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Display until February 28, 2018



NWTRAVELMAG.COM

Summer Getaway in Golden, B.C.

BY BRANDON FRALIC

Imagine a mountain town tucked away in the Canadian Rockies. A town, perhaps, that you've never heard of, cradled between massive mountain ranges and resting among rivers. What it lacks in size, this community of 4,000 makes up in scenery. Golden, B.C., is a gold mine of outdoor opportunity.

Running on Mountain Time, Golden is closer to Calgary than Vancouver. And while it may be overshadowed by big ol' Banff, Golden's uncrowded streets and scrappy small-town charm are what make it shine. Offering easy access to six Canadian national parks doesn't hurt, either. So, this summer, go small. Make Golden your basecamp. Here's how to spend an incredible three days in and around Golden, B.C.

DAY 1: GET ACQUAINTED

Assuming you're driving in from the west, make a leg-stretch stop or two in Glacier National Park. Bisected by the

world's longest highway, British Columbia's first National Park can't be missed. Wander and wonder among old growth cedar and hemlock rainforest on the short, accessible Hemlock Grove Boardwalk. Further along the Trans-Canada Highway, military howitzers used for avalanche control greet you at Rogers Pass, where the Visitors Centre provides plenty of information for hikers and history buffs.

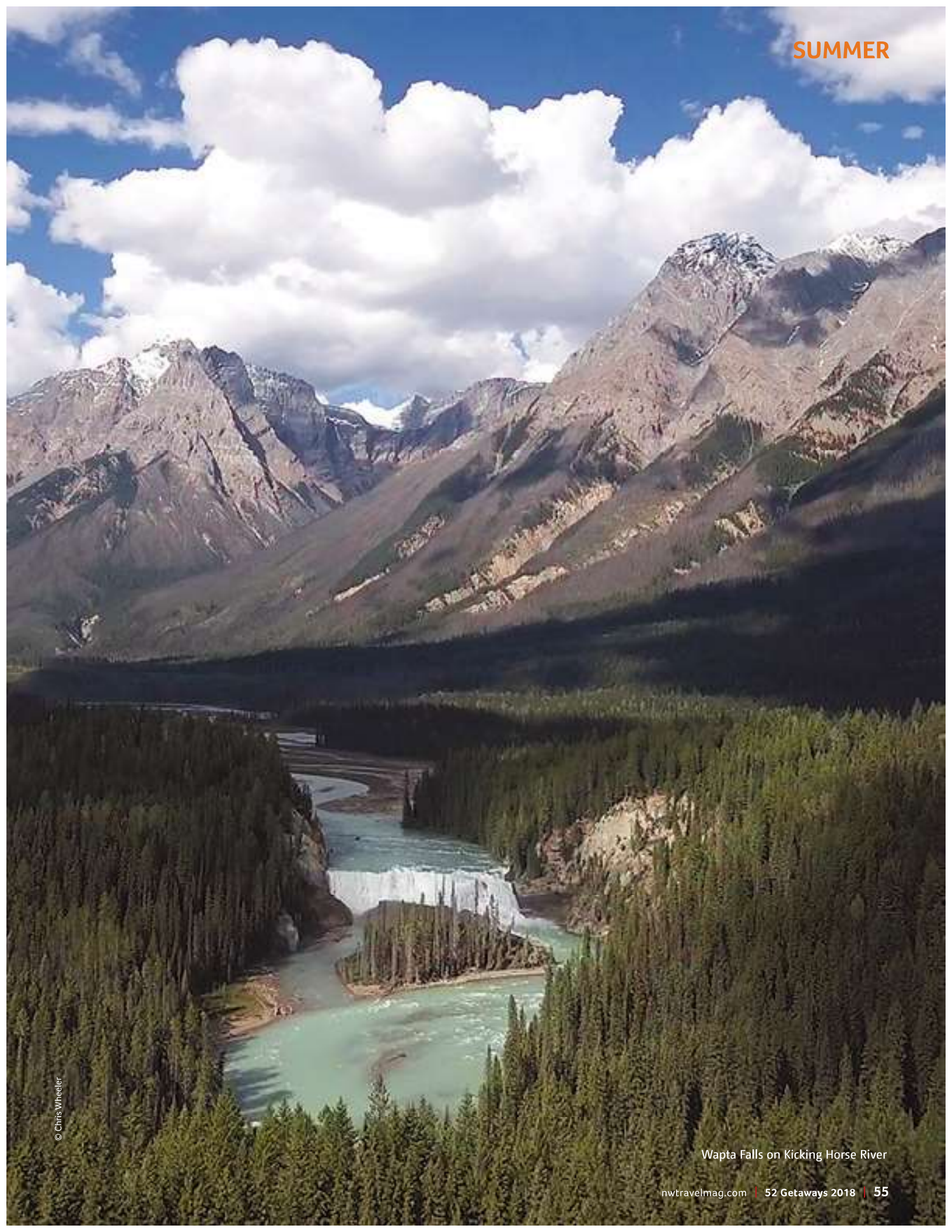
Check into your lodging at Lush Mountain Accommodations' Blaeberry Gorge Alpine Ranch, a scenic 20-minute drive from downtown Golden. Winding rural roads lead to this mountain chalet on private acreage, with views across the property to Hedberg Peak. Complete with a hot tub, fire pit, four bedrooms, a sleeping loft and fully equipped kitchen, this modern retreat makes for a most comfortable home away from home.

Once you've checked in and checked out your digs, head downtown to get acquainted with Golden. A noteworthy first stop is Golden's only brewery, Whitetooth Brewing.



Via ferrata at Kicking Horse Mountain Resort

© Destination BC | Ryan Creary



© Chris Wheeler

Wapta Falls on Kicking Horse River

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Established at the tail end of 2016, this outdoorsy little tasting room (capacity 44) has quickly become the local hotspot for brews with mountain views. Every detail is influenced by the Whitetooth team’s beer travels, from the glacial water-colored floor (borrowed from Mikkeller in Copenhagen) to the Belgian-inspired brews. Try Thread the Needle Witbier—spiced with Szechuan pepper and lemongrass—for a refreshing introduction to Whitetooth’s creative lineup.

When hunger strikes, take five minutes to walk down to Whitetooth Mountain Bistro and claim a table on the rooftop patio. Steak and seafood dominate the dinner menu, along with veggie-friendly options like the Vietnamese Noodle Bowl. You

might even catch some live music at the attached Rockwater Grill and Bar. At the very least, the raging Kicking Horse River always puts on a show.

DAY 2: GET WET

Speaking of rivers, Golden is situated at the convergence of two rolling waterways: the Kicking Horse and the mighty Columbia. These two rivers couldn’t be more different in terms of temperament. Famous for its class 3 and 4 rapids, the Kicking Horse River attracts adventure seekers with some of the best whitewater rafting in North America. Meanwhile, the Columbia meanders wide and slow—gentle enough for standup paddleboarding and leisurely birding excursions.

On your second day in Golden, it’s time to venture out on these waters. Pop into colorful Jita’s Cafe on the way, fueling up with homemade chai tea and grabbing a sack lunch to go. You’ll know you’ve reached the Columbia Wetlands when an exceptionally large roadside paddle catches your eye. Not just any huge hunk of wood, this paddle is officially the world’s largest. Snap a selfie with the 60-foot oar before turning up the driveway to Columbia Wetlands Adventures, your host for a guided river float.

At more than 110 miles in length, the Columbia Wetlands are counted among the longest protected wetlands in North America. Here, you’ll find some 300 species of wildlife, from heron and osprey to bald eagles and beavers. After a short walk through the woods, the wetlands spread out before you. Follow the series of floating docks and cross a swinging suspension



© Brandon Falic

Blaeberry Gorge Alpine Ranch



© Northern Lights Photography

Nature hike at Northern Lights Wolf Centre

SILVERWOOD THEME PARK

Boulder Beach

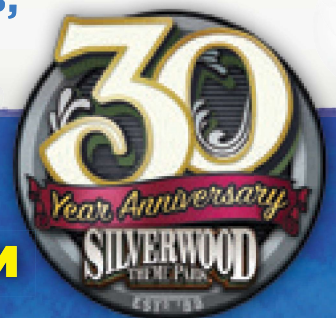
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Eagle's Eye Restaurant

bridge before reaching the Captain's dock. An oasis awaits, complete with the Canadian flag hoisted high.

During late spring, the Columbia River floods with snowmelt, and the wetlands are the only un-dammed section of the river. Oh, and heli-skiing was invented nearby. These are just a few of the facts you might learn from your guide as you float serenely down the river, powered by a near-silent electric motor. Dragonflies dance on green waters. Snow-capped Rocky and Purcell Mountain peaks rise on either side of the raft, both ranges clearly visible from your swivel seat. Birder or not, anyone can enjoy this ecological outing.

After a day spent out on the water, there's nothing more indulgent than unwinding with a glass of Okanagan wine and a hearty meal. Time your return right and you can catch the early bird dinner special at Eleven22—an upscale, yet casual restaurant. Between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m., chef/owner Konan Mar serves a three-course meal for \$20, with choices ranging from Lemon Basil Pesto Pasta to Chicken Cashew Curry. Sit out on the backyard-style patio or cozy up inside the art-adorned restaurant in a renovated turn of the century home.

DAY 3: GET WILD

Your final day in Golden is bound to be busy, so rise with the sun and hightail it to town. A quick stop at Bluebird Cafe provides breakfast and excellent coffee en route to your destination: Kicking Horse Mountain Resort. Procure an Adventure Pass for the full skiing or snowboarding experience. Then take a ride on the Catamount Chairlift to meet Boo the Grizzly Bear at 10:00 a.m. sharp for the first tour of the day.

You don't find yourself within a few feet of a 600- to 800-lbs. grizzly bear every day. That's what makes Kicking Horse Mountain so unique—it's a ski resort with a resident grizzly. Orphaned as a

cub, Boo has been raised by humans.

But unlike bears at the zoo, Boo has plenty of natural habitat to roam about. His custom-built, 20-acre Grizzly Bear Refuge is the largest enclosed grizzly habitat in the world. Watch as rangers toss food over the fence. Boo enjoys a mostly vegetarian diet, tearing into bear kibble (like dog food, but bigger) with glee. Living proof that even bears can be fussy eaters, Boo prefers his peanuts shelled and his corn shucked.

When lunchtime rolls around, take the Golden Eagle Express Gondola up to Eagle's Eye Restaurant. Perched at 7,700 feet, this elevated dining experience is Canada's highest with astonishing views over five national parks. Dine out on the wraparound deck for endless Rocky and Selkirk Mountain panoramas. A summery Eagle's Eye Salad (add the smoked salmon) is just the ticket.

After lunch, swing by Northern Lights Wolf Centre for another wild encounter. For more than 15 years, the Centre has promoted wolf conservation, shedding light on environmental issues and educating the public. Listen to an interpretive talk while watching the wolves in their pen. Raised in captivity, these grey wolves are regularly exercised off-leash in the wilderness. To join one of these excursions, you can sign up for a nature hike with Blackwolf Photography.

Spend your final evening in Golden watching the sun go down from your private porch. Barbeque something. Soak in the hot tub. As night falls, alpenglow ignites the surrounding mountains—a fitting goodbye to your Golden getaway... until next summer. 🐻

WHEN YOU GO

LODGING

>> Lush Mountain Accommodations, lushmountain.com

FOOD AND DRINK

>> Whitetooth Brewing, whitetoothbrewing.com

>> Whitetooth Mountain Bistro, whitetoothbistro.com

>> Eleven22, eleven22.ca

>> Bluebird Cafe, bluebirdcafegolden.com

ACTIVITIES

>> Columbia Wetlands Adventures, columbiawetlandsoutpost.com

>> Kicking Horse Mountain Resort, kickinghorseresort.com

>> Northern Lights Wolf Centre, northernlightswildlife.com

PLANNING RESOURCES

>> Tourism Golden, tourismgolden.com

>> Destination BC, hellobc.com