

weekender

# Finding the magic

The iconic Fairmont  
Jasper Park Lodge

WORDS SUZANNE MORPHET

PHOTO BY SUZANNE MORPHET

“**B**reathe deeply,” whispered the massage therapist into my ear as she cupped her scented hands over my face. I inhaled the citrusy aroma of an essential oil that launched my journey to a place of profound relaxation.

Outside, the turquoise water of Lac Beauvert reflected the majesty of the Rocky Mountains surrounding Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge. For most of my visit to this legendary property I wanted to be out there, surrounded by nature, but for the next two hours I was happily cocooned in a room with light blankets, soft music and the strong hands of an experienced therapist.

As I drifted blissfully in and out of consciousness that day last June, it would have been impossible to imagine that in exactly one month, this spa, this lodge, all its guests and everyone in the town of Jasper and in the entire national park would be evacuated as wildfires raged out of control.

We all know what happened next. But now, almost a year later, most businesses are operating, wildlife is thriving, visitors have returned and—perhaps most exciting—Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge is undergoing a multi-million-dollar renovation.

The renovation is not due to the fire. Except for one lakefront building that burned, the 700-acre property with more than 400 rooms and cabins was largely spared. Rather, it's ready, in the words of general manager Garrett Turta, for a “comprehensive transformation,” including to its main lodge, which hasn't been updated in decades.

“We aim to achieve a sophisticated blend of alpine elegance and contemporary design,” he told me, with “soaring cathedral ceilings, rich wooden beams and magnificent stone fireplaces.”

The goal? To be “the leading destination for creating magical moments.” Even if that sounds Disneyland-ish, who can argue with wanting to experience magical moments while on vacation? Not me.

The essentials are already here, I discovered, from the par 71 golf course, where Bing Crosby played when he was in town in 1946 to shoot *The Emperor Waltz*, to the barrel sauna on the shore of Lac Beauvert, where Joey Graziadei of *The Bachelor* enjoyed a passionate kiss with one of his dates in Seawson 28. (The reality TV show may be past its prime, but the scenery in the Jasper episode will have you packing your bags.)

Even if you're not staying in one of Fairmont's Signature Cabins like Joey and his dates (the smallest cabin starts around \$1,200/night in high season), the property is undeniably special.

Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge is one of Canada's grand railway hotels. While most of them are substantial stone and brick structures fashioned after a French château or Scottish castle, Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge has more rustic roots.



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And being so iconically Canadian—there’s even a pair of loons on Lac Beauvert—it feels like home, or what home should feel like. That kind of magic is hard to find.



Luxury bath in the Stanley Thompson Cabin.  
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FAIRMONT JASPER PARK LODGE



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It began in 1922 as a collection of 10 tents, soon transitioning to log and stone cabins and a main lodge that was once marketed as “the largest single-storey log structure in the world.” Embellished with an enormous stone fireplace and mounted animal heads, it was a place where guests once danced the night away to a live orchestra.

But the lodge suffered setbacks even before the recent wildfire. One night in 1952, guests were partying when flames suddenly broke out. The fire destroyed the main lodge, but it was rebuilt the following year, in time for a visit by Marilyn Monroe and Robert Mitchum, both in town to shoot the western musical *River of No Return*. They stayed at Point Cabin, one of the lodge’s original cabins from 1928, with its five bedrooms, now each with en suite bathroom.

It couldn’t all have been magical for Marilyn, though, as lodge management of the day reportedly kicked her out for repeatedly dressing inappropriately at dinner!

When my husband and I arrived for dinner at Orso Trattoria one night last June, we dressed for the special occasion that it was—my husband’s 70th birthday—and I’m sure we glowed. I had just come from my head-to-toe Jasper Indulgence in the spa and Kit was looking youthful and feeling relaxed from his Gentleman’s Facial.

The restaurant focuses on the cuisine of northern Italy (the Dolomites and the Rockies are equally awe-inspiring) and we delighted in shared salads (prosciutto with pear and grilled radicchio with fennel), followed by light and lemony ricotta agnolotti, rack of lamb, halibut and—for dessert—crispy phyllo pastry filled with orange cream.

The next morning we were up with the sun to play 18 holes at the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge golf course. I’m not



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crazy about golf, but I really wanted to see grizzly bears and this course straddles the intersection of two important wildlife corridors. (That wasn't known when it was conceived in the 1920s.) Celebrating 100 years in 2025, the course wraps partway around Lac Beauvert, with glorious mountain views from every green. While Kit was organizing our gear, I asked a staffer about bears. "We have a mama bear and two cubs," Peyton told me. Pulling out his phone, he showed me a photo of one of the cubs, which looked a little like a giant panda with its two-tone fur. Unfortunately, the grizzlies were elsewhere that day, but one species was in abundance: ground squirrels. Don't laugh when I say their antics made my day magical or, at the very least, memorable. Standing on their little hind legs and watching us tee off, or diving into one of their holes that littered the sand traps, they were always adorable and attentive. I almost expected one of them to offer tips on my swing. I'm not one to return to the same destination often. But Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge may prove the exception. Along with the renovations, there will be new experiences, including innovative sleep programs and seasonal wellness activities. And being so iconically Canadian—there's even a pair of loons on Lac Beauvert—it feels like home, or what home should feel like. That kind of magic is hard to find. ❶



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