

The Best of Vancouver & Victoria

The setting is majestic and the city is exciting so it's no wonder that **Vancouver** lures visitors from around the globe. The rest of the world has taken notice of the blessed life people in these parts lead, and 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, 2006, and 2007 as "Best City in the Americas." In 2003, the International Olympic Committee named Vancouver the host of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Heady stuff for a spot that less than 20 years ago was routinely derided as the world's biggest mill town. **Victoria**, British Columbia's capital city, exerts a siren call of its own. Located on the southeastern tip of Vancouver Island, a 90-minute ferry ride from Vancouver, Victoria is quieter and quaintier than Vancouver, but it offers all the amenities you need for a wonderful holiday.

1 THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES: VANCOUVER

- **Taking a Carriage Ride through Stanley Park:** One of the largest urban parks in the world, 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. 119.
- **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. 148.
- **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 7.
- **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. 122.
- **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 traditional Chinese herbalist. When you're tired of looking and listening, head inside to any one of a dozen restaurants to sample succulent

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.

Cantonese cooking. See chapter 9 and Walking Tour 2, p. 153.

- **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. 127.
- **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. 115.
- **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” on p. 139.
- **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. 123.
- **Crossing the Capilano Suspension Bridge:** Stretched across a deep forested canyon, high above trees and a rushing river, this pedestrian-only suspension bridge has been daring visitors to look down for more than 100 years. Now you can explore the giant trees, too, on a series of artfully constructed tree-walks. See p. 129.
- **Watching the Sunset from a Waterside Patio:** Why else live in a city with

such stunning views? Many places on False Creek, English Bay, and Coal

Harbour have great waterside 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. 259 and Walking Tour 1 in chapter 17.
- **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. 234.
- **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. 242.
- **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. See p. 245.
- **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 16, p. 257.
- **Discovering the Paintings of Emily Carr at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria:** If you didn't get to see of works by this great local artist at the Vancouver Art Gallery, you can view several canvases at the Art Gallery in Emily Carr's hometown. See p. 240.
- **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 13, and "Organized Tours" in chapter 16.
- **Biking the Dallas Road:** Where else can you find a bike path by an ocean with high mountain peaks for a backdrop? See p. 267.

3 THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES BEYOND VANCOUVER & VICTORIA

- **Skiing and Mountain Biking 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 mountain biking network. See chapter 12.

- **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. 203.
- **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 8, p. 145.

- **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 20.

4 THE BEST SPLURGE HOTELS: VANCOUVER

- **The Fairmont Hotel Vancouver** (900 W. Georgia St.; ☎ 800/441-1414 or 604/684-3131; www.fairmont.com): 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. 72.
- **Opus Hotel** (322 Davie St.; ☎ 866/642-6787 or 604/642-6787; www.opus-hotel.com): A boutique hotel that's cool without the attitude, Opus has an off-beat location in hip Yaletown, an array of room types, and a luxurious but nontraditional aesthetic—plus good dining. See p. 76.
- **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. 82.

- **Pan Pacific Vancouver Hotel** (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. 76.
- **Wedgewood Hotel** (845 Hornby St.; ☎ 800/663-0666 or 604/689-7777; www.wedgewoodhotel.com): The only boutique hotel in downtown, the Wedgewood is comfortably luxurious in that European style we love so much. Marble-clad bathrooms and a cozy bar/restaurant invite relaxing and romancing. See p. 78.

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. 84.

- **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. 84.

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. 225.
- **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. 225.
- **Delta Victoria Ocean Pointe Resort and Spa** (45 Songhees Rd.; ☎ 800/667-4677 or 250/360-2999; www.delta.victoria.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. 214.

- **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. 217.
- **Inn at Laurel Point** (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. 217.
- **Sooke Harbour House** (1528 Whiffen Spit Rd., Sooke; ☎ 800/889-9688 or 250/642-3421; www.sookeharbourhouse.com): In the little town of Sooke, just west of Victoria, this famed ocean-side inn offers quiet West Coast elegance and an exceptional restaurant. See p. 227.

7 THE BEST MODERATELY PRICED HOTELS: VICTORIA

- **Admiral Inn** (257 Belleville St.; ☎ 888/823-6472 or ☎/fax 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. 219.
- **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. 225.

- **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. 221.
- **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. 218.

- **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. 221.

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. 92.
- **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. 101.
- **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. 93.
- **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. 97.

- **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. 102.
- **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-if-you're-a-movie-star-I-don't-care look. See p. 105.
- **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. 105.

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. 238.
- **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. See p. 239.
- **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. 233.
- **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. 234.
- **Sooke Harbour House** (1528 Whiffen Spit Rd., Sooke; ☎ 800/889-9688 or 250/642-3421): Quality, 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. 239.

10 THE BEST THINGS TO DO FOR FREE (OR ALMOST): VANCOUVER

- **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. 119.
- **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. 36.
- **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. 139.
- **Picnic at the Lighthouse:** 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 also the walk down to the rocky waterline runs through a pristine, old-growth rainforest. See p. 134.
- **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 8, p. 142.

11 THE BEST THINGS TO DO FOR FREE (OR ALMOST): VICTORIA

- **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. 247.
- **Beachcomb:** Just find a beach, preferably a rocky one, and turn stuff over or poke through the tide pools. The best beaches are along Hwy. 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 16.