



Bird's eye view of Golden. Photo: M.Micovsky/Tourism Golden.

Golden Opportunity

Small Town Livin' Large

by Tracey Rayson

A good yarn can put a town on the map. And when a region's colourful past is recounted straight from the horse's mouth — one might jest, the anecdote can secure its staying power and reveal the true essence of a place. Take for instance the town of Golden in the heart of Kicking Horse Country of BC's Kootenay Rockies. Explorer Sir James Hector (of the British Palliser Expedition) was crossing a river in August 1858 when a delinquent horse hoofed him senseless. Thus, the Kicking Horse moniker laid claim to the River and the Pass, both the unintentional result of a steed's swift kick, which of course would leave anyone breathless. However, so too will the wilderness, the wildlife, and the whitecap summits of the Rockies and the dogtooth peaks of the Purcell and Selkirk ranges. And of course, the River and its tenacious drops and deep cut gorge — to its delight — will leave you gasping.

The 4,373 Golden residents, with an additional 3,155 people living in surrounding rural areas, know exactly why they've chose this adventuresome address to call home. The town is cradled by the Rocky Mountains on

the north end of the Columbia River Wetlands, an area stretching 180 kilometres between Golden and Canal Flats supporting various mammals and over 300 species of protected birds (think granddaddies like osprey, bald

eagles, and great blue herons). As a gateway to the Canadian Rocky Mountains and close proximity to six National Parks: Banff, Glacier, Jasper, Kootenay, Mount Revelstoke, and Yoho, Golden offers just about every exhilarating activity on your agenda.

"I moved to Golden because I knew that outdoor recreation opportunities around here are endless," says resident Miro Micovsky. "There is no time for rest. It's no wonder that the area around Golden has one of the highest concentrations of backcountry lodges in North America and the people that live here have mountains engraved deeply in their hearts," says Micovsky, who just happens to wear the marketing director's hat for Tourism Golden.

And for those who visit, your dreamy digs can be as varied as the surrounding terrain.

Consider bedding down in a remote Front County Lodge (cottage/cabin), where the populated area is off the beaten track but your privacy and comfort take a front seat. There are campgrounds and RV parks, motels, hotels, and of course, the home-style hospitality of personalized B&B's that will invite you to hang your hat after a long day of play.

"Any time of the year you can find yourself with the dilemma of what to do next or which places to explore," says Micovsky. With average summer temperatures pushing the mercury to a comfortable 25 degrees Celsius (77° F) and an average of 306 millimeters or (one foot) of rain per year (less than one-quarter the rainfall of Vancouver) the region is poised to accommodate a wilderness experience that will "keep you on your toes, on your pedals, in the stirrups or on the paddle," (according to the Kicking Horse Mountain Resort).

Kicking Horse Mountain Resort (KHMR) is the first, four season mountain resort to open in the Rockies region in 25 years. By project completion, over \$300 million will be invested in the Resort, of which \$45 million has been invested to date. Build-out of the resort is expected in six to eight years.

If the altitude doesn't get your heart racing, the excitement of your chosen activity will. Elevations vary from the top of Kicking Horse: 2,450 metres (8,033 feet) and mid-mountain: 1,722 metres (5,646 feet) to the bottom of the lowest chair: 1,190 metres (3,900 feet). Pick your passion. Strap on your hiking boots



Kicking Horse River's Last Waltz rapid, Middle Canyon. Photo: Alpine Rafting.

and hit the backcountry with an experienced guide, where wildflower-studded meadows and towering rock face rise up to greet you. Three main ridge hikes, plus additional hiking/walking trails from beginner to expert are accessible. Saddle-up for a horseback trail ride, jump-start your adrenal glands and plunge a snaky singletrack downhill descent, (there are



Hiker's North view across the Columbia River Valley. Photo: Mike McPhee/KHMR.

27 trails from beginner to expert, renowned for the longest vertical, lift accessed mountain bike trails in North America) or catch some big air and a warm updraft as you launch from Mount 7, the ridgetop perch and takeoff point for hang-gliders and paragliding.

If your heart seemingly beats in two places — your chest and your throat, you've probably had a "peek at Boo," the resident orphaned grizzly at the Grizzly Bear Refuge, a territory of grizzly bear research and

conservation. This blue listed species can be viewed in this protected natural habitat, where educational and interactive tours are conducted. Can't decide on any one adventure? Check out the new summer Alpine Escape Package, beginning with two nights at Kicking Horse Mountain Resort. Experience a five-night double-alpine escapade including both resort and backcountry bliss all in one package.

"KHMR is a major tourism generator and continues to show its commitment to the community both as a corporate partner in a variety of initiatives and, as a lead attraction for both summer and winter activities," says Rob Miller, manager, Community Economic Development, Golden and Area Initiatives Society (GAD). "Significant new development is planned for the Resort — from expanded

lift/terrain capacity, a range of real estate options for investors and re-locators, and golf course potential. In conjunction with other Resorts in the Columbia Valley, KHMR is part of the "Powder Highway" — a branded marketing campaign which creates the critical mass of winter ski product that consumers will soon recognize as the best variety in western Canada," reveals Miller.

Chances are you'll hear the rumbling of the Kicking Horse River well before you see it. Courtesy of the river's upper canyon, your wake-up call is a class IV wallop at Alarm Clock rapids. Gear up for the Terminator and a rock garden of boulders leading to the Shotgun, your prep for the class IV-plus Double Trouble. You'll yelp with enthused vigour as two monster waves boomerang off your body (midpoint on the Lower Canyon) and then you'll whoop triumphantly as they're left to explode back onto themselves in a chaos of foam. Your encounter in the wash-cycle will leave you exhilarated, proud too, particularly knowing you've just run some of the best whitewater in Canada, and notably BC's biggest. For those with the courage, Golden has the crafts and companies capable to show you the trip of a lifetime. However, if your inner daredevil is taking a day off, check out some flatwater on a Columbia River jet boat safari; here you'll carve through narrow canyons over forgiving and comfortable currents. Watch for moose, deer, elk, black bears, grizzly bears, mountain goats, and bald eagles along the river banks.

