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt." In Golden, it's impossible not to. From the wash of winter snowpack swelling creeks and rivers to the laces of forest throughway coming alive again, dirt offers the access to every wonder the mountains hold, and this place was made for getting down in it.

On the flanks of Mount 7, Sophie-Anne Blanchette's tires bank with practised grip into corners packed with premium soil. The moisture in the ground is perfect, and the traction is the best it will be all season. Not a speck dust flies behind her [mountain bike](#) kept at bay by the same water she was skiing in frozen form only weeks earlier. Sophie-Anne is part of a vanguard of new riders: hammering up to 1,200 vertical metres (4,000 feet) from town on purpose-built climbing trails to descend revitalized downhill tracks remade into sprawling enduro works, all under her own human power.

For Sophie-Anne, who's as strong on the way up as she is down, these trails are tailor-made. Golden offers a seemingly endless all-mountain buffet of modern flow and tech that she can spend two or 10 hours on. She can climb as high or as low as she wants, punching her lungs on the way up, and her forearms on the way down—all in an ecstatic blitz of roots, rollers and jumps that will stay prime until late October or early November.

Below her, the whole time is the emerald green braid of the Columbia and Kicking Horse Rivers, and their pumping flows. Spring is when rivers froth with waves and [whitewater rafting](#) is at its best. Ryan Johannesen and Carmen Narancsik know this well, they've been guiding people down the convulsing Kicking Horse River for over a decade with their company Glacier Rafting. Each spring, they tap the water cycle from glacier to ground to bring guests down the gravity-fed roller coaster that is one of the world's greatest churners of H2O. Rafters start in the calm upper reaches of the Rockies and are delivered over 25 kilometres (15 miles) back to Golden. The bold will finish the journey by running the lower canyon, accessed only by helicopter, and only by Glacier Rafting.

While high water brings with it an adrenaline punch that'll attract ambitious rafters and kayakers alike, it's not mandatory to run the Kicking Horse's lower canyon—which frames the river's wildest waters. More gentle passage flows from its headwaters, in places only marginally more turbulent than the mellow Columbia—the Kicking Horse's sister river. One of the largest waterways in North America, [the Columbia](#) is a gentler flow where you're just as likely to find

swimmers and sunbathers as canoeists and SUPers on any sunny day. Not to mention trail runners and golfers, who also chase its shores, their playground equally nourished by its waters.

Set in dirt delivered to the valley floor by eons of spring flows, Golden lives in the yearly celebration of these spring months, and the ever-widening smile they bring of the sun across the sky.

From [restaurants and bistros to cafés](#) and [pubs](#), when you're done in the mountains, come find a patio or warm stool in Golden's comforting embrace. Walk the longest freestanding [timber-frame bridge](#) in Canada to cross the Kicking Horse River and land in the heart of downtown. In the summer, you'll find weekly outdoor concerts in Spirit Square, and a bustling farmer's market every Wednesday. World-class live performances move indoors for the winter, at the historic and impressively restored Golden Civic Centre. Several other music venues bump into the wee hours of the night year-round, or you can slow sip a craft beer at the [local brewery](#). Mix and match between fine dining and sampling spirits distilled right in Golden, and come fill up your own in one of the most authentic mountain towns in Canada.