

## Personal Essay

# Maintaining the beauty of Banff National Park

Banff, the town and the national park, is the heart of the Canadian Rockies. I've lived in the Town of Banff my whole life, and I've experienced firsthand many joys and challenges of living in a national park. First off, I want to say that living in Banff has caused me to take advantage of the amazing mountains, lakes, and wildlife in my home. The privilege of growing up here has been something that I have cherished since I've moved

away to university. However, with any privilege comes responsibility, and that is why I feel that it is our responsibility to protect and cherish the environment and all of the inhabitants of that environment.

From a young age, living in Banff immersed me in nature. You learn invaluable lessons about the significance of your surroundings and the importance of wildlife. Only in a national park can a representative from Parks visit your Grade 3 class to sing songs about mountain goats — moments like these leave a lasting impact. Banff is home not only to humans but also to elk, bears, squirrels, eagles, and so much more. Sharing our space with these animals has taught me how to act around them and to maintain a respectful distance. I've encountered bears on several occasions, and my instinct has always been to calmly give them space and walk away slowly, without pulling out my camera or panicking. Remember, these animals were here long before Banff became a national park, and they are generally harmless unless provoked. In fact, nine times out of ten, they are more frightened of us than we are of them. A simple tip: singing your heart out while hiking will keep bears away!

Another crucial lesson I've learned is never to feed the wildlife. The squirrels, birds, and gophers in Banff have become all too accustomed to humans, and this is not natural. Many times, I've often sat down to eat, only to have animals sit beside me, waiting for food. This behaviour poses significant risks: animals that eat human food may become obese, choke, or suffer from poisoning.

To fully enjoy the beauty of Banff, I would recommend camping. You can sit out by the lake under the northern lights that are draping over the mountains. It is truly unreal. However, like I have said, privilege comes with responsibilities. For instance, after using any opened food, it's best to store it in your car to minimize food scents and avoid attracting animals. Even if you are quickly just going to the outhouse. Keeping food in your tent works just as well, but it carries a higher risk of drawing animals closer. Overall, it does not take a lot of work, and doing small actions allows one to live happily and peacefully among animals.

Living in Banff I feel as though I have a deep connection to our earth. The earth is something that we have been blessed with, so when I walk Banff Avenue and see litter on the ground, it genuinely upsets me. There are so many important things that the community of Banff does that contribute to the health of our town. For example, my household follows a "leave no trace"



Grace as a child at  
Vermillion Lakes in 2008.  
**Submitted by Grace Gibson**



Grace by the pedestrian  
garbage and recycling bins  
on Banff Avenue in 2010  
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philosophy. Wherever you go and whatever you do after you leave, there should be no trace that you were there. This principle is especially important on hikes, where trash cans are often absent. Keeping your garbage with you prevents litter from washing into our rivers and lakes as the snow melts in spring, which can lead to pollution throughout Alberta. Banff has many initiatives that have been put in place to help with the health of our environment. Recently, Banff has put in place a single-use plastics bylaw, which has caused workplaces in Banff to only use paper products, which allows only biodegradable products into our garbage systems and soils.

There are also many other ways to be sustainable on your trips to Banff. The town has so many gift shops and is very consumerism-based, but I always try and will always recommend to go to local shops and support the many small businesses within Banff. As well, in the summer, there is a fantastic market on Wednesdays that is all small businesses. It is important to know that every small choice you make contributes to the health of the planet.

Visitors need to understand that Banff is not just a tourist destination; it is a thriving community. Banff's community revolves around tourism, and we understand that yes, you are on your vacation, but it is very important to respect everyone, especially our town. The community in Banff is very geared towards making sure

everybody feels included and understood. For example, if you come to Banff in the new year, there is an impressive pyrotechnic show, and most importantly, it is safe for all the animals and wildlife. This step keeps the people of the town happy and feeling like they have a sense of tradition while also catering to the importance of animals and their safety, and that is one of the reasons Banff is such a special place.

I have loved my time in Banff and all the experiences that it has had to offer me. Living in Banff is a constant reminder of nature, and it's important. By respecting wildlife, practising sustainable habits, and fostering strong community connections, I can enjoy, along with as many other people from all over the world, the amazing views, and we can all ensure to keep it gorgeous for future generations to come. It can be hard to balance between adventure and conservation, but I believe that every small action contributes to the larger goal of protecting the natural beauty that Banff holds. After all, spending time in Banff and living in Banff is not just about experiencing it; it's also about preserving it for years to come.

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Grace, now a student at the University of Alberta.  
**Submitted by Grace Gibson**