

Lists of the top golf courses in the world are top heavy with seaside experiences. Monterey's Pebble Beach Golf Links rests along the Pacific Ocean as does Bandon Dunes in Oregon. Royal County Down is on the Irish Sea. Scotland's Royal Dornoch is on the North Sea.

While oceans and seas obviously help make for great golf and breathtaking scenery, I personally can't imagine a more spectacular setting for golf than the Canadian Rocky Mountains near Alberta. A combination of crystal blue skies with mountain peaks soaring some 3,000 feet above tees and greens provide an exhilarating golf high unique to this part of the world.

A good portion of the fun in making the trip to Banff Springs is the sheer anticipation of one's arrival in the mountains. Calgary International Airport is three hours north of the U.S.-Canadian border and only a 90-minute drive east of Banff National Park. A short jaunt through the city gets one out into the country and eventually onto Highway 1, also known as the Trans-Canada Highway. The ride past Heart Mountain leads toward Pigeon Mountain before you head northwest at Dead Man's Flats. Just short of Mount Rundle, you reach the entrance gates of Banff National Park.

From its humble beginnings as a 26-square mile hot springs preserve, Banff National Park has expanded a hundredfold into 2,564 square miles (6,641 square kilometers) of stunning mountain scenery located in the heart of the Canadian Rockies. The park is literally a celebration of nature, featuring snow-capped peaks, glistening glaciers and awe-inspiring landscapes. Millions of tourists visit annually to gawk at the emerald waters of Lake Louise, to stroll through the flower-filled fields at Sunshine Meadows, and to cruise beneath the jagged peaks lining the Icefields Parkway.

Readers of this magazine, of course, know the most enjoyable way to commune with nature involves a bag of clubs and a cooler of refreshing beverages. To accommodate that yearning, the national park offers no less than 11 golf courses across the area, including a number of spectacular championship layouts reviewed here.

#### Fairmont Banff Springs

Way back in 1932, a budding young architect named Robert Trent Jones became design partners with the remarkable Stanley Thompson, a highly skilled and ambitious designer who, among other accomplishments, would go on to become co-founder and president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects with Jones and Donald Ross. Considered by many to be the Father of Canadian Golf Architecture, Thompson designed more than 145 courses over his illustrious career, including many of Canada's premier layouts.

Ranked among the top ten courses in Canada by *Golf Digest*, the course is lined by stately pine trees that serve as a foreground for the incredible mountain panorama on every hole. Opened as a 9-hole course built by Old Tom Morris apprentice Bill Thomson, the layout was expanded to 18 holes by Donald Ross in 1923. Only three years later, Stanley Thompson was provided an unlimited budget by the Canadian Pacific Railway to reconfigure the property into a championship course. While a few of the Ross holes were kept when the new track formally opened in 1929, others took proper advantage of the mountain-scape to create the existing course, promoted at the time as "the most expensive course in the world."

The course meanders under the snow-capped peaks of Mount Rundle and Sulphur Mountain and meanders along the scenic waters of the Bow River. Large greens are guarded by sprawling, sometimes deep-faced, bunkers—a Thompson trademark.

Banff Springs director of golf Steve Young effusively praised the course's design and the designer.

# Rocky Mountain High!

## Scenery, Nature and Golf Soar at Banff Springs and Jasper Park in Canada

By Neal Kotlarek with Dave Weretka

"Thompson was one of Canada's top architects," he said. "Not only was he an architect, he was also an artist. The holes he created are pleasing and appealing to the eye."

Young stated his belief that the scenery the course is set in is "second to none. This is mountain golf," he said. "The layout is located in a very narrow river valley. It follows along the river and the cliffs of the mountain. You are not just visiting a special place – you get to golf in that special place. What more can you ask for?"

The headliner of the Stanley Thompson Course is the iconic par-3 No. 4. Known as the Devil's Cauldron, the hole begins from an elevated tee and traverses over a glacial lake toward a green tucked below towering pines and the majestic shadows cast by Mount Rundle. Make sure to have the battery of your smart phone fully charged before teeing off on this hole as you will undoubtedly want multiple angles and selfies even before you step away from the tee.

Golf historians will appreciate the history of the 380-yard No. 6 as Thompson built a wide landing area here seemingly as an open invitation to fire away at the only original Donald Ross green site left on the course. At 3,200 square feet, this is the smallest green on the course and features subtle swales that are a primary characteristic of Ross's work.

Following a few fine holes that wander away from the mountainside, the 480-yard No. 15 packs an amazing one-two punch of beauty and challenge. The hole is nicknamed Spray due to its demanding tee shot over the Spray River to a large landing area which is tightened by pines the closer one approaches the putting surface. This hole was previously known as "golf's greatest opening tee shot," as it was the 1st hole until a new clubhouse was built in 1989 and the course was rerouted. In some ways, the positioning is fitting as the player was previously forced to experience a letdown following the exhilaration of launching a first drive into the sky – a mile above sea level! – and toward magnificent Mount Rundle.

Before or after your round at the Thompson Course, consider playing the property's Tunnel Course, the property's third nine. Though it was added in 1989 and thus is not a Thompson design (Geoffrey Cornish and Bill Robinson did the honors), the layout is stunning in its own right and features fabulous views of both the Rockies and the amazing, castle-like Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel.

While the natural beauty of the resort's golf course holds few parallels, the host hotel has no equals anywhere in the world. Known as the "Castle in the Rockies," the hotel was built in the 1880s by railroad baron William Cornelius Van Horne. A flagship property of the Fairmont chain, the hotel serves up first-rate accommodations, cuisine, recreation options and spa services. Time away from the golf course can be spent hiking on paths through the national forest, white water rafting, kayaking, biking, fishing and horseback riding. The town of Banff is an easy stroll downhill from the Fairmont Banff Springs.

#### Fairmont Jasper Park

The route between Banff Springs and Jasper Park has been rightly called one of the world's most stunning roadways. As a bonus with the mountain scenery of the two national parks, one gets to enjoy forests, icefields, glaciers, crags and an excellent chance at encountering any number of elk, bears, mountain goat, moose and even bighorn sheep. One important note of caution when making this drive: wildlife always enjoy the right of way on the highway; thus, make liberal plans when trying to schedule your tee time during the drive up from Banff Springs.

Indeed, no drive between these two great hotels is complete without a stop at the Fairmont Lake Louise to enjoy a cold beverage while viewing the stunning blue waters of the lake and its mountain backdrop. Just north of the hotel rests the Columbia Icefield and the squadron of glaciers visible always along the Icefields Parkway. Farther along the same road, a stop at Bow Lake yields a view of Crowfoot Glacier hugging the cliffs of Crowfoot Mountain.

While 320 miles seems like a long way to drive for a round or two of golf, take comfort in the knowledge that this will be the shortest four-hour drive of your life. Personally, I was even slightly disappointed that the ride ended so soon!

Situated in Alberta's vast Jasper National Park, Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge is a 700-acre luxury mountain resort that wraps around the pristine waters of Lac Beauvert. The hotel is also vastly different in style and personality from Banff Springs. Elegant cedar chalets and luxury cabins give the property a rustic look that suits the surroundings of forests and mountains.



Banff Springs Hole 5



Jasper Park Hole 9

Jasper Park Hole 10

Jasper Park Hole 14

## Rocky Mountain High

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Jasper Park Lodge Golf Club is rated by many national golf magazines as Canada's premier course. A Stanley Thompson design, the layout was the end result of an epic project that took 50 teams of horses and 200 men working together for a year to clear the boulders and debris prior to construction. The 18 holes feature elevated tee boxes and dramatic bunkering carved through thick forests and over rugged terrain.

The signature hole on the front nine is No. 9, aptly named Cleopatra for its awesome beauty. The 231-yard par 3 plays at least two clubs shorter as the fairway slopes downhill toward a green surrounded by Thompson's signature bunkers.

The back nine is highlighted by No. 14, a 361-yard par 4 that features the aforementioned Lac Beauvert along its entire left side. Optimal precision is required both off the tee to avoid the lake and toward the green, divided into two parts by a ridge that either pulls the approach shot toward the flagstick or – as in my case – detours the shot away from the flagstick to set up a long, uncomfortable putt.

Jasper Park Lodge features 442 superbly appointed guest rooms, suites and cabins. Outdoor amenities include kayaking on the lake and hiking on one of the many mountain trails. Dining options are highlighted by Rocky Mountain cuisine in any of the resort's eight restaurants which showcase local and organic foods.

When extolling nature in his epic song "Rocky Mountain High," folk singer John Denver referenced the elements of nature that make a stay in the mountains so special, including the walks in quiet solitude, the forests, the streams and seeing everything "as far as you can see." A golf trip to Banff Springs and Jasper Park in the Canadian Rockies offers all of those attributes along with luxurious accommodations. What more, as Steve Young referenced, can you ask for?

For more information:

Fairmont Banff Springs

[www.fairmont.com/banff-springs](http://www.fairmont.com/banff-springs)

(403) 762-2211 or (800) 257-7544

Fairmont Jasper Park

[www.fairmont.com/jasper](http://www.fairmont.com/jasper)

(780) 852-3301 or (800) 257-7544



Jasper Park Hole 11



Jasper Park Hole 18



Banff Springs

## ON THE CORKSCREWS

STEPHEN HAWK

In 1973, newlyweds Mike and Mary Benziger drove west and permanently settled in Northern California. Seven years later, Mike and his brother Bruno Benziger purchased the historic Wegener Ranch on Sonoma Mountain in Glen Ellen, Calif. Hearing the Sirens call of the Golden State, over the next six years the four remaining siblings — Bob, Joe, Jerry, and Patsy, with their spouses — made their way to California.

In 1986, winemaker Joe Benziger first partnered with artist Bob Nugent to launch the Imagery Series of wines. This pairing of wine and art continues to this day, and permeates every aspect of Imagery Winery, including unique artwork replicated on every label. The dedicated on-site art gallery features label artwork commissioned from some of the world's most notable contemporary artists, and includes over 500 works by over 300 artists. Currently, around 60 pieces are on view in the gallery.

At any given time, as many as 35 artists are working on pieces that will appear on future Imagery wine labels. The artists are not limited by size, medium, or content — the only exception is that the work must include a likeness of the Parthenon replica on the Benziger Estate, which serves as the winery's signature image.

Joe Benziger has dedicated his career to crafting rare wines from uncommon varietals such as Malbec, Tempranillo, and Lagrein. These limited-production wines are available to wine club members only.

However, that doesn't mean Imagery is inaccessible. Following in her father Joe's footsteps, middle-daughter Jamie Benziger is the winemaker in charge of Imagery's new and more popularly-priced collection of Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir. The label is characterized with a "drip" motif, suggestive of both wine and paint.

**2016 Chardonnay** **\$14**

This offering presents initial subtle aromas of ripe apple, pear, and lime. It is pale-straw colored in the glass. It greets the palate with flavors of further apple and lemon, plus a touch of steeliness from the cold fermentation and minimal oak. The wine is

## Evocative Imagery

enlivened with the addition of 5% Chenin Blanc, and the finish is bright and fresh.

This wine would work well with Vietnamese turkey and glass noodle salad, sea bass with golden mash, or kedgeree risotto.

**2016 Cabernet Sauvignon** **\$17**

This Cab starts out with a nose of dark fruit, vanilla, and toasted oak. Then come the flavors of blackberries, plum, and cherries. The blend is 85% Cabernet Sauvignon and 15% Petite Syrah, the latter lending unusual spice and pepper notes. The wine is fruit forward and velvety soft, with moderate tannins and medium acidity. The winery is targeting this wine at the hotel trade, so it might take a bit of effort to locate.

Serve this easy-going red with pan-cetta-wrapped sausages, finger-lickin' ribs, or saffron roast lamb with sticky garlic potatoes.



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