

# Tauck Grand Canadian Rockies Blog



PREPARE TO BE DAZZLED.... See Canada through the eyes of a small group of Magellan agents escorted by our Queensland Sales Manager, Sharon Hando on this, an exceptional Tauck journey through the Canadian Rockies. From the coastal seaport city of Vancouver to the chic alpine town of Banff, Tauck's 10 day Grand Canadian Rockies journey operates annually from May to September and is priced from US\$5,190 per person twin share.

Highlights Include;

- Accommodation at four acclaimed Fairmont hotels and resorts
- A floatplane flightseeing excursion over the Gulf Islands from Victoria to Vancouver
- An overnight rail journey from the Vancouver coast to Canada's Rocky Mountains
- Visits to the Butchart Gardens, a Canadian National Historic Site
- An "Ice Age" adventure at Athabasca Glacier & a gentle rafting trip on the Bow River
- A day of outdoor summer adventure activities at The Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge
- And so many more....

HOW YOU SEE THE WORLD MATTERS. Please enjoy daily updates from our intrepid travellers as they go "beyond the ordinary" as guests of Tauck.

## **DAY ONE – Arrive in Vancouver**

BLOGGER: Sharon Hando – Travel the World

## **DAY TWO – Vancouver highlights and a ferry to Victoria**

BLOGGER: Susan Aitkin – Mary Rossi Travel

## **DAY THREE – Victorian ways with The Butchart Gardens and afternoon tea**

BLOGGER: Eliza Summerhayes – Cruise View

## **DAY FOUR – Visit the Royal BC Museum, afternoon tea, flightseeing & all aboard "The Canadian"**

BLOGGER: Craig Reid – The Village Travel

## **DAY FIVE – Into the Canadian Rockies by rail to Jasper**

BLOGGER: Judy Tanner – Aurora Travel

## **DAY SIX – A day as you please in Jasper National Park**

BLOGGER: Mandy Ward – Lidstrom & Clyne Travel

## **DAY SEVEN – Icefields Parkway, Athabasca Glacier and on to Lake Louise**

BLOGGER: Sharron Hungerford – The Travel Agent at Caloundra

## **DAY EIGHT – Moraine Lake, Yoho National Park & on to Banff National Park**

BLOGGER: Roger Koller – Gregor & Lewis Bespoke Travel

## **DAY NINE – Bow River float trip and day or resort leisure**

BLOGGER: Sharon Hando – Travel the World

## **DAY TEN – Journey home**

BLOGGER: Sharon Hando – Travel the World

# Day 1 Arrive in Vancouver



## Saturday 29th August 2015

STRONG WIND & CONSISTENT RAIN – two things not experienced in Vancouver for at least 4 months....UNTIL TODAY !!! The locals are ecstatic - us tourists, not so much...

I arrived into Vancouver with United Airlines on a flight where I was seated in the back row next to the only onboard toilet. I honestly couldn't have been more uncomfortable had I been seated on the ACTUAL toilet – it was like Kings Cross on a Saturday night – it was BUSY !!!! I was still on my own time (and coin). Things were about to change though.....there at Vancouver airport was a lovely young man with my name (and the names of two of my travelling companions) brightly displayed on his iPad. James was our driver for our included Tauck transfer. He whisked us easily away from the extremely busy Vancouver airport (there must have been a million students who just arrived to begin a yearlong study programme in Canada) and took us directly to the absolutely stunning Fairmont Waterfront Hotel at the Pier in downtown Vancouver – what a superb location ! Having never been to Vancouver before, I was like a kid in a chocolate factory – I was super excited and asked James A LOT of questions which he was able to answer as well as contribute some additional information along the way. The journey took about 30 minutes.

On check in at the hotel (3pm), we were each given our room keys (obviously) to our Deluxe Harbour View rooms (oh, what a view !) along with a bright yellow envelope that included a welcome letter from our Tour Director, Chuck, our itinerary for the next 10 days and a form that we had to take with us to our Welcome Reception this evening asking us to confirm our name as per our booking but also our name we preferred to answer to, our Emergency Contact and our return flight details to ensure that Chuck had all the correct information. Whilst it is weird reconfirming our departure details when we have just arrived, it means that we now don't have to think about that until our adventure in Canada comes to a close – a whole 10 days from now.....

I had organised for our travelling party – myself, Roger, Craig, Mandy, Susan, Judy, Eliza and Sharron to meet in the ARC Bar of our hotel at 5pm to allow us to all have an opportunity to get to know each other first before joining the rest of the Tauck guests at 6pm for our Welcome Reception. We had all arrived safely (albeit Judy's luggage hadn't at this stage...but the good news is that it finally did) and gathered for a lively conversation about our respective trek's across the Pacific before joining the other guests (there are 43 of us in total) + Chuck, in The Terrace Room (a private Room in the hotel) for our Welcome Reception. Here we had an open bar (manned by the lovely Marcel who whipped up a fabulous Vodka, Lime and Soda (or 2) for me) and the opportunity to mingle with the other guests before Chuck spoke up and acknowledged all the guests couple by couple. Typically, the Aussie contingent was well received by the other guests with Chuck mentioning how the Australian influence always made for a lively trip. We only have one solo traveller on this trip – the rest are couples and for the most part are either new to Tauck or experiencing their 2nd trip (the first in all bar one case was a River Cruise). Following on from our Welcome Reception, we all wandered

down to the exceptional restaurant located within the hotel and were treated to a magnificent 3 course meal. In this instance, we were given a choice of 3 mains to choose from which all looked sensational (and from all reports tasted superb too – I know mine did !!!). We dined with some lovely people and whilst we didn't all sit together, our group were collectively the last to leave the restaurant.... Let the good times continue...

Now that's my story to date but for those of you that know me well, my story wouldn't be complete unless there was some little hiccup or funny little anecdote along the way... True to form, I won't disappoint - I have to tell you that I did one of the stupidest things ever this evening whilst getting ready to join the group. I was running early and had planned to be in the bar at least half an hour before everyone else ready to greet everyone however just prior to blow drying my hair tonight, rather than putting foamy mousse in my hair (as always) to give it body, I grabbed the similarly looking pump action bottle from my toiletry bag and put a healthy dose of the contents of it in my hair instead. This other bottle was FAKE TAN !!! What a nightmare .... 24 hours without sleep made for my first 'hair colour' moment .....so far.

Sharon Hando from Vancouver, CA  
QLD Sales Manager, Travel the World

# Day 2 Vancouver Highlights



**Sunday 30th August 2015**

It is a grey and cloudy Sunday here in Vancouver, B.C. Canada. Our Tauck Tour group is gathered to start their first day of sightseeing at an easy 9:15am. Our bags were collected from inside our Hotel Room at 7:45am. Our Tauck Tour guide Chuck, who has 18 years experience, is waiting to welcome the group at the coach which is parked at the Fairmont Waterfront Hotel. I am pleased to say that Tauck Tour passengers do not use name tags during the tour.

The beautiful city of Vancouver is located on a majestic harbour which is also an important commercial port. A new industry is growing in Vancouver, the film and movie business. The city is large enough to offer a broad range of restaurants and entertainment, though a comfortable size to explore and discover the sights.

At 9.15am we head to Stanley Park named after Lord Stanley in 1886, the park offers a beautiful sea walk perimeter. A popular location for locals and visitors offering wonderful views back to the city. First photo stop is the British Columbia Indian's totem poles carved of western red cedar with a real or mythical event, and then Prospect Point offers a great TTW Tauck group photo opportunity.

We head back into the city to explore the various districts of Vancouver such as Yale town, Gas town, China town and Granville. As we approach each district Chuck has a story to tell about the history or facts of the district.

Weather is improving; blue sky and sunshine has appeared, the clouds are disappearing.

The tour group has plenty of time to explore Granville Island, which is not really an island. The district has been reinvented to house the local produce markets and artisans.

It is time to move to the ferry port for our voyage across to Victoria, Vancouver Island departing at 3.05pm. The coach driver moves the Tauck coach carefully onto the ferry. The sea passage takes 1.35hrs crossing the Straits of Georgia. Just before 5pm we are heading towards the city of Victoria.

Victoria, Vancouver Island is the capital of B.C. The city is dressed with hanging flower baskets looks very pretty. Our home for the next two nights is the magnificent Hotel Grand Pacific, Victoria which faces onto the harbour, an easy stroll to explore the town.

Our guide offers a selection of local restaurant recommendations for dinner tonight; tomorrow we will enjoy the Hotel Grand Pacific restaurant.

It has been a great start to our Tauck Canadian Rockies adventure. Keep posted for more news tomorrow.

Susan Aitkin from Victoria, BC - Mary Rossi Travel

# Day 3 Victorian Ways



## Monday 31st August 2015

Victoria - Vancouver Island on our fabulous Tauck tour, The Grand Canadian Rockies.

9.00am start today from the beautiful Grand Pacific Hotel.

Even though the weather is not the best, the spirits of my fellow travellers are high whilst enroute to the beautiful Butchart Gardens.

With the aim to meet fellow passengers and also for everyone to have advantage of a forward seat on our very comfortable coach, Chuck has completed the seat rotation list for us. We head to Clover Point which offers a majestic lookout towards the Olympic mountain range. Chuck then introduces us to the story of Terry Fox whose monument we pay tribute to, an amputee victim of cancer whose goal was to walk/ run across Canada to raise awareness of the disease and which is now an annual event.

After an easy drive we arrive at Butchart Gardens, a must see tourist destination and only 20 minutes from downtown Victoria. Well what can I say but Wow and more Wow, with four different themed gardens it truly is a sight to behold, the colours and array of flowers were incredible. For those without rain protection (us) umbrellas, clear and see through I might add, were on hand at every corner. The very accessible paths throughout suited everyone from families with prams to those physically challenged. After the gorgeous sightseeing a hot chocolate and open fire were waiting for us at the last stop. I thoroughly enjoyed the gardens and can only estimate the incredible hard work and hours that go into keeping this place as beautiful and pristine as it is, definitely one of Taucks many highlights of this tour.

Butchart gardens was simply "Blooming beautiful"

One of the advantages of being on a Tauck tour is the time they provide their passengers the opportunity to explore the city at their leisure. This afternoon a few of us decided to go whale watching which we just sourced by local advertising with no pressure from our tour guide. We ended up in the capable hands of "Prince of Whales" whale watching. Our tour by zodiac was about 3 1/2 hours of squeals of delight with sightings of Orcas, Seals and Humpbacks; it truly was one of those unforgettable experiences.

Our day ended with a sumptuous 3 course meal in the beautiful dining room overlooking the harbour in the Grand Pacific Hotel, a perfect ending to our memorable day on Vancouver Island.

Eliza Summerhayes from Victoria, BC  
Cruise View | Travel View

# Day 4 Flightseeing & The Canadian



**Tuesday 1st September 2015**

Victoria BC, Hotel Grand Pacific | Vancouver | Via Rail

It had been a long time since I had seen Steak and Eggs on a breakfast menu so I had to see if I could still manage this much food before leaving on my day of sightseeing with my new Tauck tour family.

I managed let's say.

Our home for now is the Hotel Grand Pacific which is perfectly situated next to the Legislature Building in Victoria, BC's capital and looks across to the lovely little town. With the morning at leisure there is plenty of time for me to wander the streets in search of the perfect souvenirs. Walking around the port I got my first glimpse of the sea plane we will be boarding soon to fly back to Vancouver.

First however we were treated to a scrumptious Afternoon tea at the Empress Hotel. I learnt the difference between High tea and Afternoon Tea today; High Tea has a hot offering, and Afternoon Tea only cold offerings.

Cakes, mini sandwiches, croissants, scones with Jam and Cream and lots of lovely English Tea - all divine. The building and bone china all beautiful. A must if you ever get the opportunity. This was included for us on our Tauck Tour but is available for purchase at \$63.00 CAD.

Next the flight over to Vancouver in a seaplane, the aircraft was a DHC-6 twin otter and was certainly a highlight. We saw whales and amazing scenery as we flew over the bays and landed in the harbour which is situated right downtown at Canada Pier. We were met by our coach driver Steve, who had all our luggage and belongings making our day of sightseeing so much easier.

Our afternoon ended with a small highlight tour of other site previously not seen in Vancouver - the bridges that leave the downtown area, Science World and local stadiums; this city of Vancouver just gets better with every turn.

Next we were treated to another great included dinner in a wonderful old brewery called Steamworks situated in the Gastown area of the city. A very quaint part of town which was built around an old steam clock which on the hour makes a whole lot of noise with steam and whistles, not to be missed.

The food so far on this Tauck Tour has been amazing. Most meals are included but the nice thing is you dine with who you wish, when you wish and even where you wish. At least two options are offered.

Next door to where we are dining we were shown the bottle shop where we had time to grab a bottle for our journey overnight on the Canadian Train. Very civilized.

Our host Chuck had kind of warned the group that our first impressions of the train might be a little disappointing, I guess it's not Orient Express but I have to say I was more than happy with our twin compartment. Private loo, large window, very comfortable bed and lovely linen. When we came back to our sleeping quarters from the Panorama Lounge where we enjoyed a champagne welcome our beds were made and we settled in for the night.....not before sharing just one more drink with the other people on this great tour.

I can sleep anywhere and the night on the train was no exception. I slept so well and only just made the "last call" for breakfast. The flight plane was my highlight today; no it was the afternoon tea; no actually the train was my highlight..... Why does their have to be one when this tour in one long highlight.

Thank you Sharon from Travel the World and Tauck, a really wonderful experience thus far.

Craig Reid from the Canadian Rockies  
The Village Travel

# Day 5 By Rail to Jasper



**Wednesday 2nd September 2015**

After a sound nights sleep in our cosy twin cabin (one upper and one lower bunk) I woke to the beautiful sight of farmland surrounded by birch and spruce forests.

Our complimentary amenity kit included two fluffy white towels, a face towel, shampoo, conditioner and soap so I headed off to the shower at the end of our carriage (it serves the six cabins in the carriage though we all had our own ensuite toilet and washbasin.) The shower area was a reasonable size with good water pressure and ample hot water delivered in two minute bursts which was easily extended by the press of a button on the tap.

Then it was off to breakfast in the dining car – tables of four – we sat with a very interesting couple from Florida – keen to hear all about Australia. The breakfast was a la carte and yummy – there are three seatings for breakfast – from 0730 to 0930 – no reservations necessary. Whilst at breakfast our cabin was returned to a sitting room with two comfortable armchairs to take in the wonderful view from the picture window.

Our tour leader Chuck made sure we were completely au fait with what to expect on the train and our steward Hayden was there to assist at all times with any queries or concerns.

The Panorama car is the place to be during the day to view the spectacular scenery and in true Tauck form all Tauck guests had reserved seating in this area. Chuck gave us a special gold pin to wear to ensure we were given the very best of service on the train and that included the best seating.

Lunch was served in the dining room (three seatings but reservations required – our Tauck tour director looked after this for us as he has for all our included meal reservations throughout the trip.)

On arrival in Jasper around 4.30pm, our Tauck Coach driver Steve (same driver we had in Vancouver and Victoria) was waiting and whisked us away to our beautiful “lodge by the Lake” – The Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge. In yet another example of Tauck’s impressive attention to detail Steve had already been to the hotel with our luggage and had collected our room keys which Chuck handed out to us on the coach so when we arrived we could go straight to our beautiful cabins where our luggage was waiting for us! This is a wonderful place to stay – the main lodge houses reception, the restaurants, gym and heated pool and spa plus many other amenities whilst our beautifully appointed cabins all surround Lake Beauvert. The views across the Lake to the snow capped Rocky Mountains are breathtaking.

And the cabins themselves are large and beautifully appointed – we are very excited to be spending two nights here so we can enjoy a free day tomorrow exploring the region, horse riding, bike riding, hiking or enjoying a myriad of other activities Chuck has suggested for us on his informative handout.

Tonight's dinner was a more casual, yet equally sumptuous and included BBQ dinner which was over reasonably early to allow us plenty of time to refresh ready for our respectively busy day tomorrow (and to finish this update). It was an indoor BBQ luckily as the weather is quite chilly but clear – either way, it won't stop us !

It has only been a few days but I am confident that Tauck is allocated the very best rooms in these lovely properties – all Tauck guests have lakeview rooms with included breakfast and Wifi. Later today whilst consulting with the concierge about activities for tomorrow an APT group arrived - 45+ people all queued up in the reception area waiting to checkin!!!

Say no more – Tauck is a cut above the others.

Judy Tanner from Jasper, Alberta  
Aurora Travel

# Day 6 Jasper National Park



**Thursday 3rd September 2015**

Day 6 of our Tauck Grand Canadian Rockies Tour and we are staying at the fabulous Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge, our home for the next two days, located only a short 10 minutes drive from the centre of Jasper. The Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge is a 5 star luxury resort situated on the shores of Lake Beauvert in 700 acres of rolling green grounds surrounded by National Park forest. The Lodge has a classic old lodge atmosphere and as guests of Tauck, we are staying in the spacious Lake View cabins with scenic vistas overlooking the lake, pine forests and snow capped peaks in the distance.

Today is our free day on tour and luck is on our side as we are fortunate the sun has graced us with its presence. "Tauck Time" provides their guests the opportunity to explore the local area at their own pace. Chuck, our diligent tour leader provided tour participants with a list of tours and activities in and around the resort the day we arrived so that we can make our own tour or activity choices and book these in the day prior. Tour choices in Jasper ranged from white-water rafting, the Jasper Tramway, hiking, biking, horse riding, fishing, tour to Maligne Lake, shuttle into Jasper, spa services or simply take a swim in the heated (30 degrees) resort pool. I chose the Wildlife, Maligne Lake & Boat Cruise, a 5 hour guided tour and a very popular choice as a number of the Tauck guests had also booked this tour. The tour commenced with a short walking tour of Maligne Canyon where we viewed stunning rushing waterfalls & discovered the mystery of the missing lake. This was then followed by an informative boat trip to spectacular Spirit Island surrounded by beautiful blue waters for photo opportunities. It proved to be a great activity choice.

Upon our return to the resort, after a short visit to the alpine township of Jasper for souvenir shopping, Tauck offered an exclusive National Park Interpreter presentation in the main lodge where we learned about the First Nations, an informative and entertaining talk.

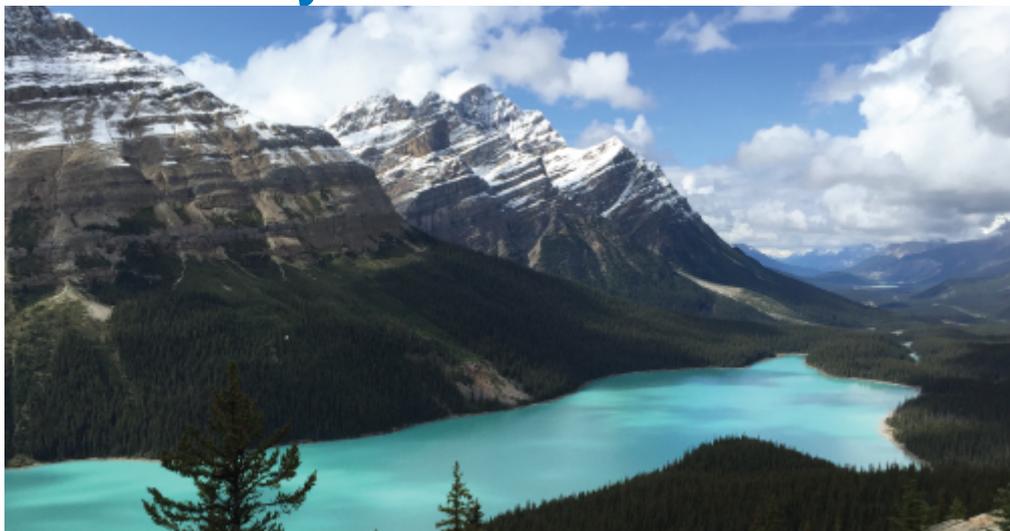
Dinner tonight was included as part of our Tauck tour and was a choice of 3 dining options at the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge. A unanimous decision amongst the group was to dine at the Moose's Nook which specialised in Canadian and North American cuisine in hunting lodge surrounds. We enjoyed a scrumptious dinner matched with Canadian wines, a truly memorable dinner and a perfect ending to a wonderful day!

Lake Louise here we come!

Mandy Ward from Jasper, Alberta

Lidstrom & Clyne Travel

# Day 7 Lake Louise



**Friday 4th September 2015**

Bright and early this morning, I didn't want to leave my generous sized and beautiful lake front log cabin at the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge; such a serene and beautiful place. We started our day with another Tauck fully included breakfast full of variety to please everybody.

All aboard our fantastic and comfortable Tauck livery coach complete with power points at every seat to charge our phones and iPads needed for our 231 kilometre journey along the Icefield Parkway to Lake Louise; a breathtaking experience. This drive is rated one of the 10 best scenic drives in the world - personally I think it could be at the very top of this list. This National Park is part of a 22,000 sq km Unesco World Heritage site – the snow capped mountains are numerous – they surround you and are truly magnificent. Our first stop today just over 30 kms from Jasper was Athabasca Falls; you could hear the roaring of the waterfall as soon as you stepped off the coach. Certainly something not to be missed. A short while later and listening to our very interesting and informative Tauck Tour Director, Chuck explained the landscape and how it has been formed by the numerous Glaciers we see and are about to explore at the Columbia Icefields. We travelled on a specially designed ice explorer vehicle (worth a 1.3 million dollars, the tyres are \$5,000 each and with six tyres on each vehicle, it makes for an expensive puncture !). These unique vehicles are equipped to take us down one of the steepest gravel roads in North America and on to the Athabasca Glacier. The Glacier was busy however due to our earlier departure from Jasper, we seemed to arrive before the influx was at its peak. Whilst some Tour companies take guests to the base of the Glacier with the on ice experience an added extra, it was fully included as guests of Tauck and definitely again something not to be missed.

Saskatchewan River Crossing was our next stop. Originally established as bungalows in 1948; following a fire the Crossing was rebuilt in 1949 and later as a motel in 1963 and was today our destination for lunch. Our included lunch was enjoyable home made food consisting of soups, salads, sandwiches, a variety of hot foods and delicious sweets.

Off again for another 30 kilometres of more wonderful scenery with informative commentary from Chuck as well as his co-ordinating every guest's dining choices for tomorrow evening in Banff. Our included dinner meals offer alternative choice restaurants and times giving us all the opportunity to dine with whom we want, when we want and where we want – all we have to do is sign TAUCK at the end on our bill.

I could get used to this ! Arriving into a small carpark where only one other coach is parked (a Tauck Coach none the less); Chuck promised the small walk of no more than 50 metres along a snow covered pathway (yes, it snowed today) would see us arrive at a recognisable site that would quite simply take our breath away - AND IT DID !!! Peyto Lake is the most photographed lake in North America and I can see why – all around us, the whole group was in awe gasping 'oh my god' repeatedly.

Next stop was at Bow Lake and it too was stunning. Stopping the coach at this and one other location for photos was greatly appreciated giving us all time to file off the coach and capture these scenic sites of glacier fed lakes with amazing mountainous backdrops on our ipads, phones and cameras.

Our last stop and home for tonight is the very grand and beautifully positioned Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise. The hotel confirms that all rooms will be ready by 4:30pm and on the rare occasion when they are not, a complimentary beverage is offered for the inconvenience. Arriving right on time at 4:30pm, our bags are unloaded and quickly whisked away to be delivered to our rooms whilst Chuck takes care of collecting the already prepared keys for our group. Again, there is no need for us to line up at the front desk to check in – this is already done for us which allowed us so much more time to explore the Lake this afternoon prior to our late dinner.

Dinner tonight was at the hotel's fine dining restaurant, Fairview and is again fully included. There was a choice of four alternative restaurants here at Lake Louise. Soft drinks accompany all included meals at every hotel with only alcoholic beverages being additional. Our group are yet to take advantage of this however.... Tonight's meal was again spectacular and as I roll back to my room, I am excited to sink into my beautiful Fairmont bed.....all this touring (and eating) is exhausting....

Sharron Hungerford from Lake Louise, Alberta  
The Travel Agent at Caloundra

# Day 8 Banff National Park



**Saturday 5th September 2015**

Here at Chateau Lake Louise you can ask for a Sunrise wake up call, not unusual except that if the sun is out it reflects off the Victoria Glacier and shines onto the Lake making for a great photo, if the sun isn't out they don't call you and you get a nice sleep in which was the situation today. On those days when the sun does rise beautifully, as guests of Tauck we only need to roll out of bed and move to the windows of our lake view rooms to capture the image. The hotel is beautiful (Dr Zhivago was made here in the 60's) as is the surroundings, even in this inclement weather we have been experiencing during this tour.

Bags packed for collection from the room by 9am today, leave the worries to Tauck like every day.

We started the day with another wonderful Fairmont breakfast, this time at the Lago restaurant located in the newly constructed building behind the hotel. Here you'll also find some great shops offering souvenirs, clothing, photography, etc. We have an hour free before it's time for the Tauck group photo taken on the shores of beautiful Lake Louise, no charge of course, it's included in your Tauck tour. Unfortunately due to the rain we have our photo taken indoors this morning a little bit later. That gives us some more time to explore some of the other great shops, and they are fantastic.

The photo goes well and we're on the coach by 11.30am on the way to Moraine Lake about 20 minutes away.

Even though it was snowing lightly there were still some nice photos to be had. On arrival there are 3 levels you can walk to and of course the best view is from the top. There's a nice walk around some of the lake as well as a really nice gift shop, cafe & restaurant; there are also a few bungalows if you wanted to stay the night. It's a beautiful spot and not to be missed when visiting Alberta.

Off to lunch now, back into the tiny town of Lake Louise Village. We dine at the Relais & Chateau property, 'The Post Hotel' a lovely log cabin style hotel, warm and cosy with nooks & fireplaces. It's a charming place right next to a picturesque creek; an undiscovered hotel really worth knowing about. Lunch was a 3 course affair, just perfect, not too filling and really enjoyable. By 2.30pm we are off again, this time to Yo Ho National Park in British Columbia via Kicking Horse Pass at 5,300 feet.

The pass was built by the Canadian Pacific Railway company, the same company that built the Chateau Lake Louise, Banff Springs Hotel and numerous other fine hotels across Canada. William Cornelius Van Horne was the visionary man who developed the idea of bringing tourists to the Rockies, the man in charge of the Canadian Pacific Railway company at the time. We do a short stop to see the spiral tunnels; amazing railway tunnels that spiral downhill built over 100 years ago used to this day. The Rocky Mountaineer travels through these from Calgary to Vancouver and vice versa.

Off to the Banff Springs Fairmont Hotel, built in 1888. When completed it was the largest hotel in the world costing \$3.50 a night, now it's just a tad more per night. Anyone whose anyone has stayed here

at the building known as the Castle in the Rockies. We take the Bow Valley Parkway the last 27 kilometres to Banff, this is the old road to the town, much more scenic than the Trans-Canada highway. We arrived at the amazing Banff Springs hotel just after 4pm, as usual checkin had been done for us so we simply collected our keys from Chuck, our Tour Director and went to our rooms to relax and/or used the hotel facilities before dinner at 7pm. My roommate decided on a swim in the hotels heated pool whilst I went exploring this fabulous property. Wi-fi worked perfectly and of course is free with Tauck so I was happy to hear from my loved ones. Dinner was at the Bow Valley Grill, as usual we could chose anything from the 3 course menu, fine food and lots of it. After a long day I'm ready for bed whilst my travelling colleagues on the other hand are off for a night cap in one of the Castle in the Rockies numerous bars.

Thank you for another great day courtesy of Tauck.

Roger Koller from Banff, Alberta  
Gregor & Lewis Bespoke Travel

# Day 9 Bow River Float Trip



**Sunday 6th September 2015**

I often say that a holiday is arranged around meal times and this tour really has provided us with some outstanding meals – my favourite to date was our dinner in the Moose Grill at Jasper Park Lodge – this is the meal by which I have since compared the rest. We have had almost every meal included and they have all have been great – the snug fit of my clothes will attest to this....

Today began like every other day with a wonderful breakfast in Bows Grill, one of the many restaurants in this absolutely beautiful hotel, the Castle in the Rockies; the Banff Springs Hotel. As we sat enjoying the meal, our outlook was the snow covered mountains (yes, snow covered !!! – it snowed pretty heavily last night). After breakfast, our included excursion for the morning was a float trip down the Bow River. Our Coach Driver, Steve and our trusty Tour Director Chuck were on hand to greet the guests that wished to participate in this adventure with our departure scheduled for 9am. Following the cold and wet afternoon of the day before, several guests declined to participate in this excursion just in case they got wet ; after all we were floating down a River in rafts and the likelihood was high.....however luck was on our side and the weather held out and no one fell overboard – win win.... The float trip was amazing and a must do experience for anyone visiting Banff. It is available to everyone at a price but included for us as guests of Tauck. As we floated down stream, we were entertained by 'Wild Bill' who, as he manoeuvred the raft with large oars, regaled us with local stories and history of the area but also a few tales from his 5 years of living on the land. He had a wild look about him but an incredible sense of calm working the Bow River in Banff in the summer and the Rivers of India during the Canadian Winters... He was extremely experienced and let me just add, he will never die of stress – he was super relaxed. On this trip, we FINALLY spotted some wildlife in their natural environment. Passing the sensational Banff Golf Course which is attached to the hotel, we spotted Coyote and Elk (it's is mating season and to date we collectively agreed that the females had been playing hard to get or they had already 'shacked' up with their man anywhere we weren't !). We floated down stream for about an hour before coming ashore at a clearing where true to their word, both Steve and Chuck were waiting with the coach along with another member of the Float Team who was on hand to distribute the fantastic photo he had taken of our group from his onshore vantage point. On returning from the River, guests were delivered back to the hotel or into town as the rest of the day were free to explore on our own. Chuck distributed Banff Heritage Passport's which gave us free entry into three of the towns museums and gave us a few suggestions of what else we could see and do during our free afternoon. At every stop, Chuck provided us all with WRITTEN suggestions on how we could spend our time, what to see, where to eat and what to look out for.....these coloured copied A4 sheets were very useful and keenly anticipated. Unfortunately the clouds were low and the very popular Sulphur Mountain Gondola ride; an eight minute ride to the top (7500 ft) which whilst fun would not have provided us the spectacular view available on a clear day therefore we opted for the shops instead. The town is just gorgeous with large colourful hanging flower baskets lining the streets. My suitcase zip was already straining therefore the shopping was limited to window shopping for me yet my colleagues managed a few more purchases – after all, we still had our large Tauck satchels provided for The Canadian Train that could be used for hand luggage to fill!!!

The town is about a 20 minute walk back up a very slight incline to the hotel or alternatively there is a local bus which for \$2.00 can drop you almost at the front door. Timing for us meant we had to walk and briskly at that although we did have to stop and grab the cameras to photograph two inquisitive Elks who were wandering along the main street and had stopped to enjoy a quick snack the front yard of one house – this was wonderful to watch – we were so close..... I must have taken 20 photos !!

Next up was a tour of the hotel which is run every day at 1pm for in house guests. The tour takes an hour and is incredibly fascinating lead by one of three guides who akin to the Scottish Heritage all wear kilts. There are so many ornate public rooms that without this tour I don't think I would have found them all. Originally built in 1888 (backwards – yes, the builders turned the plans 180 degrees and as the architect. Bruce Price famously said, “they gave the million dollar view to the kitchen staff”). The original hotel burned down in 1926 but was rebuilt bigger and better in 1928 and with the exception of three years during WWII, it has been open ever since albeit until the 70's it was only open during the summer season when guests would come for the whole season – it cost \$3.50 a night and guests were only allowed to stay if they had a \$50,000 line of credit from the bank. The hotel is now heritage listed and deservedly so – it truly is magnificent.

Our day didn't stop here – a quick race up to our rooms to grab our swimwear and off to the Upper Hot Springs we raced. There is a local bus but timing for us was a little rushed (we were trying to fit in everything !!) so we grabbed a cab and 10 minutes later we were lined up waiting to enter the famous hot springs. The cost was minimal and definitely worth the experience although it was a little crowded and I likened it to 'people soup'. Recommended time in the springs is only 10 minutes so it wasn't long before we were back in another cab and racing back to the hotel to get ready for our final night with Tauck.

Our farewell dinner began in the gorgeous Heritage Room of the hotel with pre dinner canapés and drinks and an informative and witty presentation from a retired Mountie (one of three that attends every Tauck farewell dinner at the Banff Springs Hotel). He was extremely entertaining and kept us all thoroughly engaged as well as allowing us the opportunity to be photographed with him – after all, a trip to Canada wouldn't be complete without a photograph with a Canadian Mountie. After dinner, we enjoyed yet another marvelous meal in one of the hotel's many restaurants Castello's. As is typical of all Tauck Welcome and Farewell Dinners, all beverages were included. Thanks again Tauck.....it was a very fitting end to an extremely picturesque adventure through the Rocky Mountains. William Cornelius Van Horne, appointed general manager of Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) has been credited with recognizing the tourism potential of the Canadian west. Van Horne maintained tourism was an intricate ingredient in getting people to ride CPR and was conscious of the financial possibilities attached to the western mountain scenery. His philosophy reflected this awareness, 'Since we can't export the scenery,' he said, ' we'll have to import the tourists.'

Sharon Hando from Banff, Alberta  
QLD Sales Manager, Travel the World

# Day 10 Journey Home



**Monday 7th September 2015**

They say that all great things must come to an end and I guess this is no different..... Sadly, it was time to leave our beautiful 'Castle in the Rockies' this morning. Bags ready by 6:30am – argh !!! for collection from inside our hotel rooms as it has been all along (it is so nice to not have to drag our bags off the luggage racks and into the hallways especially as their weight has increased significantly since leaving home 10 days ago).

All on the Coach by 8am (completed Comment Cards in hand to give to Chuck) for our final ride together as a group to either a) Calgary Airport – first stop for those flying directly home or b) to the Westin Hotel, Calgary for those lucky guests extending their journey further.

Again, Chuck kept us well informed of the history of our surroundings as we travelled the almost 2 hours into Calgary. One noticeable bonus on this journey is the incredible knowledge Chuck has of the area and how eloquently he shared his passion, enthusiasm and facts of this amazingly beautiful and majestic area known as the Rocky Mountains with us all – we couldn't help but learn and I feel enriched by the experience.

It was big hugs and sad goodbyes as we all parted ways with many new friendships created during the last 10 days. Tour Director and Coach Driver gratuities on Tauck land journeys are additional and are at the discretion of the guests with the suggested amount being USD8 for the TD and USD5 for the Driver per day. They deserved this ...and more. I always felt safe in the hands of our always smiling driver Steve and always calmly aware and informed by our wonderful TD, Chuck – they were a great team and a joy to travel with which made it very easy to extend our further thanks by way of gratuities as we said goodbye to them both (we said goodbye to Chuck at Calgary Airport as he was flying back to Vancouver to take the next Grand Canadian Rockies tour – surely it couldn't be as much fun as this trip was ??!!) and goodbye to Steve at the Westin where myself and Sharron were storing our bags for the day.

For the two Shaz's, we had the day to explore Calgary as our flights were not until the evening and luckily for us, our chatty and inquisitive selves happened upon a sea of people dressed in red jerseys who were on their way to the annual Labor Day Event – the Canadian Football League's game between rivals, the Calgary Stampeders and the Edmonton Eskimos. We followed like sheep and found ourselves enjoying a wonderful spectacle – tens of thousands of people, fighter jets flying above, cheerleaders and marching bands – from our fantastic vantage point in the bleachers and wearing our provided cardboard helmets (the only ones probably), we couldn't keep the smile off our faces.....Wow, wow and wow – it was a great way to finish what has been an amazing experience. Thank you Tauck !!!!

Sharon Hando from Calgary  
QLD Sales Manager, Travel the World