

# the Golden Circle

## highlights

The Golden Circle Route contains some of North America's grandest scenery and wildest places. Within relatively short distances, the route covers a wide range of eco-systems—from boreal forest to coastal rainforest to immense icefields.

Long before they were highways, the White Pass (on the South Klondike Highway) and Chilkat Pass (on the Haines Road) were trade routes used by Tlingit and Southern Tutchone first nations. En route you can experience their culture and lifestyle by visiting local museums and traditional fishing villages. Both of these passes were also used during the Klondike Gold Rush and the towns of Carcross and Skagway still retain the character of those times.

Starting in Whitehorse with the more rounded mountains of the Yukon's interior valley, the South Klondike Highway rises as you approach Carcross and the Southern Lakes region. The road borders some of these large, long, beautiful lakes before rising over the rugged coastal mountains and then descending into the narrow coastal fjord where Skagway, Alaska is situated.

The painted graffiti on the rocks above the cruise ship dock in Skagway harbour is mostly historical, commemorating the maiden voyages of ships arriving in port.



- > South Klondike Highway
- > Haines Road
- > the Alaska Highway

*DISTANCE: 600 km Whitehorse to Whitehorse*  
*MINIMUM TIME RECOMMENDED: 5 nights*

## itinerary

Distance from Whitehorse start (Wh) Distance from Skagway base (S)

### DAY 1 Whitehorse to Skagway: 180 km

**Wh 59.7 km & 60.2 km** 30 minutes from Whitehorse, the highway curves between two beautiful lakes—Spirit Lake and Emerald Lake.

**Wh 68.7 km** The Caribou Crossing Trading Post and Museum of Yukon Natural History feature a wildlife gallery, children's activities, and a gift shop.

**Wh 69.7 km** Next is the "smallest desert in the world." The wind-sculpted sand dunes are remnants of an old lake bottom. Lupine growing in certain areas of the desert have adapted to the arid conditions by growing woolly-leaves that retain moisture.

**Wh 71 km** Carcross is an historic picturesque village situated on the shores of Bennett Lake.

A self-guided walking tour (available at the Carcross Visitor Information Centre) takes you past historic buildings, colourful shops, and attractions.

**Wh 71.7 km** Continuing from Carcross, follow the bridge over the Nares River. Nares Lake, on the left, is an important wetland for migrating birds—swans, ducks, and other waterfowl may be spotted in spring and fall.

**Wh 141.8 km** Driving past Canada Customs, the highway continues to climb toward the White Pass summit. The alpine tundra scenery is the result of recent glaciation and high annual snowfall. After the summit sign, the road begins its spectacular descent, dropping from 1,003 metres (3,292 ft) to sea level in 20 minutes.

**Wh 180 km** Skagway is beautifully situated at the end of the Lynn Canal. At the Skagway Convention and Visitors Bureau you'll find information on Skagway's many attractions and activities, including historic walking tours, gold rush entertainment, and flightseeing tours.

**Overnight: Skagway, Alaska**

### DAY 2 Skagway and Haines, Alaska: one-hour ferry trip

*Your itinerary on this day will vary, depending on ferry schedules. (see sidebar)*

**S 14.5 km** 14.5 km (9-mile) long Dyea Road takes you to the old townsite of Dyea and the start of the Chilkoot Trail. Seals can often be seen at the mouth of the Taiya River. A pullout at 6.12 km (3.8 miles) provides a great view of Skagway and the Lynn Canal.

- Haines is a picturesque fishing village situated on a finger of land between Chilkat and Chilkoot inlets in the Lynn Canal. At the Haines Convention and Visitors Center you can get information on local outfitters offering mountain biking, kayaking and rafting tours.

- The Sheldon Museum and Cultural Centre has some outstanding examples of traditional Chilkat blankets, which are woven from mountain-goat hair dyed with natural mineral and plant pigments.

- Dungeness and King crab, salmon, halibut, shrimp are some of the fresh local catches available in Haines restaurants.

**Overnight: Haines, Alaska**

Taking the ferry from Skagway to Haines, Alaska takes only one hour. When planning this itinerary, be sure to check the Alaska Marine Highway ferry schedule at [www.ferryalaska.com](http://www.ferryalaska.com), since departure times vary.

Leaving Haines, the Haines Road follows the wide valley of the Chilkat River until it steeply rises through thick forests of hemlock and Sitka spruce to the magnificent mountain scenery of the Chilkat Pass. The road ends in Haines Junction on the edges of Kluane National Park and Reserve, which contains the highest mountains in Canada and a diverse range of birds, plants and animals.

Kluane National Park and Reserve contains Canada's highest mountains, the largest non-polar icefield in the world, and a rich variety of bird, plant, and animal life. Kluane has some of the healthiest populations of grizzly bears and Dall sheep in the world, and recorded sightings of nearly 200 bird species. The park is a major tectonic zone (besides being the highest mountains in Canada, they are also the fastest growing) and the major agent in landscape formation is glaciation. The park contains over 2,000 glaciers—including valley, alpine and rock glaciers. The park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Kluane National Park and Reserve hiking trail maps and descriptions can be found at [www.pc.gc.ca/kluane](http://www.pc.gc.ca/kluane).



## DAY 2 OPTION

- Day trip by rail to Lake Bennett. Skagway is the starting point of the White Pass & Yukon Route railway. One of the most scenic railways in the world, the WP&YR is a designated International Historic Civil Engineering Landmark. For details, visit [www.wpyr.com](http://www.wpyr.com).

**Ferry to Haines, Alaska**

## DAY 3 Haines, Alaska to Haines Junction, Yukon: 246 km

**Wh 190 – 219 km** Leaving Haines, the road travels along the braided banks of the Chilkat River. This is North America's best eagle viewing area. Concentrations reach their peak in mid-November when up to 4,000 eagles feast on the annual salmon run.

**Wh 252 km** The U.S./Canada border at Pleasant Camp is situated in the heart of dense coastal forest. After the border, the road rises steadily through the Chilkat Pass.

**Wh 276 km** The summit of the Chilkat Pass is 1,065 metres (3500 ft). The pass region is rich in wildlife including moose, mountain goats, bears, arctic ground squirrels, ptarmigan, coyotes and golden eagles.

**Wh 339 km** A trail leads from Million Dollar Falls territorial government campground to the spectacular falls.

**Wh 363.2 km** The Southern Tutchone traditional village of Klukshu is located on the Klukshu River. This small river runs rich (*seasonal*) with king, sockeye and coho salmon. An interpretive panel provides an introduction to a traditional fish trap located in the heart of the village.

**Wh 375.7 km** Dezadeash Lake is a large, shallow lake, bountiful with fish. At its north end is the Rock Glacier Trail—an easy hike that provides beautiful views of the lake and valley.

**Wh 406.5 km** Picturesque Kathleen Lake has a campground and viewpoint. A species of kokanee (landlocked salmon) inhabit the lake.

**Wh 426 km** Haines Junction is situated at the junction of the Haines Road and Alaska Highway. It is the headquarters of Kluane National Park and Reserve, and located in the traditional territory of the Champagne/Aishihik First Nation. Start your visit at the Kluane National Park Visitor Information Centre for interpretive displays and an audio-visual presentation, as well as information on campgrounds, accommodations, wildlife, and a wide variety of activities: hiking, glacier flightseeing, river trips, fishing, and more.

**Overnight: Haines Junction, Yukon**

## DAY 4 Spend the day exploring World Heritage Site Kluane National Park and Reserve

- Local outfitters offer horseback riding trips, mountain biking excursions, fishing charters, canoeing trips, whitewater rafting adventures, as well as wilderness interpretation.
- Flightseeing is one of the only ways to appreciate the grandeur of Kluane's interior. The combination of great mountains and massive icefields is incomparable with any other place in the world—except perhaps Antarctica.

**Overnight: Haines Junction, Yukon**

## DAY 4 OPTION

- 71.6 km Driving west on the Alaska Highway to Kluane Lake, will take you to the Parks Canada Tachal Dhal Visitor Centre at the south end of Kluane Lake. The centre has an interpretive display and spotting scopes set up for viewing the Dall sheep that inhabit the sage-covered slopes of the mountain. The best viewing times are spring and fall.

## DAY 5 Haines Junction to Whitehorse: 158 km

**Wh 524 km** An interpretive pull-out at the Takhini burn explains the importance of wildfires to the boreal ecosystem. Many elk and deer inhabit this area, which burned in 1958.

- As you near Whitehorse, you will pass several dogsled kennels. In summer, these kennels offer interpretive tours that introduce visitors to the sport of dog mushing.

**Wh 586 km** Stop at the Visitor Information Centre in Whitehorse to see the film *As the Crow Flies*, and information on things to see and do, including attractions such as: MacBride Museum, Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre, S.S. Klondike sternwheeler, the world's longest wooden fish ladder, Yukon Transportation Museum, Takhini Hot Springs, the Yukon Wildlife Preserve, and many more.

**Overnight: Whitehorse, Yukon**