

## **Rock On in the Rockies by Nell Nelson published in OK! in August 2008**

### **Nell heads for Alberta in Canada for some celebrity spotting and shopping and a spot of heli-yoga**

OK! gets saddled up and follows in the footsteps of Brad Pitt and Jake Gyllenhaal, for a piece of the cowboy action this summer in The Rockies.

The Canadian Rockies in Alberta are part of a massive mountain range that runs from Alaska right down to the tip of South America. OK! homed in on Banff which is one of the oldest towns in the Canadian Rockies, and when we say in the Rockies, it is rocky. Banff is the highest town in Canada at 1,463 m above sea level and is surrounded by mountain ranges, so its not just the sight of Brad Pitt in a cowboy hat that could leave you breathless! Banff has a real outback feel, with a wide main street lined with shops selling everything you need for a true Rockies experience from hiking boots and fleeces to moose and bear fridge magnets. The Rockies offer 'awesome' skiing as the Canadians would say, but in the summer you can go hiking, canoeing, mountain bike riding or horseback riding as well as enjoy some amazing spa treatments. This wonderful scenery with backdrops of snowy topped mountains and lakes as blue as Rob Lowe's eyes doesn't just attract tourists, many top film directors flock here to make movies: *Legends of the Fall*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *The Assassination of Jesse James*, *The Edge*, *Unforgiven* and *Lonesome Dove*, so don't be surprised if the scenery seems familiar or if you see some faces you recognise. Check out [www.albertamoviemaps.com](http://www.albertamoviemaps.com) if you feel like doing a film location driving tour.

### **Where Should I Stay?**

Definitely spend some part of your trip in the 'back country' as the Canadians call the great outdoors, but OK! does like a road and some of the lodges can only be accessed by helicopter or on horseback. Mount Engadine Lodge [www.mountengadine.com](http://www.mountengadine.com) is about two hours drive from Calgary airport and this delightful homely wooden chalet is nestled among snow topped mountains and lush meadows which attract the odd moose or two. Food is simple, but plentiful and fresh coffee and tea is available all day. Heath Ledger and Ang Lee hung out on the Lodge deck on a break from filming some of the fishing scenes in *Brokeback Mountain*. In Banff, there is no shortage of hotels [www.bestofbanff.com](http://www.bestofbanff.com) but the one that hogs the skyline is the 770-room Victorian Scottish fairytale baronial castle The Fairmont Banff Springs [www.fairmont.com/BanffSprings](http://www.fairmont.com/BanffSprings) which attracts a host of stars from The Queen and Prince Philip to John Travolta and Kelly Preston.

### **What Should I Do?**

More a case of what shouldn't I do? The Canadians love the great outdoors. Basing yourself in Banff, there are easy-to-access-hiking and mountain bike trails in the mountains and by the lakes. Learn to ride cowboy/girl style with reins in one hand and the other gripping the pommel on the saddle, through cowboy hat-skimming trees and lakes at

Rafter Six Ranch [www.raftersix.com](http://www.raftersix.com). Walt Disney, Paul Newman, Charles Bronson and Kevin Kostner are just a few of the stars who have visited the Ranch. Get a real high with new sport heli yoga from Icefield Helicopter Tours [www.icefieldheli.com](http://www.icefieldheli.com) based near Lake Louise. It's an amazing combination of zen and adrenalin. Yoga guru Martha McCallum told us to crouch down on the ground as the helicopter zoomed in to land: its blades whirring continuously – this is no time to be precious about your hair! We loaded our yoga mats in the hold, then we were strapped in to the five-seater air machine and then we just went straight up into the blue skies and flew off at 100mph following the clear line of a river to a lush meadow for the ultimate 'down dog' and 'sun salutation' followed by a gourmet lunch by the riverbanks. All that melting snow means lots of rivers and a good way to see the scenery is in a two-person non-capsizable canoe in the Banff National Park with Blue Canoes [www.banfftours.com](http://www.banfftours.com) starting off on the Bow River in Banff. OK! loved canoeing once they got the hang of steering much to the relief of a nearby Canada Goose and her chicks.

### **How Do I Relax?**

Banff started as a spa town in the 1880s when three Canadian Pacific workers discovered hot sulphur springs. You can still take the waters at the original Banff Upper Hot Springs but a more luxurious option is at the Banff Springs hotel's Willow Stream Spa with several mineral pools inside and out and a fantastic range of treatments. OK! felt very relaxed after a Rockies Rehydration body wrap with aloe vera essential oils, then splurged at The Waldhaus, the hotel's Bavarian style restaurant on truffle fondue and black forest gateau looking out at the snow-capped mountains – yes we're still in Canada!

### **Which Stars Will I See?**

Alberta is a great outdoor movie location, Brad Pitt filmed *The Assassination of Jesse James* in the Rockies and he came back, bringing Angelina and the kids to go to the Dinosaur Provincial Park which has one of the greatest dinosaur fossil beds in the world. The Fairmont Banff Springs attracts most stars who come to the area. Marilyn Monroe filmed her riding scenes at the Rafter Six Ranch for *River of No Return* (1954) and recovered from her horseback accident at the hotel. Apparently bell hops drew lots on who would push her wheelchair and you never know who you could end up sharing one of the mineral pools at the Willow Stream Spa with: Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones, Christie Brinkley, Robin Williams and Tim Robbins all stay at the Banff Springs.

### **What Should I Eat?**

Alberta is beef country – almost half of Canada's total beef comes from this state which as well as mountains has wide open prairies, so make sure you tuck into some steak. The Sleeping Buffalo Restaurant in Banff [www.crmr.com](http://www.crmr.com) has pioneered Rocky Mountain Cuisine using Canadian produce cooked in a classical French style so OK! tucked into a grilled buffalo rib eye with a raspberry black peppercorn sauce. Moose, elk and caribou also feature on the menu; they taste like venison. For a snack to keep you going in between shopping, exercising and spa-ing the Bison Mountain Bistro in down town Banff [www.thebison.ca](http://www.thebison.ca) tempts with cowboy

size portions of buttermilk waffles, maple syrup and eggs benedict with maple onions and Canadian bacon.

### **What Should I Buy?**

Go west and head for one of the cowboy shops – Lammle’s Western Wear and Tack in Banff [www.lammles.com](http://www.lammles.com) has over 4,000 cowboy hats, a huge range of cowboy boots and shirts and belts OK! couldn’t resist a pair of suede pointed cowboy boots with Cuban heel and was tempted by a diamante belt. The Banff Tea Company [www.banffteaco.com](http://www.banffteaco.com) has over 160 blended teas with unique Canadian flavours such as Six Glacier Tea with spearmint and lavender and The Rocky Mountain Soap Company [www.rockymountainsoap.com](http://www.rockymountainsoap.com) has a wide range of 100% natural soaps and bath products – so you can create your own mineral spa back home.