

Train takes guests on awesome journey through Rockies

BY MARY QUINLEY
CORRESPONDENT

"Bear on the left!" belted a man's voice from the front of the train car.

Passengers bolted from their seats, scrambled to the left-side windows and poised their cameras.

Sure enough, a black bear ambled along the grassy floor of the majestic Canadian Rockies, creating an ideal photo-op for travelers aboard the Rocky Mountaineer, a passenger rail service.

"Western Canada is full of varying types of wildlife, such as, black bears, moose, grizzly bears, elk, coyotes, eagles and osprey," said Michelle Dunn, manager of communications for Rocky Mountaineer Railtours.

There is no guarantee that animals will be sighted during the excursion.

However, said Dunn, depending on the time of travel, more often than not wildlife are seen.

Passenger Jerry Goetz of Bloomfield Hills was surprised to see so much game close to the train tracks.

People tend to get on a plane to travel, he said, and they miss a lot. Riding the rails furnishes an opportunity to experience nature's best.

"We saw bears, mountain sheep, a llama and eagles, sometimes in their nests near water," said Goetz, who enjoyed the train ride in June 2002 with his wife, Kinney.

The couple opted for the GoldLeaf Service, one of two choices of travel.

Their seats were on the upper level of a glass-domed coach that provided panoramic views of the ever-changing scenery. Within minutes of settling into their reclining dome-level seats, passengers in the GoldLeaf coach are offered champagne and orange juice to "toast" the trip.

A spiral staircase descends to the lower level, where a dining room features white linen tablecloths and regional cuisine menu selections.

"It was first-class and, the food was spectacular," Goetz said, referring to the "gourmet meals" which were served on the two-day trek.

The RedLeaf Service, more like a traditional train, features a single story coach with reclining seats, plenty of legroom and large picture windows.

"Upscale chilled entrees" are served at the seats.

The train personnel in both classes provide commentary about the landscape, Canadian history, geography and the rail-voy.

All passengers have access to vestibule areas located at the end of the coaches.

"It's a train journey with some of the most incredible scenery in the world, where you are not only sitting back and relaxed, you are being pampered and catered to by the onboard staff, who become like family by the end of the trip," Dunn said.

A variety of packages are offered, running the gamut from a two-day rail journey and combo rail-and-rental car excursions to a twelve day Trans Canada Rail Adventure.

One option is the Yellowhead Route.

Passengers board at Vancouver's Pacific Central Station in the province of British Columbia for their two-day luxury ride.



The Rocky Mountaineer, a passenger train service that travels through Canada's West and the Canadian Rockies, enters a tunnel.

The train weaves through fertile fields of the Fraser Valley, passes near towering crowns of the Coastal Mountains and then snakes along the Thompson River to historic Kamloops for an overnight stay at a hotel.

Day two features stunning snapshots of rolling plateaus and snow-covered tips of the Monashee Mountains.

Waterfalls, expansive glaciers and breathtaking views of the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies, Mount Robson (12,972 feet), supply awesome vistas.

The journey ends in Jasper, the largest mountain park in

Canada.

Last summer, Kathryn Dingeman booked a two-day, all-daylight tour on the train. She traveled with her mom, Gertrude Dingeman of Redford, and two friends, Nadine Debusk of Redford and Doris Chase of Rochester.

"It was a wonderful trip all-around," said Dingeman of Farmington, who, with her traveling companions, chose the GoldLeaf service. It's the only way to go and worth every penny, she said.

Mary Quinley is a Livonia resident who writes about food and travel.

IF YOU GO

■ The cost of the Classic Rail Journey with GoldLeaf Service from June through October is \$927 (double) and \$977 (single), one-way, from Vancouver to Banff/Jasper or Banff/Jasper to Vancouver.

■ For more information, call Rocky Mountaineer Railtours (800) 665-7245 or www.rockymountaineer.com.



The Rocky Mountaineer edges across a bridge.

PHOTOS BY MARY QUINLEY

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A gourmet lunch is served in the GoldLeaf dome coach aboard the Rocky Mountaineer.