



# Road THERAPY

Taking the high road  
to mental health

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BY SUSAN LUNDY

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**e're driving along** the Crowsnest Highway on the southern edge of BC, a little east of Osoyoos and west of the quaint town of Greenwood. Over the last few hours, the landscape on the other side of the windshield has played out like a fast-changing kaleidoscope: at one point a snowy wonderland at the peak of Manning Park; then a lush forest splashed with red-orange-yellow fall trees, and now an expanse of rolling hills coloured in burnt yellow and topped by a vivid blue sky.

As the visuals change and the landscape opens up, so too do our minds. Conversation has stopped for now as the hum of the car lulls our thoughts into a meditative place. At times, we've had the tunes blasting, singing along to our standard road fare: Elton John, Cat Stevens, Steve Earle... We've also had time to dissect a lingering issue from back home—but problems seem far away and we're happy to let it sit at the back of our minds for a while.

There's no medical-school definition of "road therapy," but this is what it's all about. It's hitting the road and just driving. Releasing yourself from the cares of home, letting your mind wander into a daydream or even nothingness. Feeling the bliss of being in motion. Letting your subconscious chew away at a problem, while you—in the present—relax.

Road trips help you live in the moment and be spontaneous. They give your brain a workout as you navigate space and process new information. They provide time to think and daydream. Singing releases endorphins, the brain's "feel-good" chemicals, and exploring the outdoors provides fresh air and doses of Vitamin D.

Road therapy looks different at different times. As a teenager and young adult, I often found sanctuary on the road in my old Datsun B210 with the Simon & Garfunkel tunes cranked. On the road, singing along, I could quell the emotion of a break-up or forget the angst of an exam. A few years later, now a writer at my first newspaper job in Salmon Arm, I'd take to the highway at night, driving to Kamloops and back, daydreaming and writing stories in my head.

Concerns over environmental footprint and the price of gas over the last decade have limited some of the advantages of road trips, but with recent advances in hybrid and electric-vehicle technology, we can once again hit the high road.



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On our early November road trip, we decided to explore the less-travelled highways and roadways of the West Kootenays—relishing the area's perfect combination of wide-open spaces, mountain views, lake views, snowy passes and vividly coloured fall scenery that would be equally beautiful any time of year.

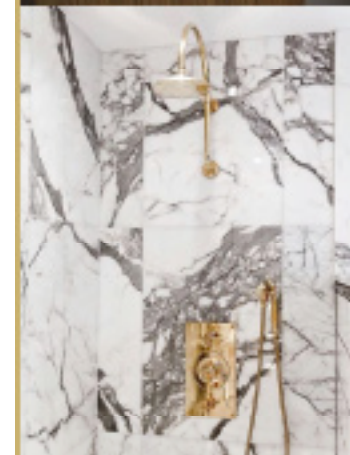
We travelled 1,700 kilometres and included four overnight stays on our journey, but road therapy can work as a day trip, too; it's a good way to get out and still adhere to most pandemic health protocols. (But be sure to check with different regions' pandemic regulations before setting out this winter and spring.)

Here are a few ideas to create your own road therapy expedition:

## MAKE A PLAN... SORT OF

Part of the point of road therapy is being spontaneous, driving to places unknown. Our five-day trip loosely followed a route that started in the Lower Mainland, taking Highway 1 to Hope and then the Crowsnest to Castlegar; driving various highways through Nelson, Kaslo, New Denver and Nakusp, riding a ferry across Upper Arrow Lake, and travelling on to Revelstoke, Vernon and Kelowna, down the Coquihalla and back to the coast.

But we left lots of time to aimlessly drive from point A to B, X or Y. For example, one day, we set off on a driving jaunt out of Nelson, loosely heading for the small town of Salmo. It turned out that the destination itself was less interesting than the journey, as we spontaneously turned off the road here and there, discovering some beautiful scenery in addition to the tiny town of Ymir, once a thriving mining hub and now just a small cluster of cool historic buildings.



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Lone Falls, near Nakusp.

## PICK A RIDE

Thanks to the generosity of Volvo Canada, our road trip involved test-driving a fully loaded, plug-in hybrid Volvo XC90 T8. Since the point of road therapy is to hit the pavement and free the mind, the ride doesn't really matter. But travelling in complete luxury and comfort with a gas-efficient vehicle doesn't hurt!

Some of this seven-seater's perks included a 19-speaker surround-sound system—perfect for the multi-stationed SiriusXM system—and heated leather seats with a massage component. Travelling in this car, with its huge front window, elegant interior and so many comforts, put me in mind of a first-class train ride. And the ability to talk to it—“Hello beautiful car, please turn on the heated steering wheel”—was a lot of fun.

Road trip safety is another consideration and we experienced the Volvo's steer assist twice—once when we skidded on a snowy pass and the car quickly recovered—and another time, just at dusk, as we swerved to avoid a herd of elk that had suddenly appeared on the road right beside us.

The car had three drive mode settings for steering feel and response, and Bruce was particularly fond of the power mode, which immediately turned it into a supercharged, corner-hugging sports car. Whatever the mode, the highways in the Kootenays are a great place to test-drive a vehicle.

## STOP, BREATHE, ENJOY THE OUTDOORS

Our route gave us plenty of opportunities to stop, hike, breathe in the fresh air and enjoy the bountiful benefits of nature.

The West Kootenays have myriad waterfalls, many within easy access of the highway. The Fletcher Falls turnoff is located about 10 minutes north of Ainsworth and accessed via a short walk. Lone Falls, near Nakusp, is a popular picnic spot located just a few metres from the parking area, while Sutherland Falls—one of the most visually stunning waterfalls in the Revelstoke area—is found near Blanket Creek Provincial Park. A visit to Begbie Falls, also near Revelstoke, includes a glorious trail walk.

We also hiked the beautiful Kaslo River Trail with its unique Hide & Seek art installation, and the Nakusp Waterfront Walkway, where we revelled in gorgeous views of Arrow Lake and the surrounding mountains. Ahhhh.

## RELAX

In keeping with the Volvo-Swedish theme, we were introduced to the concept of “fika,” which is an important part of Swedish culture. Defined as “a state of mind, an attitude and a ritual,” it's said to refresh the brain and strengthen relationships. It means making time for friends and colleagues to share a cup of coffee (or tea) and a snack.

To this end, coffee experts Jay Lijewski and Joshua Boyt—or, The Coffee Car Guys—have created a mobile coffee bar for the back of their Volvo XC90; the kit includes coffee beans, grinder and French press/mug.

If it involves coffee, I'm all in. So the concept of fika—es-

pecially if it occurs on the road in the middle of nature—is a wonderful idea. We stopped early one morning at Fletcher Falls, sipped coffee at a vantage point and enjoyed the natural setting of woods and water (think forest bathing with coffee).

The Kootenays offer another way to relax: the area is spotted with naturally occurring hot springs. We stayed overnight at Ainsworth Hot Springs, enjoying a mesmerizing float around the steaming main pool and then taking a few trips through the hotter pools in the natural caves, which are a unique feature at Ainsworth. You'll also find hot springs at Halcyon and Nakusp on this route.

## OVERNIGHT IN STYLE

In addition to staying at Ainsworth Hot Springs, we overnigh- ted at the historic Hume Hotel & Spa in Nelson and the upscale Explorer Society Hotel in Revelstoke. Both offered unique experiences.

The Hume is centrally located, steeped in history and extremely comfortable with super friendly staff. The Explorers Society is a nine-room boutique hotel with beautiful exposed-brick rooms, a rooftop lounge and hot tub. It also features the Quartermaster Eatery, which combines a fire-and-smoke-themed menu and a thoughtfully curated collection of unique wines and spirits.

## THE LAST STOP

Finally, return home refreshed, invigorated and ready to face the challenges of the day, knowing that a bit of road therapy has opened your mind to possibilities of a new world. 📍

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