

# THE IDENTITY ISSUE

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# BASE CAMP FOR ADVENTURE

BANFF'S HIP VIBE AND INSTAGRAM-WORTHY VIEWS MAKE IT A  
BUCKET-LIST DESTINATION FOR MEETING PLANNERS.

BY WENDY HELFENBAUM

Nestled in Canada's first national park in Alberta's Rocky Mountains, Banff attracts 4 million visitors annually. Majestic peaks and alpine lakes surround this UNESCO World Heritage Site at an elevation of 4,500 feet (the highest town in Canada), making it a spectacular backdrop for high-end retreats and incentives.

With connecting service from most major cities out of Calgary International Airport, Banff is a scenic, 90-minute highway drive away. Off-site venues include mountaintop ski lodges, natural caves and elegant ballrooms for groups of up to 1,000. World-class skiing, hiking and snowshoeing, plus famous hot springs, are a few of the outdoor activities in Banff. And with the low Canadian dollar, plus Alberta's lack of provincial sales tax, there's never been a better time to plan an incentive here, says Cathy Macdonald, previously senior manager of MICE business development at Banff & Lake Louise Tourism.

"The return on investment is the easy part, but I always say it's the return on experience that is immeasurable," says Macdonald. "Banff is a bucket-list destination and a heightened experience. It's the magical version of winter: dogsledding across the Continental Divide, sightseeing of peaks and mountains, and ice-skating on Lake Louise with glaciers in view."

The walkable downtown Banff is three blocks of funky boutiques and casual and gourmet eateries. Stop by the newly opened Chuck's Steakhouse, known for its Alberta beef, and High Rollers, a retro-themed bowling alley, craft beer hall and upscale pizzeria.

In October 2016, Brewster Travel Canada unveiled the \$26 million redevelopment of the Banff Gondola and its upper terminal building. It includes an expanded rooftop viewing deck for cocktail receptions; new conference space and dining outlets; and the Above Banff Theatre, a multisensory cinema.

"That's going to be a great venue for us, not only as an enhancement for activities, but for private dinners," notes Macdonald. For a small town, Banff offers big bang for your buck.



# 5 PLACES TO STAY

## BUFFALO MOUNTAIN LODGE

**Rooms:** 60 **Suites:** 48  
**Meeting space:** 5,000 square feet

With its towering, open-beam ceiling and a focal-point antler chandelier, this Tunnel Mountain property is packed with rustic charm, natural light and glorious views. Rooms have fieldstone wood-burning fireplaces, and many have balconies or patios. The cozy property, surrounded by 9 acres of forest, accommodates groups of up to 100. Guests can relax in the outdoor stainless steel hot tub and possibly spot deer and elk.

## THE RIMROCK RESORT HOTEL

**Rooms:** 322 **Suites:** 21  
**Meeting space:** 18,000 square feet

This horseshoe-shaped hotel, built in 1993 down the side of Sulphur Mountain, works for groups of up to 300. Light-filled boardrooms and breakout rooms feature spectacular mountain views, as does restaurant Eden's intimate Bordeaux Room, ideal for VIP dinners for up to 12. The funky Diva's Lounge, with decor celebrating Hollywood's leading ladies, does buyouts for groups of up to 80 for mixology classes or executive hospitality functions.

## FAIRMONT BANFF SPRINGS

**Rooms:** 671 **Suites:** 93  
**Meeting space:** 76,000 square feet

Known as the "Castle in the Rockies," this splurge-worthy baronial-style mountain property built in 1888 has sweeping panoramic views and is the largest conference resort in Canada, accommodating up to 1,200 attendees. Willow Stream Spa is the brand's second-largest, and the elite Fairmont Gold floor features two exquisite lounges and high-end service, including private check-in, huge breakfast buffets and afternoon hors d'oeuvres.

## BANFF PARK LODGE

**Rooms:** 200 **Suites:** 11  
**Meeting space:** 18,900 square feet

Located minutes from downtown and steps from the glacier-fed Bow River, this full-service resort and conference center rests in a peaceful location with three on-site restaurants and an intimate, relaxing, eucalyptus-infused steam room.

## MOOSE HOTEL & SUITES

**Rooms:** 89 **Suites:** 85

Opened in June 2016, this bright, upscale mountain lodge is the first new hotel within Banff National Park since 2007. The downtown property's courtyard has a quirky surprise: It's built around a 1913 wood-frame house that was the home of legendary Banff musician and outdoorsman Leonard Leacock. The cottage was moved from its original site nearby and is being restored to host small functions. The Moose employs rich natural materials and woodwork throughout, with furnishings from local craftspeople. A 2,000-sq.-ft. meeting room, the Darch Suite and the Pacini Restaurant will be added in April.



# SWANKY INCENTIVE OPPORTUNITIES

## INDULGE IN A TROPICAL DREAM WRAP AT THE RIMROCK RESORT HOTEL SPA.

This new 60-minute hydrating treatment is enriched with creme fraiche natural butter and incorporates fruit-scented anti-aging ingredients. Attendees can make use of the spa's Vichy Shower room and get a Rocky Mountain pedi for added indulgence.

## GO SPELUNKING AND ENJOY A PRIVATE SCENIC DINNER.

Lana Casavant, North America sales executive for destination management company Rare Indigo Ventures, recently organized a cocktail reception and tented alfresco dinner for 50 people in the television industry at Cave and Basin National Historic Site on Sulphur Mountain. Discovered in 1883 by three Canadian Pacific Railway workers, the emerald-colored natural hot springs located deep in the cave launched the country's National Park system.

## TOUCH THE SKY, AND THEN GO DOGSLEDDING.

Take in spectacular views of the Goat and Sundance mountain ranges during a 25-minute wilderness helicopter tour with Discover Banff Tours' Flight of the Great Snowy Owl. Then, tuck your attendees under blankets on sleds pulled by a team of Canadian huskies for a two-hour journey through the Rockies. Finally, sip hot apple cider around a roaring campfire.

## TAKE AN EXHILARATING GUIDED ICE WALK.

Treat your attendees to an ice walk through Banff National Park's stunning Johnston Canyon. With massive, 984-ft. limestone walls on one side and a snaking river on the other, the catwalks surrounded by frozen waterfalls and pillars of ice are begging to be explored, says Janet Elizabeth Doyle of White Mountain Adventures. Last winter, it hosted 177 attendees with a medical and science symposia for the tour.

## EXPERIENCE A SCENIC SNOWSHOE TOUR AND BARBECUE.

The iconic Fortress Mountain was made famous in "The Revenant," the Oscar award-winning movie starring Leonardo DiCaprio. "Our VIP groups are taken up the mountain in a snowcat to a backcountry barbecue at the very spot the scene was filmed," shares Doyle. In April 2016, it took 15 top banking executives on this exclusive experience.