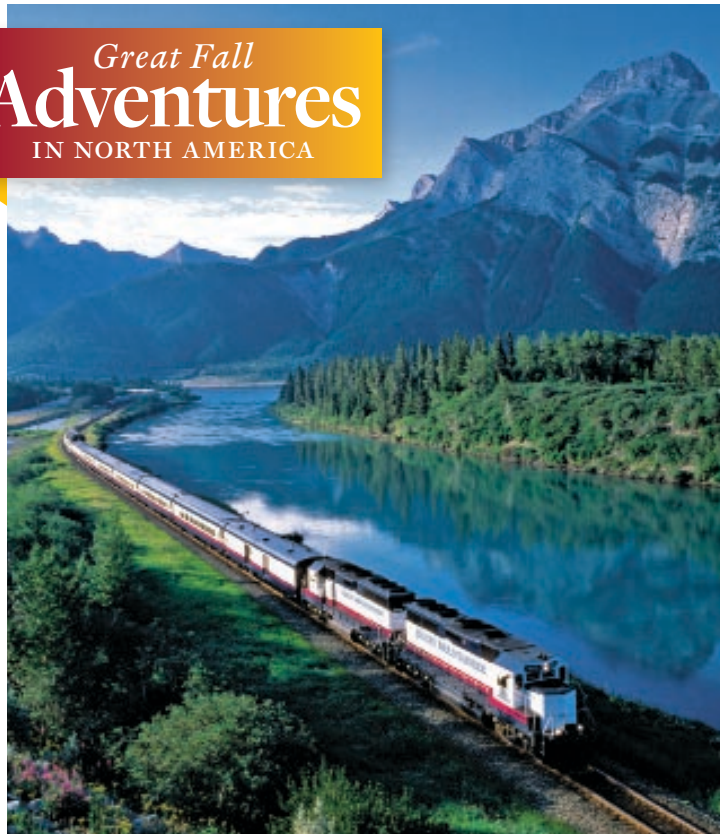


Great Fall  
**Adventures**  
IN NORTH AMERICA



# THE 5 BEST TRAIN RIDES

For truly friendly travel with ever-changing scenery, take your foot off the gas, unbuckle your seat belt, and hit the rails.

## 1 CONQUERING THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

**ROUTE:** Vancouver to Banff, Alberta **DURATION:** Two days

The benchmark train ride for jaw-dropping scenery, the Rocky Mountaineer highlights the Canadian Rockies in a way government-run trains can't: It travels only in daylight. The two-day trip is the ideal land cruise, with lavish domed viewing cars and regional gourmet dining, both of which are overshadowed by the majesty outside. Following the original Canadian Pacific line along the churning Fraser River, you leave lush rain forest for the mountains — lots of them — and the rust-colored desert of the Canadian far west. After a night in quaint Kamloops, you approach the Rockies, where the views of jagged peaks and

glacier-fed alpine lakes are monstrously beautiful — and not viewable from any road.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Spiral Tunnels

To reduce the grade through Big Hill, a unique pair of circling tunnels were dug into the walls on opposite sides of the stunning Kicking Horse River (\$500; [rockymountaineer.com](http://rockymountaineer.com)).

## 2 INTO THE SIERRA MADRE

**ROUTE:** El Fuerte to Creel, Mexico **DURATION:** 13 hours

Nothing about the Copper Canyon Express is fast. It took 100 years to build, and the train seldom comes close to arriving on time. But why hurry through Mexico's Sierra Madre, with gorges seven times more expansive than the Grand Canyon? Don't even try the alleged 13-hour journey in a day,

or darkness will claim the view — get off for a night or two in Divisadero. The train, also known as “el Chepe,” is a feat of Looney Toons engineering; trestles hang off sheer cliffs as train wrecks decay far below.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Divisadero

Its name refers to the view over the space where three canyons unite; the town offers great hiking, horseback riding, and climbing (\$70; [chepe.com.mx](http://chepe.com.mx)).

## 3 GLACIERS GALORE

**ROUTE:** Anchorage to Seward, Alaska **DURATION:** Four hours

The Alaska Railroad debuted its luxurious 114-mile Coastal Classic this summer with double-decker domed cars and white-tablecloth dining. The half-day trip passes vistas of snow-topped mountains, fjords, and plenty of big game (moose, wolves, bears). For sportsmen, the ARR has whistle-stop service in the parks.

**HIGHLIGHT:** The Loop District

The key attraction is the striking Bartlett Glacier, which comes into view on the left as the train winds up toward Grandview (\$160; [akrr.com](http://akrr.com)). ▶

### Essential Train Gear



Pass on the cheap beer in plastic cups from the club car and mix a cocktail from your own portable bar. Complete with martini glasses, shaker, and strainer, the **Manhattan from Picnic Time** only lacks for hooch (though it has room for two bottles). Find a neighbor with a flask to vary the drinks menu — and toast the real joy of train travel (\$136; [kohls.com](http://kohls.com)).

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: LEFT: COURTESY ROCKY MOUNTAINEER; MIDDLE: ISAACSON; RIGHT: CANZANI; MICHAEL PIRROCCO

**4 LIVING THE OLD WEST**

**ROUTE:** Antonito, Colorado, to Chama, New Mexico

**DURATION:** Six hours

In the 1870s, silver mines in Colorado and New Mexico required a hastily built, narrow-gauge railway to bridge the Continental Divide. Now 129 years old, the railway operates in two sections: 44 miles on the Durango & Silverton line and 64 on the lesser-known but more scenic Cumbres & Toltec. For train geeks, the trip is a series of ecstasies, from the restored steam engines to the steep loops and gaping gorges.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Cumbres Pass

At 10,015 feet, it's the continent's highest railway pass. Legend says the surveyor simply followed his mule over the crest (\$83; [cumbrestoltec.com](http://cumbrestoltec.com)).



**5 INTO THE MIDNIGHT SUN**

**ROUTE:** Cochrane to Moosonee, Ontario

**DURATION:** Five hours

The Polar Bear Express is a train to the top of the world, through boreal forest, over white rivers and crystalline lakes, toward the aurora borealis. Used by Cree and Inuit as their lifeline to modern civilization, the train has a family car with camp counselors so you can park the kids. But the canoe car shows the Polar Bear Express's true priority: It belongs to the paddlers and fishermen who seek out the middle of nowhere.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Onboard music

Performers in the club car sing voyageur tunes over Canadian beers (\$44; [ontarionorthland.ca](http://ontarionorthland.ca)). —SARAH ROSE

**More Tickets to Ride**



**6 THE CANADIAN**

Canada's VIA Rail is everything Amtrak should be: comfortable, friendly, and reliable. Plus, its cross-country service from **Toronto** to **Vancouver**, which offers up the grandeur of the Canadian plains and Rockies, is endlessly scenic. VIA even bends over backward for outdoorsmen: Passengers can get off at any mile between Sudbury Junction and Lake Winnipeg and get picked up on a return trip (\$430; [viarail.ca](http://viarail.ca)).

**7 THE MALAHAT**

Vancouver Island has the top "see it before it's gone" train in North America, a charming single-car, self-propelled diesel dayliner that makes a 4.5-hour excursion between **Victoria** and **Courtenay**. First Nations tribes partnered with small island towns to keep the line running, past virgin forest and views of the Coast Mountains across the strait, to small communities like Duncan, with its 80 totem poles (\$24; [viarail.ca](http://viarail.ca)).

**8 CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR**

Amtrak's long-distance service is a step up from the bus, but this route is still the best way to see America, from the green farm belt and arid **Great Plains** to the winding passes of the **Rockies** and **Sierras** (\$145; [amtrak.com](http://amtrak.com)).

**9 THE "L"**

When Spider-Man stops a train or mobsters hear the rumble of rails, it's the **Chicago "L."** An icon of urban rapid transit, the Loop is the best bargain in travel, passing some of the world's greatest architecture, from the Sears Tower to the limestone canyons of the financial district (\$2.25; [transitchicago.com](http://transitchicago.com)).

**10 THE EMPIRE**

In fall, the **Hudson River Valley** is aflame with botanical fireworks. From Albany, the train follows the bucolic Mohawk River to the ultimate water feature: **Niagara Falls** (\$36; [amtrak.com](http://amtrak.com)). —S.R.

**Your Own Private Railway**

PRIVATE SLEEPING QUARTERS, SITTING ROOMS, EVEN A BACK DECK — FOR A PRICE.

With President Obama chartering the Georgia 300 for his inaugural and celebrities such as Dan Aykroyd and shampoo-and-tequila magnate John Paul DeJoria maintaining their own well-appointed railcars, the preferred method of travel for the Victorian rich, dubbed Private Varnish, is making a discreet comeback. Step on to one of the 130 or so private "Amtrak-certified" railcars around the country and you'll see why: It's everything a cramped seat in a cigar tube with tiny portholes isn't. Most feature multiple



sitting rooms and sleeping quarters with real beds and chairs, full kitchens, and even rear decks for enjoying a nightcap while America slides by. Private cars typically latch on to Amtrak trains, then uncouple in cities here and there (or resorts that still maintain sidings from the Gilded Age, like Saratoga Springs, New York, and the Greenbrier, in West Virginia), giving you a private lodge downtown. In a private car, say devotees, the transportation itself becomes the vacation.

**PREVIEW:** Events such as the Kentucky Derby and Super Bowl attract commercial charters selling berths (\$15,900 for a *deluxe five-day Kentucky Derby package for two*; [excitations.com](http://excitations.com)). The private railcar convention, in Savannah this November, invites the public to tour vintage cars.

**CHARTER:** Pick a route and check [Aaprco.com](http://Aaprco.com) or [Privaterailcars.net](http://Privaterailcars.net) for cars based at either end. Expect to pay \$7,500 per day for eight people.

**BUY:** Amtrak-ready cars start at \$275,000; plan to spend around six figures to update the truck and electric on your own salvaged car. Among the great fixer-uppers now available: the sleek stainless-steel 1935 Mark Twain Zephyr (\$600,000; [railmerchants.net](http://railmerchants.net)). —WAYNE CURTIS

PHOTOS FROM TOP: COURTESY KATHARINE O. HARRISON/ALASKA RAILROAD; COURTESY PATRON TEQUILA; MAP: MICHAEL NEWHOUSE

# THE 4 BEST BIKE TRAILS

Fall is the perfect season to hit the dirt on knobby tires. Here are the top new spots to open up this year.



## CROSS COUNTRY

### ALLEGRIPPIS TRAIL SYSTEM

Huntingdon, Pennsylvania

The trail is 32 miles of concentric loops designed to offer rides of every length and difficulty, and much of the trail system is a perfect mash-up of all the quintessential elements of East Coast riding: swooping single-track through pine forest; pump-track-style rollers on soft, sticky soil; and long, grinding climbs. Make sure to hit the descent down Hydro, which slices through the hardwoods all the way to an ideal view of Raystown Lake (*free; allegrippistrails.com*).



## DOWNHILL

### FREIGHT TRAIN

Whistler, British Columbia

Bikers were already able to scream down plenty of nearly vertical trail at highway speeds on FT, but this year it got even better: A 200-foot tunnel, with four 30-foot quarterpipes, was built to reroute skiers for the 2010 Olympics. The best part? Four miles and 2,100 vertical feet later, you can hop on the resort's lift and repeat without a climb (*\$45; whistlerbike.com*).

## Great Fall Adventures IN NORTH AMERICA

## FREERIDE

### FREE LUNCH AND PUCKER UP

Grand Junction, Colorado

This two-year-old project has doubled in length with this year's addition of Pucker Up, adding more than a mile of fast, one-after-another eight-foot drops and 10-foot gap jumps. But don't expect gravity to do all the work: Wall rides will challenge your handling skills, as will two play areas along the trail. The design even offers opt-outs, so you can bail on that nine-foot huck if you're not feeling it (*free; copmoba.org*).

## BIKE PARK

### HANSON-LARSEN MEMORIAL PARK

Rapid City, South Dakota

This 280-acre multidisciplinary park set in the middle of town has 10 miles of raceworthy singletrack and a jump park for the vertically inclined. For downhillers, nearly a mile of double-black diamond trail — descending through a rock-strewn draw complete with ledge drops, bank turns, and step-ups — is all slotted to open by year's end (*free; imba.com*).  
—JOSH FULMER

## Essential Bike Gear

To guard against the carnage that can come with downhill and freeriding, you'll need some protection. With polypropylene plates over your chest and moldable Visco-Elastic Polymer Dough down your vertebrae, **Poc's Spine VPD Tee** provides the right mix of mobility and safety (\$315); Poc's new helmet, the **Cortex Flow** — a fiberglass shell with a chin bar positioned for optimal airflow — shields against headfirst encounters (\$265; *pocsports.com*).

