

The Best of Vancouver & Victoria

If you really want to understand **Vancouver**, stand at the edge of the Inner Harbour (the Canada Place cruise-ship terminal makes a good vantage point) and look around you. To the west you'll see Stanley Park, one of the world's largest urban parks, jutting out into the waters of Burrard Inlet. To the north, just across the inlet, rise snowcapped mountains. To the east, right along the water, is the low-rise brick-faced Old Town. And almost everything else you see lining the water's edge will be new glass-and-steel high-rise towers. As giant cruise ships glide in to berth, floatplanes buzz in and out, and your ears catch a medley of foreign tongues, you may wonder just where on earth you are. Vancouver is majestic and intimate, sophisticated and completely laid-back, a bustling, prosperous city that somehow, almost miraculously, manages to combine its contemporary, urban-centered consciousness with the free-spirited magnificence of nature on a grand scale.

Vancouver is probably one of the "newest" cities you'll ever visit, and certainly it's one of the most cosmopolitan. A youthfulness pervades, along with a certain Pacific Northwest chic (and cheek) that comes from being the backdrop in so many movies that Vancouver is sometimes called "Hollywood North" (as is Toronto, so maybe it's time to retire that rather tired phrase). I can guarantee you that part of your trip will be spent trying to figure out what makes it so unique. Nature figures big in that equation, but so does enlightened city planning and the diversity of cultures. Vancouver is a place where people *want* to live. It's a place that awakens dreams and desires.

The city's history is in its topography. Thousands of years ago, a giant glacier sliced along the foot of the coast range, carving out a deep trench and piling up a gigantic moraine of rock and sand. When the ice retreated, water from the Pacific flowed in and the moraine became a peninsula, flanked on one side by a deep natural harbor (today's Port of Vancouver on Burrard Inlet) and on the other by a river of glacial meltwater (today called the Fraser River). Vast forests of fir and cedar covered the land and wildlife flourished. The First Nations tribes that settled in the area developed rich cultures based on cedar and salmon.

Some 10,000 years later, a surveyor for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) came by, took in the peninsula, the harbor, and the river, and decided he'd found the perfect spot for the CPR's new Pacific terminus. He kept it quiet, as smart railway men tended to do, until the company had bought up most of the land around town. In 1887 the railway moved in, set up shop, and the city of Vancouver was born.

Vancouverites have seemingly all fallen in love with the outdoors. And why shouldn't they? Every terrain needed for every kind of outdoor pursuit—hiking, in-line skating, mountainbiking, downhill and cross-country skiing, kayaking, windsurfing, rock climbing, parasailing, snowboarding—is right in their backyard: ocean, rivers, mountains, islands, sidewalks. The international resort town of Whistler (described in chapter 18),

which will take center stage during the Winter Olympics in 2010, is just 2 hours north of downtown Vancouver.

When they're not skiing or kayaking, Vancouverites enjoy the best of their city's culinary offerings. In the past decade or so, Vancouver has become one of the top dining destinations in the world, bursting with an incredible variety of cuisines and making an international name for itself with its Pacific Northwest cooking. The new food mantra here is "buy locally, eat seasonally," which you'll find being practiced at many restaurants.

The rest of the world has taken notice of the blessed life people in these parts lead. Surveys generally list Vancouver as one of the 10 best cities in the world to live in. It's also one of the 10 best to visit, according to *Condé Nast Traveler*, and won that magazine's Readers' Choice Award in 2005 and 2006 as "Best City in the Americas." In 2003, the International Olympic Committee named Vancouver the host of the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. Heady stuff, particularly for a spot that less than 20 years ago was routinely derided as the world's biggest mill town.

Though some "heritage buildings" still remain in Vancouver, the face of the city you see today is undeniably new. Starting in the 1960s, misguided planners and developers seemed intent on demolishing every last vestige of the city's pioneer past, replacing old brick and wood buildings with an array of undistinguished concrete high-rises and blocky eyesores. Citizen outcry finally got the bulldozers to stop their rampage. Luckily, landscaping and gardening was an ingrained part of life in this mild climate, so plants, trees, and shrubs were not uprooted for endless parking lots. You may be amazed, in fact, by the amount of green, the number of fountains, and the overall lushness of neighborhoods like the West End, which also happens to be one of the most densely populated areas in the world. A building boom preceded Expo '86 (the last world's fair in North America) and followed it as well, spurred on by enormous amounts of cash pouring in from Hong Kong and Asia. The new residential towers, made of glass and steel, are much lighter looking than those from times past, and keep with the hip, international image that Vancouver is developing for itself.

If you miss the old in Vancouver, you'll find plenty of it in **Victoria**, some 80km (50 miles) across the Strait of Georgia on Vancouver Island. Victoria took the opposite approach from Vancouver and preserved nearly all its heritage buildings. As a result, British Columbia's capital, beautifully sited on its own Inner Harbour, is one of the most charming small cities you'll ever find (it has about 325,000 residents in the Greater Victoria area, compared to around two million in Vancouver). Since it's on an island, accessible only by ferry (the best way to go) or plane, a more leisurely sense of time prevails in Victoria. It's a perfect antidote for stressed-out mainlanders.

For years Victoria marketed itself quite successfully as a little bit of England on the North American continent. So successful was the colonial sales pitch, residents began to believe it themselves. They began growing elaborate rose gardens, which flourished in the mild Pacific climate, and they cultivated a taste for afternoon tea with jam and scones. They were islanders ruled by the mother island from which all culture emanated and was exported.

For decades this continued, until eventually the people of Victoria saw the glories all around them instead of those reflected from a dying empire. The town became a lot more interesting. It was discovered that not many residents of Victoria shared a taste for English cooking, so restaurants branched out into seafood, ethnic, and fusion cuisines. And lately, as visitors have shown more interest in exploring the natural world, Victoria has added whale-watching and mountainbiking trips to its traditional London-style double-decker bus tours. The result? Victoria is the only city in the world where you can

zoom out on a boat in the morning to see a pod of killer whales and make it back in time for an expansive afternoon tea. Still, life is much quieter and 10 times more laid-back than Vancouver, but that's part of Victoria's charm. And if you add the Butchart Gardens, a truly world-class garden that celebrated its centenary in 2004, and the fabulous First Nations art collection in the Royal B.C. Museum, you've got all you need for a memorable vacation just a 90-minute ferry ride from the big city. If you want to explore more of Vancouver Island, head to Tofino and Pacific Rim National Park (described in chapter 18) on the Island's wild, wet, west coast.

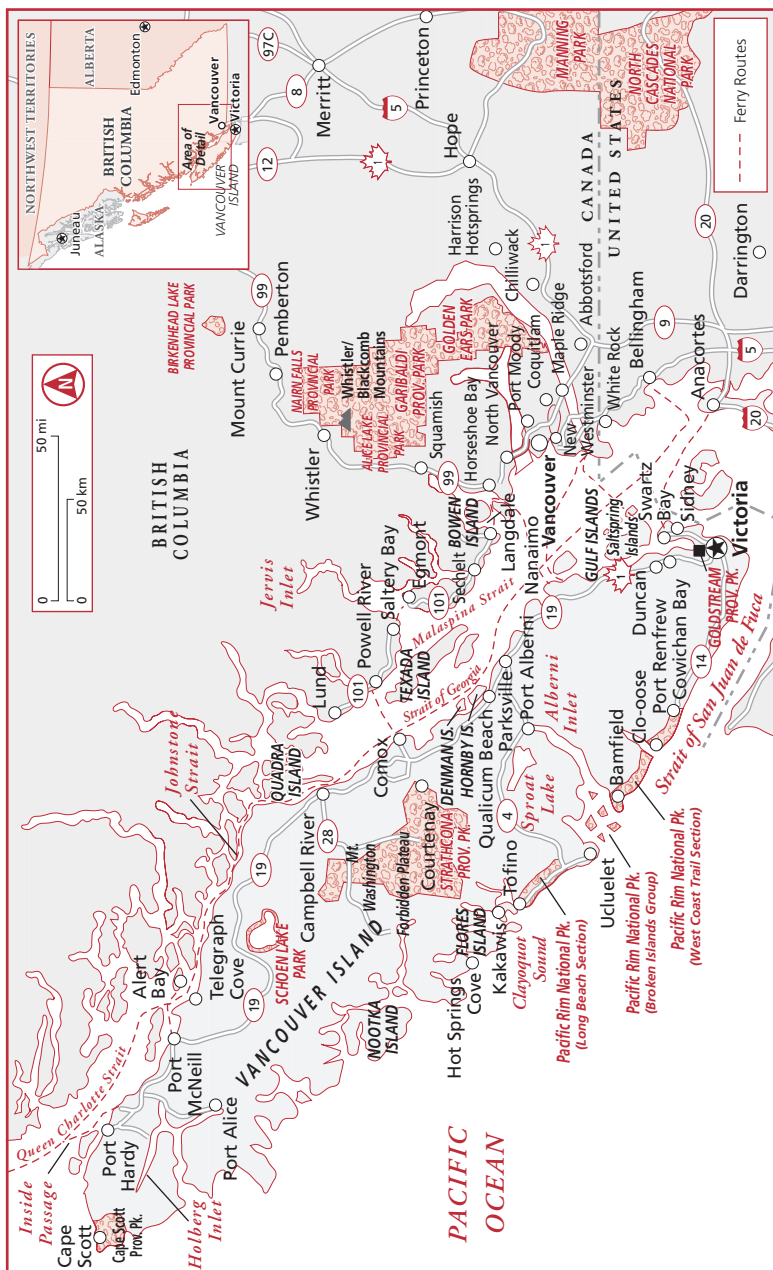
1 The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences: Vancouver

- **Taking a Carriage Ride through Stanley Park:** One of the largest urban parks in the world, and certainly one of the most beautiful, Stanley Park is nothing short of magnificent. Sample the highlights on a delightful 1-hour carriage ride that winds through the forest, along Burrard Inlet, past cricket fields, rose gardens, and the park's superlative collection of First Nations totem poles. See p. 116.
- **Wandering the West End:** Encompassing the über-shopping strip known as Robson Street, as well as cafe-lined Denman and a forest of high-rise apartments, the West End is the urban heart of Vancouver. Enjoy the lush trees lining the streets, the range of architecture, the diversity of cultures, the latest fashions and fashionistas, and neat little surprises on every side street. See Walking Tour 1, p. 145.

The Best Websites for Vancouver & Victoria

- **Entertainment Info** (www.ticketstonight.ca): This site is a great place for half-price night-of tickets and general entertainment information in the Vancouver area.
- **Pacific Rim Visitor Centre** (www.pacificrimvisitor.ca): This area-specific site is a great place to learn more about Vancouver Island's west coast.
- **Tourism B.C.** (www.hellobc.com): The official site of the provincial government tourism agency, this site provides good information on attractions, as well as higher-end accommodations.
- **Tourism Vancouver** (www.tourismvancouver.com): The official city tourism agency site provides a great overview of attractions, including an excellent calendar of events, plus a few last-minute deals on accommodations.
- **Tourism Victoria** (www.tourismvictoria.com): Victoria's official tourism site functions much the same as Vancouver's, with up-to-date, comprehensive information about what to do and see around the city.
- **Whistler Blackcomb Ski Resort** (www.whistlerblackcomb.com): This site offers a particularly helpful overview of activities and accommodations options available at North America's premier ski resort.

Southwestern British Columbia



A Short History of First Nations

When Captain Vancouver arrived in English Bay in 1792, more than 50 First Nations were living in what is now British Columbia, speaking about 30 languages from six distinct language families.

Exactly where each tribe lived, when they arrived, and how many members each had is all now a matter of some controversy, but evidence suggests that the area had been settled for some 10,000 years. One hundred percent of the province's land area is now claimed by one or more First Nations. Negotiations are proceeding slowly: One of the most important aspects of any claim is a band's oral tradition. The stories and legends about where a band came from, what lands it occupied, and how and where it gathered food are much more than just stories and legends; in certain circumstances they are considered the equivalent of legal documents, with their content and ownership a huge issue.

Living in the rainforest, all of these coastal peoples developed an extremely rich and complex culture, using cedar as their primary building material and, for food, harvesting marine resources such as herring, shellfish, and especially salmon. The richness of the local environment allowed these peoples ample surplus; their spare time was devoted to the creation of stories and art. Now undergoing a revival, coastal art, whether in wood, glass, or precious metals, usually depicts stylized figures from native mythology, including such universal figures as the Raven, or tribal totems such as the Bear, Frog, or Killer Whale.

The central ceremony of the coastal First Nations was and is the potlatch, a gathering of tribes held to mark a significant event such as the raising of a totem pole or the coming-of-age of a son or daughter. Invited tribes sing and dance traditional songs (which are considered to be their private intellectual property), while the host, both to thank his guests and to demonstrate his

- **Dining Out on Local Seafood:** Visitors are rightly amazed at the abundance of fresh-that-day seafood available in Vancouver's restaurants. This is a city where an appetizer of raw oysters often precedes a main course of wild salmon or halibut. See chapter 6.
- **Dining Out, Period:** The number of truly outstanding restaurants in Vancouver is astonishing. A meal at one of Vancouver's top restaurants will wake you up to the glories of the food scene here, and you'll find extraordinary tastes for every budget in chapter 6.
- **Visiting the Vancouver Aquarium:** It's a Jacques Cousteau special, live and right there in front of you. Fittingly enough, the aquarium has an excellent display on the Pacific Northwest, plus sea otters (cuter than they have any right to be), beluga whales, sea lions, and a Pacific white-sided dolphin. See p. 117.
- **Exploring Chinatown:** Fishmongers call out their wares before a shop filled with crabs, eels, geoducks, and bullfrogs, while farther down the street elderly Chinese women haggle over produce as their husbands hunt for deer antler or dried sea horse at a

wealth, gives away presents. At the end of the 19th century, when First Nations culture—supported by a flood of wealth from the sea otter trade—reached unprecedented heights, potlatches could last for days, and chiefs would give away all they had.

The sea otter debacle aside (encouraged by American and British fur traders, coastal natives hunted sea otters to extinction along most of the coast), coastal indigenous peoples were exemplary environmental managers (many were instrumental in forming the blockades that prevented logging in Clayoquot Sound's old-growth forests in the 1980s and 1990s). Pre-contact, First Nations society was divided into a nobility of chiefly families, commoners, and slaves, the latter mostly war captives taken during raids.

In the years after contact, the coastal First Nations were decimated by diseases such as smallpox (it's estimated that some 10,000 people lived along the coastal waterways and all but 600 of them were killed by smallpox carried by white settlers), the loss of traditional fishing rights, the repression of traditional rituals such as the potlatch, and the forced assimilation into English-Canadian culture. In the decades after World War II, an entire generation of native children was forced into residential schools, where speaking native languages and learning native stories were forbidden. The 1970s saw the first steps toward a long and slow recovery. The term "First Nation" came into common usage in the '70s, replacing the word "Indian," which some regarded as derogatory. There is no legal definition of "First Nation," but the term "First Nations peoples" generally refers to all the indigenous peoples in Canada. Though still beset by problems, the First Nations communities are on their way back to becoming a powerful and important force on the B.C. coast.

traditional Chinese herbalist. When you're tired of looking and listening, head inside to any one of a dozen restaurants to sample succulent Cantonese cooking. See chapter 6 and Walking Tour 2, p. 150.

- **Marveling at First Nations Artwork in the Museum of Anthropology:** The building—by native son Arthur Erickson—is worth a visit in itself, but this is also one of the best places in the world to see and learn about West Coast First Nations art and culture. See p. 122.

- **Browsing the Public Market on Granville Island:** Down on False Creek, this former industrial site was long ago converted into a truly eye-popping and sense-staggering indoor public market. Hop on the miniferry at the foot of Davie Street in Yaletown, and in 10 minutes you'll be there. At the market you'll find incredible food and goodies; put together a picnic and sit outside by the wharf to people- or boat-watch as you nosh. See p. 120.

- **Kayaking on Indian Arm:** Vancouver is one of the few cities on the edge of a great wilderness, and one of the best ways to appreciate its splendor is by kayaking on the gorgeous Indian Arm. Rent a kayak or go with an outfitter—they may even serve you a gourmet meal of barbecued salmon. See “Outdoor Activities,” p. 134, in chapter 7.
- **Discovering the Paintings of Emily Carr at the Vancouver Art Gallery:** It’s always a thrill to discover a great artist, and Emily Carr’s work hauntingly captures the primal appeal of B.C.’s rugged, rain- and wave-washed forests and shores. See p. 118.
- **Crossing the Capilano Suspension Bridge:** Stretched across a deep forested canyon, high above old trees and a rushing river, this famous pedestrian-only suspension bridge has been daring visitors to look down for more than 100 years. Now you can explore the giant forest trees, too, on a series of artfully constructed treewalks. See p. 125.
- **Watching the Sunset from a Water-side Patio:** Why else live in a city with such stunning views? Many places on False Creek, English Bay, and Coal Harbour have great water-side patios. See chapter 7.

2 The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences: Victoria

- **Strolling Victoria’s Inner Harbour:** Watch the boats and aquatic wildlife come and go while walking along a paved pathway that winds past manicured flower gardens. The best stretch runs south from the Inner Harbour near the century-old Provincial Legislature Buildings and The Fairmont Empress hotel. See p. 240 and Walking Tour 1 in chapter 15.
- **Savoring Afternoon Tea:** Yes, it’s expensive and incredibly touristy, but it’s also a complicated and ritual-laden art form that goes on for at least an hour. Besides, it’s good. See p. 214.
- **Marveling at Butchart Gardens:** This world-class garden, 20 minutes north of downtown Victoria, is a must-see attraction. Gorgeous during the day and subtly illuminated on summer evenings, it takes on a whole new personality when the famous fireworks begin. Saturday nights in the summertime, you get both. See p. 222.
- **Touring the Royal B.C. Museum:** One of the best small museums in the world, the Royal B.C. does exactly what a good regional museum should do—explain the region and its people. The First Nations galleries are breathtaking reminders of the richness of native culture. See p. 225.
- **Whale-Watching:** Of all the species of orcas (killer whales), those on the Washington and B.C. coasts are the only ones that live in large and complicated extended families. This makes Victoria a particularly good spot to whale-watch because the orcas travel in large, easy-to-find pods. There’s something magical about being out on the water and seeing a pod of 15 animals surface just a few hundred feet away. See “Whale-Watching” in chapter 14, p. 239.
- **Touring by Miniferry:** Catch a Victoria Harbour Ferry, and take a 45-minute tour around the harbor past the floating neighborhood of West Bay or up the gorge, where tidal waterfalls reverse direction with the changing tide. Moonlight tours depart every evening at sunset. See “Getting Around” in chapter 11, and “Organized Tours” in chapter 14.

- **Biking the Dallas Road:** Where else can you find a bike path by an ocean

with high mountain peaks for a backdrop? See p. 249.

3 The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences beyond Vancouver & Victoria

- **Skiing and Mountainbiking at Whistler Blackcomb Resort:** The two best resorts in North America merged in 1997 for a total of more than 200 runs on two adjoining mountains. In the summer, the same slopes become a world-class mountainbiking network. See chapter 18.
- **Ziptrekking at Whistler:** Once you're strapped into your safety harness and hooked onto cables suspended hundreds of feet above a wild river, leap off, and away you go. Safe for everyone from 8 to 80, Ziptrek is an exhilarating adventure you'll never forget. See p. 279.
- **Looking for Bald Eagles in Squamish:** The bald eagle is the

national symbol of the United States, but in winter, when the salmon are running, you can see more of these huge birds in Squamish than just about anywhere else in the world. See "Wildlife-Watching" in chapter 7, p. 141.

- **Discovering Pacific Rim National Park:** The drive to this rugged maritime park on Vancouver Island's west coast is stunning, and once there, you're in a world of old-growth temperate rainforests and surf-pounded beaches. It's a place where you can experience the primal glories of nature amid the pampering luxuries of a first-class resort. See chapter 18.

4 The Best Splurge Hotels: Vancouver

- **The Fairmont Hotel Vancouver** (900 W. Georgia St.; ☎ 800/441-1414 or 604/684-3131; www.fairmont.com): A landmark in the heart of Vancouver, this grand hotel was built by the Canadian Pacific Railway and opened in 1939. The château-style exterior, the lobby, and even the rooms—now thoroughly restored—are built in a style and on a scale reminiscent of the great European railway hotels. See p. 68.
- **Opus Hotel** (322 Davie St.; ☎ 866/642-6787 or 604/642-6787; www.opushotel.com): A contemporary boutique hotel that's cool without the attitude, Opus has an offbeat location in hip Yaletown, an array of room types, luscious room colors and finishes, and a luxurious but nontraditional aesthetic—plus good dining. See p. 69.
- **Pacific Palisades Hotel** (1277 Robson St.; ☎ 800/663-1815 or 604/688-0461; www.pacificpalisadeshotel.com): Large rooms decorated in apple greens and lemon yellows; a lobby of bold, bright colors; a scene restaurant; and thoughtful freebies like the use of yoga gear make this West End high-rise one of the top choices for hip hotel aficionados. See p. 76.
- **Pan Pacific Hotel Vancouver** (300-999 Canada Place; ☎ 800/937-1515 or 604/662-8111; www.panpacific.com): Perched atop the Canada Place cruise-ship terminal and convention center, the Pan Pacific features rooms with stunning water, mountain, and city views; a great health club and spa; and first-class service. See p. 70.
- **Wedgewood Hotel** (845 Hornby St.; ☎ 800/663-0666 or 604/689-7777;

www.wedgewoodhotel.com): The only boutique hotel in downtown, the Wedgewood is the most comfortably luxurious in that European style we

love so much. Fabulous marble-clad bathrooms and a cozy bar/restaurant invite relaxing and romancing. See p. 71.

5 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels: Vancouver

- **Coast Plaza Hotel & Suites** (1763 Comox St.; ☎ 800/663-1144 or 604/688-7711; www.coasthotels.com): A former high-rise apartment building, the Coast offers large rooms with walk-out balconies and marvelous English Bay views, right in the heart of the West End. See p. 78.
- **West End Guest House** (1362 Haro St.; ☎ 888/546-3327 or 604/681-2889; www.westendguesthouse.com): Built in 1905 by two Vancouver photographers, this highly regarded B&B in the thick of the West End is filled with the artists' work as well as an impressive collection of Victorian antiques. See p. 79.

6 The Best Splurge Hotels: Victoria

- **The Aerie** (600 Ebedora Lane, Malahat; ☎ 800/518-1933 or 250/743-7115; www.aerie.bc.ca): A red-tiled villa high atop Mount Malahat, this luxury accommodation features hand-carved king-size beds, massive wood-burning fireplaces, Jacuzzis, and a famed restaurant. Private terraces offer views across forested mountains to a long coastal fjord. See p. 204.
- **Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa** (849 Verdier Ave.; ☎ 888/544-2079 or 250/544-2079; www.brentwoodbaylodge.com): Every detail in the rooms and bathrooms is perfect at this small luxury resort overlooking a pristine fjord 20 minutes north of Victoria (plus the food is great). You can get treatments for two at the fabulous Essence of Life spa. See p. 204.
- **Delta Victoria Ocean Pointe Resort and Spa** (45 Songhees Rd.; ☎ 800/667-4677 or 250/360-2999; www.deltavictoria.com): The glass-fronted hotel lobby and harbor-facing rooms provide the best vantage point in Victoria for watching the lights of the legislature switch on. This comfortable hotel offers a host of services, including a calm, contemporary, Zen-like spa. See p. 192.
- **The Fairmont Empress** (721 Government St.; ☎ 800/441-1414 or 250/384-8111; www.fairmont.com/empress): Architect Francis Rattenbury's masterpiece, the landmark Empress on Victoria's Inner Harbour has charmed princes (and their princesses), potentates, movie stars, and the likes of you and me since 1908. The hotel's Willow Stream spa is a luxurious retreat. See p. 194.
- **Hotel Grand Pacific** (463 Belleville St.; ☎ 800/663-7550 or 250/386-0450; www.hotelgrandpacific.com): The rooms in this high-rise luxury hotel beside the harbor come with a full array of amenities, and the fully equipped fitness center offers aerobics classes, a 25m (82-ft.) ozonated indoor pool, a separate kids' pool, a weight room, sauna, whirlpool, and massage therapist. See p. 195.
- **Laurel Point Inn** (680 Montreal St.; ☎ 800/663-7667 or 250/386-8721; www.laurelpoint.com): With panoramic vistas of the harbor and an elegant, Japanese-influenced decor, this

is the place for design junkies and aficionados. See p. 196.

- **Sooke Harbour House** (1528 Whiffen Spit Rd., Sooke; ☎ 800/889-9688 or 250/642-3421; www.sookeharbour

house.com): In the little town of Sooke, just west of Victoria, this famed oceanside inn offers quiet West Coast elegance and an exceptional restaurant. See p. 206.

7 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels: Victoria

- **Admiral Inn** (257 Belleville St.; ☎ 888/823-6472 or 250/388-6267; www.admiral.bc.ca): Located on the edge of the Inner Harbour, the Admiral provides friendly service, free bikes, and the most reasonably priced harbor view around. See p. 197.
- **The Boathouse** (746 Sea Dr.; ☎ 866/654-9370 or 250/652-9370; www.members.shaw.ca/boathouse): If you're seeking tranquillity, privacy, and a memorable location, check out this one-room cottage created from a converted boathouse. Built in a secluded cove on Brentwood Bay, within rowing distance of Butchart Gardens, it features its own private dock and dinghy. See p. 204.
- **The Magnolia** (623 Courtney St.; ☎ 877/624-6654 or 250/381-0999; www.magnoliahotel.com): With its central location, elegant lobby, well-designed rooms, and large desks and

dataports, The Magnolia is Victoria's best spot for business travelers and those who want understated luxury at a reasonable price. See p. 200.

- **Royal Scot Suite Hotel** (425 Quebec St.; ☎ 800/663-7515 or 250/388-5463; www.royalscot.com): This family-friendly hotel occupies a converted apartment building and offers spacious suites that'll make you and yours feel comfortably at home. The suites come with fully equipped kitchens, and a video arcade and playroom are in the basement. See p. 197.
- **Swans Suite Hotel** (506 Pandora Ave.; ☎ 800/668-7926 or 250/361-3310; www.swanshotel.com): In the heart of the Old Town and just a block from the harbor, this newly refurbished boutique hotel is right above Swans Pub, one of the most pleasant restaurant/brewpubs in the city. See p. 200.

8 The Most Unforgettable Dining Experiences: Vancouver

- **C** (1600 Howe St.; ☎ 604/681-1164): The creativity of the chef, the quality of the ingredients, and the freshness of the seafood all combine to make this contemporary restaurant overlooking False Creek the best place in Vancouver for innovative seafood. See p. 86.
- **Cin Cin** (1154 Robson St.; ☎ 604/688-7338): For maximum buzz, dine at this Robson Street star on a Friday or Saturday night. It's a lively people-watching spot where the Italian menu is divided into Old World and New, and *tutto* tastes terrific. See p. 95.

- **Coast** (1257 Hamilton St.; ☎ 604/685-5010): "Catch it, cook it, eat it" is the motto of this superlative Yaletown restaurant. Fresh fish from around the world is cooked to elegant perfection in a beautiful space created with light wood and a dramatic center-island chef's kitchen. See p. 90.
- **Joe Fortes Seafood and Chop House** (777 Thurlow St.; ☎ 604/669-1940): In the heart of the Robson shopping area, Joe Fortes has the best oyster bar in town and prepares its fresh fish the old-fashioned way, without a lot of culinary intervention. See p. 91.

- **Lumière** (2551 W. Broadway; ☎ 604/739-8185): Lumière has often won the top spot in the yearly Vancouver restaurant awards. It's expensive but worth it to be pampered by chef Rob Feenie, the darling of the Vancouver food world and an increasingly hot commodity in New York. See p. 100.
- **Raincity Grill** (1193 Denman St.; ☎ 604/685-7337): Vancouver is loco for local fish, meat, produce, and wine. Raincity was one of the first and continues to be one of the best purveyors of fresh, locally sourced ingredients all assembled into dishes that show off the region's bounty, season by season. See p. 97.
- **Tojo's Restaurant** (1133 W. Broadway; ☎ 604/872-8050): The most sublime sushi in B.C., maybe in all of Canada. Just remember to take out an extra mortgage and practice your so-what-you're-a-movie-star-I-don't-care look. See p. 100.
- **West** (2881 Granville St.; ☎ 604/738-8938): For dazzling fine dining that utilizes the freshest local seasonal ingredients, you can't go wrong with this stellar restaurant in Kitsilano. It's the culinary highlight of the entire region. See p. 100.

9 The Most Unforgettable Dining Experiences: Victoria

- **The Aerie** (600 Ebedora Lane, Malahat; ☎ 800/518-1933 or 250/743-7115): Even if you're not staying at The Aerie, you might want to consider eating there, because chef Christophe Letard's cooking is as unmistakably French as his accent, and *très fantastique*. See p. 219.
- **SeaGrille** (Brentwood Bay Lodge, 849 Verdier Ave.; ☎ 888/544-2079 or 250/544-5100): The beautiful dining room of Brentwood Bay Lodge, about 20 minutes north of Victoria, serves a regionally inspired menu that changes daily according to what is fresh and in season. The wine list is exemplary, and so is the service. See p. 219.
- **Camille's** (45 Bastion Sq.; ☎ 250/381-3433): Enjoy a glass of fine wine as you savor the fresh, comforting Pacific Northwest cuisine at this quiet, cozy, candlelit restaurant in downtown Victoria. See p. 214.
- **The Fairmont Empress** (721 Government St.; ☎ 250/384-8111): If you're doing the high tea thing only once, you may as well do it right, and there's no better place than Victoria's hotel crown jewel, where the tea is delicious and the service impeccable. See p. 214.
- **Sooke Harbour House** (1528 Whiffen Spit Rd., Sooke; ☎ 800/889-9688 or 250/642-3421): Quality, freshness, inventiveness, and incredible attention to detail make this fabled inn the most memorable dining experience in (well, near) Victoria. It serves the best gifts from the sea and its own garden, and eating here is always a culinary adventure, well worth the money and the trip. See p. 219.

10 The Best Things to Do for Free (or Almost): Vancouver

You'll find more suggestions for free things to do in "The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences: Vancouver" section earlier in this chapter.

- **Walk the Stanley Park Seawall:** Or jog, blade, bike, skate, ride—whatever your favorite mode of transport is, use it, but by all means get out to

enjoy this superlative and super-exhilarating path at the water's edge. See p. 116.

- **Watch the Fireworks Explode over English Bay:** Every August during the July/August HSBC Celebration of Light, three international fireworks companies compete by launching their best displays over English Bay. As many as 500,000 spectators cram the beaches around English Bay, while those with boats sail out to watch from the water. See p. 23.
- **Stroll the Beach:** It doesn't matter which beach, there's one for every taste. Wreck Beach below the University of British Columbia is for nudists, Spanish Banks is for dog walkers, Jericho Beach is for volleyballers, Kitsilano Beach is for serious suntanning,

and English Bay Beach is for serious people-watching. See p. 134.

- **Picnic at the Lighthouse:** Everyone has their favorite picnic spot—one of the beaches or up on the mountains. One of the prettiest picnic spots is Lighthouse Park on the North Shore. Not only do you get to look back over at Vancouver, but the walk down to the rocky waterline runs through a pristine, old-growth rainforest. See p. 128.
- **Hike the North Shore:** The forests of the North Shore are at the edge of a great wilderness and only 20 minutes from the city. Step into a world of muted light and soaring cathedral-like spaces beneath the tree canopy. See “Hiking” in chapter 7, p. 138.

11 The Best Things to Do for Free (or Almost): Victoria

You'll find more suggestions for free things to do in “The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences: Victoria” section earlier in this chapter.

- **Climb Mount Douglas:** Actually, you don't even have to climb. Just drive up and walk around. The whole of the Saanich Peninsula lies at your feet. See p. 226.
- **Beachcomb:** Just find a beach, preferably a rocky one, and turn stuff over or poke through the tide pools.

The best beaches are along Highway 14A, starting with East Sooke Regional Park, and moving out to French Beach, China Beach, Mystic Beach, and, the very best of all, Botanical Beach Provincial Park, some 60km (37 miles) away by Port Renfrew. Remember to put the rocks back once you've had a peek. See “Beaches,” “Especially for Kids,” and “Watersports” in chapter 14.