



The beach at Kathleen Lake Campground. Since the pandemic, Canadian travellers have been hitting the road in rented RVs more than ever as an alternative to hotel stays. LISA KADANE

EMBRACING RV LIFE ON YUKON ROAD TRIP

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Highway 1 from Whitehorse to Haines Junction is a novice RV-er's dream. On this summer day — as far as my husband Blake and I could tell — we were the only rig on the road heading west toward the snowy peaks of Kluane National Park and Reserve. The open road meant we wouldn't be slowing anyone down.

We are not recreational-vehicle people, but since we love nature and like to camp, we thought why not tool around the Yukon with our accommodation (and kitchen) conveniently attached to our wheels? Everything we knew about RVing before this trip we'd gleaned from movies like *Christmas Vacation* and *2006's RV*; so we knew better than to dump waste into a storm sewer drain, or peel out of a campsite before retracting the awning.

We flew to the Yukon and picked up our reserved CanaDream Maxi Travel Camper — basically a pickup truck with the camper plunked into the truck bed. (The Whitehorse station is open from May through mid-September.)

Make no mistake — we had no intention of roughing it. Our cabin on wheels came with plush linens, a hotel-grade mattress, dining nook, compact kitchen with a Nespresso machine and a three-piece bathroom. With such amenities, it's no wonder so many Canadians are embracing RV rentals as an alternative to hotels, a trend that dovetails with the "van lifestyle" that gained notoriety during the COVID years.

In fact, pre-pandemic, Canadians made up just 10 per cent of CanaDream renters, but in 2023 our share of the pie had increased to 55 per cent.

We were a little intimidated at pickup, but by the time we pulled into a parking spot at the Kluane Visitor Centre in Haines Junction — Blake driving and me navigating — we'd got the hang of it. We ate lunch in the camper before touring the visitor centre to learn more about the UNESCO World Heritage Site that holds the world's largest non-polar ice field and its thousands of glaciers.

To explore just a tiny corner of the Kluane National Park and Reserve, we met up with Lionel Pelecyn, a guide with Yukon Guided Adventures who fell in love with the Yukon on his own road trip north in a campervan. He led us on a hike along roaring Thunderegg Creek, toward Kluane's skyline of jagged peaks glinting with snow in the summer sun. Afterwards, apropos of van life, we pulled out a few cold beers from the camper fridge to share with Pelecyn while



Fishing on the Kathleen River in southern Yukon's Kluane National Park and Reserve. LISA KADANE



Moose are among the iconic species spotted at the Yukon Wildlife Preserve. PADDY PALLIN/NATHAN HENDRY

toasting our first successful foray into the Yukon wilderness.

When we rolled into the Kathleen Lake Campground at 7 p.m. there were still four hours of daylight left and more than enough time for dinner and a campfire. At bedtime, snug in the queen-sized

bed, we watched the stars come out through the camper's skylight.

Over the next few days we fell into a routine: breakfast and campfire coffee in the morning, followed by an adventure. One day we fished for trout with a guide from Dalton Trail Lodge, spotting

a moose grazing in the middle of Lower Rainbow Lake and numerous bald eagles searching for their own catch. Another day we hiked along the Dezadeash River, sneaking up on a pine marten collecting food under a wooden boardwalk. We kept hoping to see Dall sheep

or a grizzly bear, but no such luck.

To hedge our wildlife bets, our last stop was the Yukon Wildlife Preserve, where iconic northern animals like caribou, muskoxen and wood bison roam expansive natural enclosures. It's just a kilometre from the Hot Springs Campground, where we scored a forested campsite with a power hookup so we could finally use the Nespresso machine.

The full-service campground is adjacent to Eclipse Nordic Hot Springs, a Nordic-style spa that was filled with RVers getting pampered. We chatted with fellow road trippers, many of them Americans driving their rigs to or from Alaska, or Canadians crossing the country in a camper. They'd planned for gold in Skagway and knocked back a Sourtoe Cocktail in Dawson City, and we wished mightily that we had more time on the open road.

ADD THESE FIVE ADVENTURES TO YOUR YUKON ROAD TRIP

Hike in Tombstone Territorial Park: Located 90 minutes from Dawson City, Tombstone straddles the Continental Divide and is famous for its granite spires that look like grave markers (hence the name). It's a multi-day backpacking trip to get into Talus Lake or Divide Lake in the heart of the park, or you can visit the park's periphery on a day trip with The Klondike Experience.

Join the Sourtoe Cocktail Club: When in Dawson City, don't miss your chance to try the famous Sourtoe Cocktail. It's basically a shot of booze (usually Yukon Jack whisky) with a preserved human toe at the bottom of the glass. The catch? You have to let the necrotized toe touch your lips to be inaugurated into the club.

Flightsee over Kluane National Park and Reserve: Take off from the Haines Junction airport in a Cessna 172 with Rocking Star Adventures. Gaining a bird's-eye view is the only way to see Kluane's more than 2,000 glaciers tumbling down between Canada's highest mountains.

Mountain bike in Carcross: This historic village at the crossroads of Bennett and Nares lakes is becoming a hot single track destination thanks to its network of fun, flowy and at times technical trails on Montana Mountain, all built by local First Nations youth.

Raft into Kluane on the Upper Tashshini River: Navigate exciting whitewater and look for wildlife on a one-day trip with Yukon Wild. The narrow canyons, dense forests and imposing mountains offer a glimpse of the UNESCO World Heritage Site's rugged wilderness.