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JASPER

A throwback to **TINTIN'** *s time*



BY DEBRA CUMMINGS

WAY, WAY OUT IN THE LAND OF POWDER, THE ROOFS ARE STEEPER, THE TRAILS GO DEEPER AND THE CROWDS ARE NONEXISTENT. ALL THE CLASSIC STUFF IS INTACT – THE RED BRICK STEEPLED CHURCH, THE STONE CABINS, THE STICKY BEAR PAW BUNS. WHERE IS THIS MYTHICAL KINGDOM, YOU ASK?

RIGHT HERE IN ALBERTA'S ROCKIES.

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... BEFORE THEY STRETCH INTO
ROWS OF SNOW-SPACKLED PEAKS –
PINCHED TO PERFECTION AS THOUGH
BY THE HANDS OF FAIRIES.



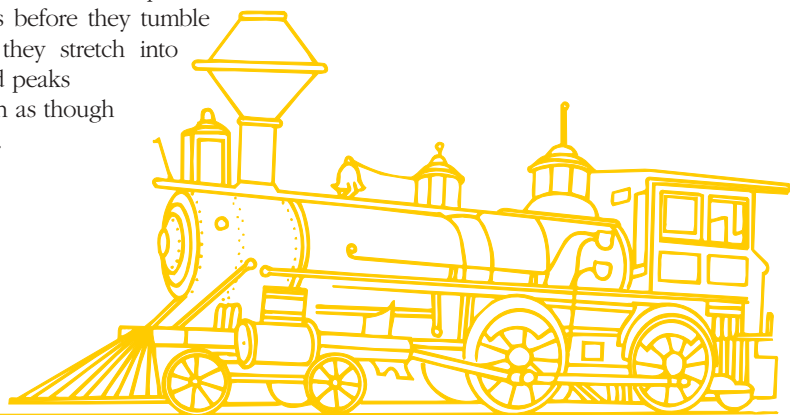
© Travel Alberta/Cross-country skiing at Sunshine Village



More popular than Harry Potter, more ubiquitous than Coke, more recognizable than Brad Pitt, Tintin is as global as icons come. Since his creation in 1929 by the Belgian cartoonist Hergé, the adventures of this “boy reporter” have been translated into more than 45 languages and have sold 200 million copies worldwide. While the final Tintin volume appeared in 1976, if Hergé still existed (he died in 1983) I’m convinced the stacks would now boast of a *Tintin in Jasper* adventure.

While the rest of the world moves and morphs at unclockable speeds, not the Rocky Mountain town of Jasper. Cradled in Canada’s largest national park, blessed by the same moniker, the town of Jasper is a rebel ... a holdout, a casual reminder of the splendid grace and bug-eyed wonder of Tintin’s time. An era of steamer trunks and luxurious long distance rail travel, of dastardly villains and swarthy explorers ... of intrepid Swiss mountain guides, tough-talkin’ miners, of ghosts.

Arriving in Jasper via the Snow Train would be the Tintin way. Remember, Tintin favoured transport that allowed for lazy transitions. Time for the cowlicked wunderkind to pore over ski maps, plan routes, read this story – that’s what Tintin, or you, might accomplish in several hours a trip from Vancouver or from Winnipeg. Enough time to do that, as well as watch the wind whip across the prickly wheatfields before they tumble into foothills, before they stretch into rows of snow-spangled peaks – pinched to perfection as though by the hands of fairies.



Saved, say some locals, by the railroad and the fact it’s not located on the Trans-Canada Highway – Jasper’s geography is what keeps it uncrowded, unspoiled. Of course, it’s not totally glitz-free (slope-side sushi is a Sunday special at Marmot Basin Ski Resort) but Jasper remains full of mom-and-pop shops, where old-timers still wear the corduroy knickers of Tintin’s era ... still use gnarled walking sticks. In fact, folks who look just like Tintin’s seasoned pals, Captain Haddock and Nestor, check in daily to Papa George’s for a morning cuppa. Jasper’s 5,000 residents still share the streets with elk, an occasional moose and a bear or two each summer.

An amble through the archives department of the Jasper Yellowhead Museum will spirit you back to Tintin’s time, and beyond. Dig deep and you will discover that back in 1811, just a few kilometres away, was precisely where the mighty explorer David Thompson hacked a route across a formidable icefield, en route to the Pacific Ocean. The scrape of ice on what is now known as Athabasca Pass, the whomp of the snow pack under an explorer’s ice axe: they are all here, told in elegant longhand, tucked in journals, government records, letters and even grocery lists.



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You see, Jasper is not one of those “instant” ski villages (built faster than a decaf-double-tall-vanilla-non-fat-no-foam-extra-hot latte). It is authentic: a classic *working* ski town. The Whistlers, the Tremblants, the Vails offer much funky charm, loads of terrain, great shopping, corner-side Starbucks; but Jasper is scruffier than those. You might say uniquely organic. Spend a half a day in the archives and you’ll feel its history – from the fur traders to rail barons, from a bizarre aircraft carrier commissioned by Sir Winston Churchill that now sits at the bottom of Patricia Lake, to the photos of Marilyn Monroe in Maligne Canyon, here while filming *River of No Return*.

Tintin, with his ever-ready, spiral-bound notepad, would have had a field day rooting through these documents searching for something ... say, Charlie Dupres’ ghost. Locals swear the late Parks Canada warden who died in an avalanche haunts them ... by spinning snow guns around, blasting them with the fundamental facts, the very reason they’re all here: the white stuff. Marmot Basin averages 160 inches (400 cm) of snow a year. The powder, like Alberta’s eye-wringing sunlight, is pure, raw and direct. And there’s lots of it!



©Travel Alberta/Morning frost at Moraine Lake, Banff National Park

Frankly, we’re not convinced our plucky boy with his loyal fox terrier would have checked into the Museum before heading to the snow-smothered resort of Marmot Basin. Likely, Tintin would have made a beeline here.



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We can see him hungry for a story, warming up on the fenced-off Bunny Hop (ideal run for beginners and families), then across to the new terrain park in Marmot Run. Not being much of a rider, Tintin the traditionalist may have jotted down a few germane observations, spun on his narrow old boards and headed to the 20 new runs which crisscross the Eagle Ridge area. That’s where we’d expect to find Tintin, yodeling with glee over the nonexistent lift lines, the “all-natural” snow, the punishing double-black diamond chutes of The Terminator and the Outer Limits, an advanced course in back-country/avalanche awareness, which combines ski or riding techniques under the tutelage of a fully certified guide.

After that, we might spot Tintin tucking down Sleepy Hollow for a quick tussle with Milou. By then we’re guessing Tintin would have bumped onto Captain Haddock or joined a Rocky Mountain Snow Host for a free tour of the mountain. That alone would get him to the mogul fields of Party Slope and Jasper Avenue (where by March the bumps are as big as half-ton Fords) and later the twisty trails of Paradise.

Snow hosts are exactly where you would pick up local lore, such as: the resort's name being prompted by the whistling furry marmots that fill these valleys in the summer; that the largest glacier-fed lake in the Canadian Rockies is Maligne Lake at 22 km long and 97 metres deep. It is also on tour when Tintin realizes that Marmot Basin is designed to be family-friendly.

"Every run funnels in to a common area, which means they all lead down to the chalet," says Megan Gibson, Marmot Basin's marketing associate. "It's almost impossible to get lost here, plus lots of our runs (30 per cent) are beginner. The town is slow-paced and traffic is never an issue when it comes to kids. At our recreation centre we've got waterslides, a kiddie pool and a climbing wall."

We're not sure whether it was the spirited Merlot at De'd Dog Bar and Grill or the friendly local who taught Tintin how to do the hokey pokey at the Downstream, but somewhere on the first night, Tintin learned that Marmot Basin was just one of Alberta's Big Six ski resorts. The others lie south of Jasper:

THE 289-KILOMETRE-LONG DRIVE
(ROUGHLY 174 MILES), FROM JASPER
TO BANFF, ALONG THE ICEFIELDS PARKWAY
IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S CLASSICS.

Lake Louise, Sunshine Village, Ski Banff @ Norquay, Nakiska and Fortress Mountain.

That was enough for Tintin to consider packing up his trench coat and moving on.

Like many of today's tourists, Tintin likely would have rented a car in Jasper. After three or four days he would sojourn south to the mega-resort of Lake Louise.

The 289-kilometre-long drive (roughly 174 miles), from Jasper to Banff, along the Icefields Parkway is one of the world's classics. Glittering with hanging glaciers and dozens of jagged peaks, it is a destination in itself. Highlights along the 3-hour excursion to Lake Louise are Athabasca Falls, Sunwapta, Athabasca Glacier, the Weeping Wall (a series of frozen, serrated waterfalls where you're likely to see professional ice climbers) and the snowy flats of Bow Lake (where the red-roofed historic lodge of Num-Ti-Jah sits amongst snow banks the size of small condos).

Featuring four mountain faces, the ski resort of Lake Louise is overwhelmingly stunning. Spin around on the Glacier Express chair and you'll see the Valley of the Ten Peaks (the visual on the back of the Canadian \$20 bill), the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise (an alpine castle resort, sister to the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge and the Fairmont Banff Springs) and you will understand why this area is referred to as the "land of a million Christmas trees." Be warned: this resort is extensive, so don't let it fool you into thinking you can ski it all in one day. If Jasper is your base, treat Lake Louise as a side trip (you could do the same with Sunshine Village) and bunk down in Jasper's bigger sister – Banff.



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©Banff, Lake Louise Tourism Bureau/Cascade Plaza on Banff Avenue

If you feel like indulging, stay at the luxurious Fairmont Banff Springs or the Rimrock Resort (home to Banff's latest and swankiest martini/cigar bar known as Diva), for some serious gourmet eating, spa treatments, après-ski glory and pure opulence.

What about Tintin? While undeniably worldly, Tintin just may feel a little lost, a tad bewildered in Banff. We think he'd sneak a wedge of maple walnut fudge from The Fudgery and have a dip at the world-famous hot pools. But then he and Milou would likely head back to the lost world, depicted in Hergé's colourful frames. The age of vast train travel, of women who ride sidesaddle through grizzly country ... of places where the Northern Lights still dance undisturbed on a blank, black slate –



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to Jasper. Where advancements at a ski hill haven't turned town clocks into anything remotely digital.

THEY TICK. THEY TOCK.

THEY WORK JUST AS THEY DO IN TINTIN'S TIME ZONE



tick. tock.
tick. tock.
tick. tock..



© Marmot Lodge

NEED TO KNOW

Winter is value season in Jasper with room rates dropping 40 to 60 per cent at many properties. A stay at a swanky spot such as the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge, which might be unaffordable in the summer, won't break the bank in the winter. Check out Jasper Park Lodge's "Rate of the Day" deal (use this term when asking for prices and you will be given the lowest cost that day, based on availability) and look for special "themed" weekends, such as the Scrooge Ski Package and Culinary Chefs' Weekend, which often feature reduced prices. For bargain seekers, the best winter deals occur during "Jasper in January" (Jan. 18 – Feb. 2, 2003). This 14th annual festival includes all sorts of family activities (races, snow sculpture contests, chili cook-offs, etc.) as well as rock-bottom rates at 14 properties (promotions start at \$65 a night). Marmot Basin is also a key player in this event. Their regular adult lift ticket of \$52 a day drops to \$37.

The other economical way to book a total vacation is through VIA Rail's Snow Train. The Snow Train refers to the stops in Jasper that the legendary *Canadian* makes while whistling across Canada. That means you can hop aboard in Vancouver and head east or start your journey in Edmonton, Winnipeg or beyond and head west through Jasper. A good number of Jasper hotels have packages built around the Snow Train's schedule. For Snow Train information call 1-888-VIA-RAIL or visit www.snowtraintojasper.com.

For Ski Jasper vacation packages call Tourism Information on Jasper: 1-800-473-8135 or visit their Web site at: www.skijaspercanada.com; www.skimarmot.com; www.discoverjasper.com; www.jasernationalpark.com or Banff/Lake Louise Tourism Bureau: 1 403 762-1550 or www.banfflakelouise.com

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