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Discover Waterton Lakes with the Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies

by A GUEST WRITER on [2016/04/19](#)

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Although the US has a veritable treasure trove of **beautiful national parks**, we certainly can't forget about our neighbors to the north, Canada. Full of amazingly diverse landscape throughout the country, Canada has quite a few national parks that will blow your mind, such as Waterton Lakes. Located in the southwest corner of Alberta, Canada, and bordering our beloved **Glacier National Park**, Waterton is a spectacular sight to visit and thankfully, today's guest contributor, Jacqueline Louie is here to tell us all about some of the park's best features.



Cinquefoil at Bear's Hump, Waterton. (Photo by Ian Wilson)

There is a saying that 'the mountains shall bring peace to the people.' It couldn't be more true than for [Waterton Lakes National Park](#), a UNESCO World Heritage site covering just 195 square miles, situated in southwestern Alberta, Canada.

Waterton Lakes National Park is the Canadian half of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, sharing a border with Glacier National Park in Montana. Waterton is “unique, because it’s got a tremendous backcountry. The scenery is pretty spectacular, and it’s got lots of wildlife,” says Stuart Watkins, president of the [Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies](#), a non-profit club that takes guests out to explore the Canadian Rockies on six-day, professionally guided and catered getaway adventures. “It’s a small park, and it doesn’t attract the big crowds that Banff does.”

Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies

Exploring the backcountry on horseback is an ideal vacation for boomers, who “want to see the natural environment. They really want to get out and have an adventure – but they don’t want to be uncomfortable,” Stuart explains. “They don’t want to backpack, eat powdered food or sleep on the ground. They want to be comfortable and safe.”



Starting up Blue Lake Pass. (Photo by Judy Fleetham)

For the Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies, exploring the Rocky Mountains on horseback has been an annual tradition dating back nearly a century. The Trail Riders offer people of all ages and abilities the opportunity to experience some of the wildest, most beautiful landscapes in the Canadian Rockies. Guests are well taken care of, staying at a comfortable base camp with tipi and tent accommodations, and tucking into homemade gourmet meals.

After a riding lesson on the first day, everyone is set for adventure. Each day, riders head out to explore a different destination, ranging from mountain valleys, to ridge tops and alpine lakes. On horseback, you can travel much farther into the backcountry than by walking – and you still get back into camp in time for a shower and hearty dinner.



Paddle on! Kayakers take in the spectacular scenery on Upper Waterton Lake. (Photo courtesy of Parks Canada)

Each evening after dinner, everyone gathers in the ‘doughnut’ – a canvas tent designed like a tipi – for music and a singalong, and a chance to share stories, jokes and highlights of the day. This summer, the after dinner activities will include not only musical entertainment, but also a cowboy poet; a naturalist; and a dance caller, getting everyone up for square dance lessons. The last night in camp wraps it all up with a celebration, and everyone participating with a story, poem, song, joke or any other way they’d like to share.



“Teepee Town” with The Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies. (Photo by Judy Fleetham)

Stuart references the film *City Slickers* to describe what the Trail Riders have to offer. “We are very much like that – we take city people out into the backcountry – although it’s not a cattle drive, it’s a trail ride. It’s about education, and submersing people into our western cowboy culture.”

Judi Pearce went on her first trail ride last summer with the Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies.

Describing herself as a beginning rider who “knew which end of a horse was up,” but who hadn’t ridden in many years, it was an adventure for Judi, a widow, who is “absolutely” coming back to do another trip this summer.

“Waterton is very, very beautiful, and it has the additional significance of being the International Peace Park, where Waterton joins up with Glacier National Park,” she says. “I loved the mountains, and I loved the wildflowers we saw. It was just beautiful. You could see forever. There were high mountain lakes that you could only ever see if you went by helicopter. It was a real emotional high . . . Now I know why John Denver wrote Rocky Mountain High. That’s really what it felt like.”

The wranglers from Alpine Stables, Judi adds, did “an amazing job – they knew every inch of that territory. The horses were amazing. There were times when we were riding along a cliff edge and you would look down and say, ‘I hope this horse really knows what it’s doing.’”

It was fun. “There were lots of laughs. The people that came were such a diverse group. There were people from every walk of life from all over the U.S.,” she says.

With the strong U.S. dollar (and the low Canadian dollar) this is a great time for Americans to come to Canada for a vacation.



The sun rises in the east over Vimy Peak, illuminating the Prince of Wales hotel and a majestic view of the middle and upper lakes in the park. (Photo courtesy of Parks Canada)

The Trail Riders typically explore different destinations in the Canadian Rockies each summer; last year and again this year, the camp takes place in Waterton, in August. For more information, please visit trailridevacations.com.

Wildflower Capital of Canada

Described as the place ‘where the Prairies meet the mountains,’ Waterton Lakes National Park encompasses four different eco-regions – parkland, montane, subalpine and alpine. The park boasts an abundance of wildlife and tremendously diverse plant life, including many rare plants.



Balsamorhiza at Belleview Prairie, Waterton. (Photo by Ian Wilson)

And if you’re a flower enthusiast, you’ll want to check out the annual [Waterton Wildflower Festival](#), scheduled for June 19 – 24, 2016.

The festival is “everything about wildflowers – with workshops, presentations, and guided walks to places to find wildflowers,” says photographer Ian Wilson, co-author with Jacinthe Lavoie of the guidebook, [Wildflowers of Waterton Park](#), and [Waterton Wild](#), a photo book of the park’s wildlife and wildflowers.

Outdoor Adventure

In addition to horsebackriding and plentiful flower and wildlife viewing opportunities, there is a wide range of activities that will appeal to active boomers: including hiking for all levels, from prairie walks through fescue grasslands, to arduous hikes and scrambles. And if you want to explore Waterton’s lakes and rivers, you can go paddling, kayaking and canoeing.

For hotels, restaurants and shopping, you can visit the charming Waterton Village, in the heart of the national park. There is also a variety of tent, RV and trailer campgrounds located throughout the park. Online camping registration is now open through the [Parks Canada](#) website.

Disclosure: Jacqueline Louie was a guest of the Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies.

Have you ever been to Waterton Lakes National Park? Join the conversation at the [My Itchy Travel Feet page on Facebook](#) or [send us an email](#) to ask a question or share your experience.