

The Best of British Columbia & the Canadian Rockies

British Columbia and the Canadian Rockies, which stretch across the provincial border into Alberta, are extravagantly scenic and quietly sophisticated. The diversity of landscapes is astounding: You'll travel from cactus-studded desert to soaring mountaintops and on to wilderness ocean beaches. You can visit traditional First Nations (Native Canadian) villages, thread through market stalls in the largest Chinese community outside of Asia, and cheer on cowboys at an old-fashioned rodeo.

As for creature comforts, British Columbia and the Rockies are famed for their luxury hotels, rustic guest ranches, quiet inns, and B&Bs. And the food? With Alberta beef, Pacific salmon, and some of the world's most fertile farm and orchard land, these two provinces champion excellent regional cuisine.

Finally, there's no better place to get outdoors and enjoy yourself. These areas are flush with ski resorts and golf courses, hiking is a near universal passion, and you'll find no better spot on earth to try your hand at adventure sports like sea kayaking, trail riding, or scuba diving.

This guide is chock-full of recommendations and tips to help you plan and enjoy your trip to western Canada; the following are the best of the best, places and experiences you won't want to miss.

1 THE BEST TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

- **Wandering Vancouver's West End:** Vancouver is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world, and wandering the streets, people-watching, and sipping cappuccinos at street cafes can fill an entire weekend. Stroll up Robson Street with its busy boutique-shopping scene, turn down cafe-lined Denman Street, then stride into 405-hectare (1,001-acre) Stanley Park, a gem of green space with old-growth cedars, miles of walkways, and the city's excellent aquarium. See chapter 5.
- **Taking Tea in Victoria:** Yeah, it's a little corny, but it's also fun—and delicious. Tea, scones, clotted cream—who said the British don't know good food? The afternoon tea at the Empress is world-renowned, a little stuffy, and very expensive; if that doesn't sound like fun to you, we'll show you other places where tea is more reasonably priced and a lot less formal. See chapter 6.
- **Ferrying through the Gulf Islands:** The Gulf Islands, a huddle of cliff-lined, forested islands between Vancouver Island and the British Columbia mainland, can be reached only via ferry. Hop from island to island, staying at excellent country inns and B&Bs; pedal the quiet farm roads on your bike, stopping to visit artists' studios or to quaff a pint in a cozy rural pub. The romantic getaway you've been dreaming of starts

and ends right here on these idyllic islands. See chapter 7.

- **Traveling the Inside Passage:** The 15-hour Inside Passage ferry cruise aboard the MV *Northern Adventure* takes you from Vancouver Island's Port Hardy along an otherwise inaccessible coastline north to Prince Rupert, near the southern tip of the Alaska Panhandle. Orcas swim past the ferry, bald eagles soar overhead, and the dramatic scenery—a narrow channel of water between a series of mountain islands and the craggy mainland—is utterly spectacular. See chapter 11.
- **Wine Tasting in the Okanagan Valley:** The Okanagan Valley in central British Columbia has some of the most arid climatic conditions in Canada, but with irrigation, grape varieties like merlot, cabernet sauvignon, and pinot blanc flourish here. Vineyards line the edges of huge, glacier-dug lakes and clamber up the steep desert-valley walls. Taste delicious wines, go for a swim, play

some golf, eat at excellent restaurants, and do it all again tomorrow. See chapter 13.

- **Skiiing the Canadian Rockies:** You can hit all three ski areas in Banff National Park with a one-price ticket, using the frequent shuttle buses to ferry you and your skis from resort to resort. The skiing is superlative, the scenery astounding, and—best of all—you can stay at Banff's luxury hotels for a fraction of their astronomical summer rates. See chapter 16.
- **Riding Herd at a Guest Ranch:** The edge of the Great Plains nudges up to the face of the Canadian Rockies in Alberta, making this some of the most fertile and beautiful ranching country anywhere. For more than a century, ranches have welcomed guests to their rustic lodges and cabins, offering trail rides, cattle drives, evening barbecues, and barn dances that'll keep you entertained whether you're a greenhorn or an old hand. See p. 381.

2 THE BEST ACTIVE VACATIONS

- **Hiking the West Coast Trail:** Hiking the entire length of the rugged 69km (43-mile) West Coast Trail, from Port Renfrew to Bamfield on Vancouver Island, takes 5 to 7 days, but it's truly the hike of a lifetime. This wilderness coastline, edged with old-growth forest and lined with cliffs, is utterly spectacular, and can be reached only on foot. If you're not up for it, consider an 11km (6¾-mile) day trip on the more easily accessible stretch just south of Bamfield. See p. 182.
- **Scuba Diving off Vancouver Island:** According to no less an authority than Jacques Cousteau, the waters off Vancouver Island offered some of the best diving in the world. And they still do. Nanaimo and Port Hardy are popular

departure points, with outfitters ready to drop you into the briny world of the wolf eel, yellow-edged cadlina, and giant Pacific octopus. See chapters 8 and 9.

- **Kayaking Clayoquot Sound:** Paddle a kayak for 4 or 5 days through the waters of Clayoquot Sound on Vancouver Island's wilderness west coast, from the funky former fishing village of Tofino to a natural hot-springs bath near an ancient Native village. Along the way, you'll see thousand-year-old trees and glaciers, whales, and bald eagles. See p. 188.
- **Salmon Fishing from Campbell River:** Even though salmon fishing is not what it once was, Campbell River is still the "Salmon-Fishing Capital of the

World.” Join a day trip with an outfitter and fish the waters of Discovery Passage. Get ready to hook the big one! Even if your trophy salmon gets away (or you’re required to release it), you’ll see plenty of wildlife: bald eagles, seals, even orcas and porpoises. See p. 207.

- **Rafting the Chilcotin and Fraser Rivers:** This 3-day white-water extravaganza flushes you from the slopes of the glaciated Coast Range down through shadowy canyons to the roiling waters of the mighty Fraser River, second in North America only to the Columbia River in power and size. A number of outfitters in Williams Lake offer river options ranging from half-day thrill rides to multiday trips with catered camping. See p. 279.
- **Canoeing Bowron Lakes Provincial Park:** Every summer, canoeists and kayakers set out to navigate a perfect 120km (75-mile) circle of six alpine lakes, with minimal portages in between. There are no roads or other signs of civilization beyond the launch point, except some well-placed cabins, campsites, and shelters. The full circuit is a 7-day trip, but the memories will last a lifetime. See p. 284.
- **Mountain Biking the Kettle Valley Rail Trail:** This rails-to-trails hiking and biking route travels from Okanagan Lake up and over Okanagan Mountain

and Myra Canyon, crossing 17 trestles and traversing two tunnels on its 175km (109-mile) route. The entire circuit, which takes from 3 to 5 days, provides lots of challenging grades and excellent scenery. See p. 299.

- **Heli-Skiing near Golden:** Helicopters lift adventurous skiers to the tops of the Selkirk and Purcell mountains that rise just west of Golden, accessing acres of virgin powder far from the lift lines and crowds of traditional ski resorts. **CMH Heli-Skiing** (☎ 800/661-0252) offers a variety of holidays, most based out of its private high-country lodges and reached only by helicopter. See p. 322.
- **Cross-Country Skiing at Canmore:** The 1988 Olympic cross-country skiing events were held at Canmore, on the edge of Banff National Park. The routes at the **Canmore Nordic Centre** (☎ 403/678-2400) are now open to the public and offer 70km (43 miles) of world-class skiing. See p. 379.
- **Lodge-to-Lodge Trail Riding in Banff National Park:** See the park’s back-country without getting blisters on your feet. Instead, get saddle-sore as you ride horseback on a 3-day excursion, spending the nights in remote but comfortable mountain lodges. **Warner Guiding and Outfitting** (☎ 800/661-8352) provides all meals and lodging, plus oats for Silver. See p. 385.

3 THE BEST NATURE- & WILDLIFE-VIEWING

- **Tide Pools at Botanical Beach near Port Renfrew:** Waves have eroded potholes in the thrust of sandstone that juts into the Pacific at Botanical Beach, which remain water-filled when the waves ebb. Alive with starfish, sea anemones, hermit crabs, and hundreds of other sea creatures, these potholes are some of the best places on Vancouver Island to explore the rich intertidal zone. See p. 152.
- **Bald Eagles near Victoria:** Just a few miles north of Victoria is one of the world’s best bald eagle-spotting sites: Goldstream Provincial Park. Recent counts put the number of eagles wintering here at around 4,000. (Jan is the best month for viewing, though there are eagles here year-round.) See p. 155.
- **Gray Whales at Pacific Rim National Park:** Few sights in nature match

observing whales in the wild. March is the prime viewing time, as the whales migrate north from their winter home off Mexico. During March, both Tofino and Ucluelet celebrate the Pacific Rim Whale Festival; outfitters offer whale-watching trips out onto the Pacific. See chapter 8.

- **Orcas at Robson Bight:** From whale-watching boats out of Telegraph Cove or Port McNeill, watch orcas (killer whales) as they glide through the Johnstone Strait in search of salmon, and rub their tummies on the pebbly beaches at Vancouver Island's Robson Bight. See p. 216.
- **Spawning Salmon at Adams River:** Every October, the Adams River fills with salmon, returning to their home water to spawn and die. While each autumn produces a large run of salmon, every fourth year (the next is 2010), an estimated 1.5 to 2 million sockeye salmon struggle upstream to spawn in the Adams River near Squilax. Roderick Haig-Brown Provincial Park has viewing platforms and interpretive programs. See p. 286.
- **Songbirds and Waterfowl at the Columbia River Wetlands:** Between Golden and Windermere, the Colum-

bia River flows through a valley filled with fluvial lakes, marshes, and streams—perfect habitat for hundreds of species, including moose and coyotes. Protected as a wildlife refuge, the wetlands are on the migratory flyway that links Central America to the Arctic; in spring and fall, the waterways fill with thousands of birds—over 270 different species. Outfitters in Golden operate float trips through the wetlands. See p. 323.

- **Elk in Banff National Park:** You won't need to mount an expedition to sight elk in Banff: They graze in the city parks and on people's front lawns. To see these animals in their own habitat, take the Fenlands Trail just west of Banff to Vermillion Lakes, another favorite grazing area. See chapter 16.
- **Black Bears in Waterton Lakes National Park:** There are black bears throughout the Canadian west, but chances are good you'll spot a bear or two along the entry road to Waterton Lakes National Park, where the open grasslands of the prairies directly abut the sheer faces of the Rocky Mountains. (Remember, bears were originally prairie animals.) See p. 417.

4 THE BEST FAMILY-VACATION EXPERIENCES

- **The Beaches near Parksville and Qualicum Beach:** The sandy beaches near these towns warm in the summer sun, then heat the waters of Georgia Strait when the tides return. Some of the warmest ocean waters in the Pacific Northwest are here, making for good swimming and family vacations. See chapter 8.
- **The MV *Lady Rose* (☎ 800/663-7192):** This packet steamer delivers mail and merchandise to isolated

marine communities along the otherwise inaccessible Alberni Inlet, the longest fjord on Vancouver Island's rugged west coast. Along the way, you may spot eagles, bears, and porpoises. The MV *Lady Rose* is large enough to be stable, yet small enough to make this daylong journey from Port Alberni to Bamfield and back seem like a real adventure. See p. 181.

- **The Okanagan Lakes:** Sunny weather, sandy lake beaches, and miles of clean,

clear water: If this sounds like the ideal family vacation, then head to the lake-filled Okanagan Valley. Penticton and Kelowna have dozens of family-friendly hotels, watersports rentals, and lakeside parks and beaches. Mom and Dad can enjoy the golf and wineries as well. See chapter 13.

- **Fort Steele Heritage Town** (☎ 250/426-7352): Once a 19th-century frontier boomtown turned ghost town, Fort Steele again bustles with life. Now a provincial heritage site, the town has been rebuilt, other historic structures have been moved in, and daily activities with living-history actors give this town a real feel of the Old West. See p. 327.
- **Fort Calgary Historic Park** (☎ 403/290-1875): This reconstruction of the Mountie fort on the banks of the Bow River—and the genesis for the city of Calgary—has always been interesting, as volunteers have been in the process of rebuilding the original fort. In the last couple years, critical mass has been reached and new/old Fort Calgary is really taking shape: It's gone from a good idea to a great attraction. But what's really cool is that the labor has been volunteer and that all the work was done using tools and techniques

from the 1880s. Take the kids and give them a lesson in history and volunteerism! See p. 344.

- **The Kicking Horse River:** One of the best white-water rafting trips in the Rockies is on the Kicking Horse River near Golden. While it's the treacherous Class IV rapids that give the river its fame, there are also stretches gentle enough for the entire family. Better yet, most outfitters run simultaneous trips on both sections of the river, so part of your brood can run the rapids while the other enjoys a leisurely float through lovely Rocky Mountain scenery. See p. 323.
- **West Edmonton Mall** (☎ 800/661-8890): Okay, so it's a mall. But what a mall! Within its 483,000 sq. m (5.2 million sq. ft.) are 800 stores and a mammoth entertainment center that contains a complete amusement park, roller coaster, bungee-jumping platform, and lake-size swimming pool with real sand beaches and rolling waves. You can also ice-skate, watch performing dolphins, ride a submarine, attend movies at 19 theaters—oh, and get your shopping done, too. See p. 360.

5 NATIVE CANADIAN CULTURE & HISTORY

- **Quw'utsun' Cultural Centre** (Duncan; ☎ 877/746-8119): North of Victoria, this facility contains a theater, carving shed, ceremonial clan house, restaurant, and art gallery, all dedicated to preserving traditional Cowichan history and culture. Try to visit when the tribe is preparing a traditional salmon bake. See p. 158.
- **Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre** (formerly the Kwakiutl Museum and Cultural Center, Quadra Island;

☎ 250/285-3733): To the Native peoples along the Northwest coast, the potlatch was one of the most important ceremonies, involving the reenactment of clan myths and ritual gift giving. When Canadian officials banned the potlatch in the 1920s, the centuries-old costumes, masks, and artifacts of the Kwagiulth tribe were confiscated and sent to museums in eastern Canada and England. When the items were repatriated in the early 1990s, the tribe built this handsome museum to showcase

this incredible collection of Native art. See p. 210.

- **Alert Bay** (off Vancouver Island): One of the best-preserved and still vibrant Native villages in western Canada, Alert Bay is a short ferry ride from northern Vancouver Island. Totem poles face the waters, and cedar-pole longhouses are painted with traditional images and symbols. The **U'mista Cultural Centre** (☎ 250/974-5403) contains a collection of carved masks, baskets, and potlatch ceremonial objects. See p. 218.
- **Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve** (Queen Charlotte Islands): A UNESCO World Heritage Site and a Canadian national park, this is the ancient homeland of the Haida people. Located on the storm-lashed Queen Charlottes, it isn't easy or cheap to get to: You'll need to kayak, sail, or fly in on a floatplane. But once here, you'll get to visit the prehistoric village of Ninstints, abandoned hundreds of years ago and still shadowed by decaying totem poles. See p. 258.
- **'Ksan Historical Village** (Hazelton; ☎ 877/842-5518): The Gitksan people have lived for millennia at the confluence of the Skeena and Bulkley rivers, hunting and spearing salmon from the waters. On the site of an ancient village near present-day Hazelton, the Gitksan have built a pre-Contact replica village, complete with longhouses and totem poles. No ordinary tourist gimmick, the village houses a 4-year carving school, Native-art gift shop, traditional-dance performance space, artists' studios, restaurant, and visitor center. See p. 263.
- **Secwepemc Museum & Heritage Park** (Kamloops; ☎ 250/828-9801): This heritage preserve contains a Native Secwepemc village archaeological site from 2,400 years ago, plus re-creations of village structures from five different eras. It's not all just history here: The Shuswap, as the Secwepemc are now called, also perform traditional songs and dances and sell art objects. See p. 286.

6 THE BEST MUSEUMS & HISTORIC SITES

- **Museum of Anthropology** (Vancouver; ☎ 604/822-5087): Built to resemble a traditional longhouse, this splendid museum on the University of British Columbia campus contains one of the finest collections of Northwest Native art in the world. Step around back to visit two traditional longhouses. See p. 84.
- **Royal British Columbia Museum** (Victoria; ☎ 888/447-7977): The human and natural history of coastal British Columbia is the focus of this excellent museum. Visit a frontier main street, view lifelike dioramas of coastal ecosystems, and gaze at ancient artifacts of the First Nations peoples. Outside, gaze upward at the impressive collection of totem poles. See p. 119.
- **The Museum at Campbell River** (Campbell River; ☎ 250/287-3103): The highlight of this regional museum is a multimedia presentation that retells a First Nations myth using carved ceremonial masks. Afterward, explore the extensive collection of contemporary aboriginal carving, then visit a fur trapper's cabin and see tools from a pioneer-era sawmill. See p. 206.
- **North Pacific Historic Fishing Village** (Port Edward; ☎ 250/628-3538): Located on the waters of Inverness Passage, this isolated salmon cannery built an entire working community of 1,200 people—complete with homes, churches, and stores—on boardwalks and piers. Now a national historic site, the mothballed factory is open for

tours, and you can even spend a night at the old hotel. See p. 251.

- **Fort St. James National Historic Site** (Vanderhoof; ☎ 250/996-7191): In summer, the rebuilt log Fort St. James trading post hums with activity, as actors play the roles of explorers, traders, and craftspeople. This open-air museum of frontier life is a replica of the first non-Native structure in British Columbia, constructed in 1806. See p. 266.
- **Barkerville** (83km/52 miles east of Quesnel; ☎ 250/994-3332): Once the largest city west of Chicago and north of San Francisco—about 100,000 people passed through during the

1860s—the gold-rush town of Barker-ville is one of the best-preserved ghost towns in Canada. Now a provincial park, it comes to life in summer, when costumed “townspeople” go about their frontier way of life amid a completely restored late-Victorian pioneer town. See p. 283.

- **Glenbow Museum** (Calgary; ☎ 403/268-4100): One of Canada’s finest museums, the Glenbow has fascinating displays on the Native and settlement history of the Canadian Great Plains, plus changing art shows and thematic exhibitions. The gift shop is a good place to find local crafts. See p. 344.

7 THE MOST SCENIC VIEWS

- **Vancouver from Cloud Nine** (☎ 604/662-8328): Situated on the top floor of one of the tallest hotels in Vancouver, towering 42 floors above the city, the rotating restaurant/lounge Cloud Nine has 360-degree views that go on forever. See p. 100.
- **The Canadian Rockies from Eagle’s Eye Restaurant** (☎ 250/344-8626): The Kicking Horse Mountain Resort isn’t just one of the newest skiing areas in the Canadian Rockies. This exciting development also boasts the highest-elevation restaurant in all of Canada. The Eagle’s Eye sits at the top of the slopes, 2,410m (7,907 ft.) above sea level. Ascend the gondola to find eye-popping views of high-flying glaciated crags—and excellent cuisine. See p. 325.
- **Calgary Tower** (☎ 403/266-7171): At 191m (627 ft.), this is one landmark that you’ll want to get on top of. From the windows of this revolving watchtower, you’ll see the face of the Rocky Mountains to the west and the endless prairies to the east. If you like the view, stay for dinner or a drink. See p. 342.
- **Sulphur Mountain in Banff National Park**: Ride the gondola up to the top of Sulphur Mountain for tremendous views of the cliff-faced mountains that frame Banff. Hike the ridge-top trails, have lunch in the coffee shop, or fill your camera’s memory chip with shots of ground squirrels and glaciers. See p. 387.
- **Moraine Lake in Banff National Park**: Ten snow-clad peaks towering more than 3,000m (9,843 ft.) rear up dramatically behind this tiny, eerily green lake. Rent a canoe and paddle to the mountains’ bases. See p. 396.
- **Waterton Lakes from the Garden Court Restaurant at the Prince of Wales Hotel** (☎ 403/859-2231): There are lots of great views of the Canadian Rockies, but perhaps the most singular is the view from the Prince of Wales Hotel, high above Waterton Lake. With blue-green water stretching back between a series of rugged snow-capped peaks, the view is at once intimate and primeval. See p. 420.

8 THE MOST DRAMATIC DRIVES

- **The Sea-to-Sky Highway:** Officially Hwy. 99, this drive is a lesson in geology. Starting in West Vancouver, the amazing route begins at sea level at Howe Sound and the Squamish Cliffs—sheer rock faces rising hundreds of feet—then up a narrowing fjord, climbing up to Whistler, near the crest of the rugged, glacier-clad Coast Mountains. Continue over the mountains and drop onto Lillooet. Here, on the dry side of the mountains, is an arid plateau trenched by the rushing Fraser River. See p. 228.
- **The Sunshine Coast:** Hwy. 101 follows the mainland British Columbia coast from West Vancouver, crossing fjords and inlets twice on ferries on its way to Powell River. On the east side rise the soaring peaks of the Coast Mountains, and to the west lap the waters of the Georgia Strait, with the green bulk of Vancouver Island rising in the middle distance. From Powell River, you can cross over to Vancouver Island on the BC Ferries service to Comox. See chapter 8.
- **Williams Lake to Bella Coola:** Start at the ranching town of Williams Lake, and turn your car west toward the looming Coast Mountains. Hwy. 20 crosses the arid Fraser River plateau, famed for its traditional cattle ranches, until reaching the high country near Anaheim Lake. After edging through 1,500m (4,921-ft.) Heckman Pass, the route descends what the locals simply call “The Hill”: a 32km (20-mile) stretch of road that drops from the pass to sea level with gradients of 18%. The road terminates at Bella Coola on the Pacific, where summer-only ferries depart for Port Hardy on northern Vancouver Island. See p. 280.
- **The Icefields Parkway** (Hwy. 93 through Banff and Jasper national parks): This is one of the world’s grandest mountain drives. On a road trip back to the ice ages, you’ll climb past glacier-notched peaks to the Columbia Icefields, a sprawling cap of snow, ice, and glacier at the very crest of the Rockies. See p. 399.

9 THE BEST WALKS & RAMBLES

- **Vancouver’s Stanley Park Seawall:** Stroll, jog, run, blade, bike, skate, ride—whatever your favorite mode of transport is, use it, but by all means get out here and explore this wonderful park. See p. 89.
- **Victoria’s Inner Harbour:** Watch the boats and aquatic wildlife come and go while walking along a pathway that winds past manicured gardens. The best stretch runs south from the Inner Harbour near the Parliament Buildings, past the Royal London Wax Museum. See chapter 6.
- **Strathcona Provincial Park:** Buttle Lake, which lies at the center of Strathcona Provincial Park, is the hub of several hiking trails that climb through old-growth forests to misty waterfalls and alpine meadows. Return to the trailhead, doff your hiking shorts, and skinny-dip in gem-blue Buttle Lake. See p. 212.
- **Johnston Canyon in Banff National Park:** Just 24km (15 miles) west of Banff, Johnston Creek cuts a deep, very narrow canyon through limestone cliffs. The trail winds through tunnels, passes

waterfalls, edges by shaded rock faces, and crosses the chasm on footbridges before reaching a series of iridescent pools, formed by springs that bubble up through highly colored rock. See p. 384.

- **Plain of Six Glaciers Trail in Banff National Park:** From Chateau Lake Louise, a trail rambles along the edge of emerald-green Lake Louise, then climbs up to the base of Victoria Glacier. At a rustic teahouse, you can order a cup of

tea and scones—each served up from a wood-fired stove—and gaze up at the rumpled face of the glacier. See p. 396.

- **Maligne Canyon in Jasper National Park:** As the Maligne River cascades from its high mountain valley to its appointment with the Athabasca River, it carves a narrow, deep chasm in the underlying limestone. Spanned by six footbridges, the canyon is laced with trails and interpretive sites. See p. 401.

10 THE BEST LUXURY HOTELS & RESORTS

- **The Fairmont Hotel Vancouver** (Vancouver; ☎ 800/441-1414): Built by the Canadian Pacific Railway on the site of two previous Hotel Vancouvers, this landmark opened in 1929. The chateau-style exterior, the lobby, and even the guest rooms—now thoroughly restored—are built in a style and on a scale reminiscent of the great European railway hotels. See p. 68.
- **The Fairmont Empress** (Victoria; ☎ 800/441-1414): Architect Francis Rattenbury's masterpiece, the Empress has charmed princes (and their princesses), potentates, and movie moguls since 1908. If there's one hotel in Canada that represents a vision of bygone graciousness and class, this is it. See p. 109.
- **Hastings House Country House Hotel** (Salt Spring Island; ☎ 800/661-9255): This farm matured into a country manor and was then converted into a luxury inn. The manor house is now an acclaimed restaurant; the barn and farmhouse have been remade into opulent suites. You might feel like you've been transported to an idealized English estate, if it weren't for those wonderful views of the Pacific. See p. 142.
- **Poets Cove Resort and Spa** (South Pender Island; ☎ 888/512-7638): Poets Cove may be on a remote bay on a rural island, but don't let the isolation fool you. New and dazzling, the resort has beautifully furnished rooms, villas, and cottages, all overlooking a peaceful harbor. The spa, restaurant, and facilities are absolutely first class. See p. 149.
- **The Wickaninnish Inn** (Tofino; ☎ 800/333-4604): Standing stalwart in the forest above the sands of Chesterman Beach, this log, stone, and glass structure boasts incredible views over the Pacific and extremely comfortable luxury-level guest rooms. The dining room is equally superlative. See p. 192.
- **Four Seasons Resort Whistler** (Whistler; ☎ 888/935-2460 or 604/935-3400): This grand—even monumental—hotel is the classiest place to stay in Whistler, which is saying something. This is a hotel with many moods, from the Wagnerian scale of the stone-lined lobby to the precise gentility of the guest rooms to the faint and welcome silliness of the tiled and backlit stone fixtures of the restaurant. This is a hotel that's not afraid to make big statements. See p. 238.
- **Grand Okanagan Lakefront Resort** (Kelowna; ☎ 800/465-4651): You can't get much closer to Okanagan Lake than this marina-fronted hotel, and you won't find more luxurious lodgings either, particularly the new **Royal Private Villas**. In their own building, these

sumptuous guest units are essentially luxury apartments, with access to a private rooftop infinity pool. See p. 308.

- **The Fairmont Palliser** (Calgary; ☎ 800/441-1414): Calgary's landmark historic hotel, the Palliser is permeated with good breeding and high style. The magnificent lobby looks like an Edwardian gentlemen's club, and the guest rooms are large and luxurious. See p. 346.
- **Fairmont Hotel Macdonald** (Edmonton; ☎ 800/441-1414): When the Canadian Pacific bought and refurbished this landmark hotel, all of the charming period details were preserved, and the inner workings were modernized and brought up to snuff. The result is an elegant but still-friendly small hotel. From the tuxedoed bellman to the gargoyles on the walls, this is a real class act. See p. 362.
- **Rimrock Resort Hotel** (Banff; ☎ 800/661-1587): Banff is known for its scenery and its high prices; this is one of the few luxury hotels whose rates are actually justified. New and architecturally

dramatic, it steps nine stories down a steep mountain slope. A fantastic marble lobby, great restaurant, and handsomely appointed bedrooms complete the package. See p. 391.

- **The Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise** (Lake Louise; ☎ 800/441-1414): First of all, there's the view: Across a tiny gem-green lake rise massive cliffs, shrouded in glacial ice. And then there's the hotel: Part hunting lodge, part palace, the Chateau is its own community, with sumptuous boutiques, sports-rental facilities, nine dining areas, and beautifully furnished guest rooms. See p. 397.
- **Post Hotel** (Lake Louise; ☎ 800/661-1586): Quietly gracious hospitality in a dramatic Canadian Rockies setting is the hallmark of this luxurious lodge. The original log-built dining room and bar remain from the 1940s, now joined by a new hotel wing with extremely comfortable and beautifully furnished rooms. The "F" suites are the most desirable. See p. 398.

11 THE BEST B&BS & COUNTRY INNS

- **West End Guest House** (Vancouver; ☎ 604/681-2889): This 1906 heritage home is filled with an impressive collection of Victorian antiques. Fresh-baked brownies accompany evening turn-down service, and the staff is thoroughly professional. See p. 72.
- **Andersen House Bed & Breakfast** (Victoria; ☎ 250/388-4565): Your hosts outfit their venerable 1891 Queen Anne home in only the latest decor, from raku sculptures to carved-wood African masks. Their taste is impeccable—the old place looks great. See p. 110.
- **Old Farmhouse B&B** (Salt Spring Island; ☎ 250/537-4113): The Old

Farmhouse is an 1894 farmstead with a newly built guesthouse. The welcome you'll get here is as engaging and genuine as you'll ever receive, and the breakfasts are works of art. See p. 143.

- **Galiano Oceanfront Inn & Spa** (Galiano Island; ☎ 877/530-3939): Combine a magical island view, a wonderfully inventive restaurant, a full-service spa, plus luxury-level rooms, and you get this very handsome inn. Flanked by gardens and filled with major Northwest Native art, the Galiano Inn wears its high style very comfortably. See p. 146.
- **Oceanwood Country Inn** (Mayne Island; ☎ 250/539-5074): Overlooking

Navy Channel, this inn offers top-notch lodgings and fine dining in one of the most extravagantly scenic locations on the West Coast. Admirably, the inn maintains an array of prices ranging from affordable and cozy garden-view rooms to luxury-level suites that open onto hot-tub decks and hundred-mile views. See p. 148.

- **Fairburn Farm Culinary Retreat & Guesthouse** (Duncan; ☎ 250/746-4637): This rambling farmhouse B&B sits amid some of the most bountiful farmland in Canada—so start cooking. This unusual operation is part culinary school, part country inn, and part pilgrimage site for Slow Food—movement devotees. Come here for the comfy guest rooms, and stay for the *terroir*. See p. 160.
- **Urban Villa** (Kelowna; ☎ 866/961-2220): This swank guesthouse is just a stroll from Lake Okanagan beaches and minutes from the crush of downtown Kelowna. You get the hands-on attentiveness of a B&B but without the fuss. Plus, the decor and fittings match those of a top-end hotel. See p. 309.
- **Mulvehill Creek Wilderness Inn and Bed & Breakfast** (Revelstoke; ☎ 877/837-8649): Equidistant to a waterfall and Arrow Lake, this remote inn in the forest has everything going for it: nicely decorated rooms with locally made pine furniture, a beautiful lounge with

fireplace, decks to observe the pool and garden, and gracious hosts who exemplify Swiss hospitality. Swimming, boating, fishing—it's all here, even a wedding chapel. See p. 317.

- **Vagabond Lodge** (Golden; ☎ 866/944-2622): Right at the base of the lifts at Kicking Horse Mountain Resort, this log lodge is more of a small boutique hotel, except with lots of Western-style friendliness. With log-built furniture and an enormous stone fireplace, the Vagabond looks right out of a North Woods fantasy, except for the fastidious level of comfort in the guest rooms. See p. 325.
- **Union Bank Inn** (Edmonton; ☎ 780/423-3600): Not quite a B&B, not quite a hotel, the absolutely charming Union Bank Inn is something in between. Right downtown, this marble-faced 1910 bank sat vacant for many years before being redeveloped as an inn and restaurant. Each bedroom was individually decorated by one of Edmonton's top interior designers. See p. 365.
- **Thea's House** (Banff; ☎ 403/762-2499): A vision of stone, pine, and antique carpets, Thea's is a newly built bed-and-breakfast just 5 minutes from downtown Banff. "Elegant Alpine" is Thea's style, a cross between a log lodge and a vision out of *Architectural Digest*. Perfect for a romantic getaway. See p. 391.

12 THE BEST RUSTIC ACCOMMODATIONS: LODGES, WILDERNESS RETREATS & LOG-CABIN RESORTS

- **Tigh-Na-Mara Resort Hotel** (Parksville; ☎ 800/663-7373): Comfortably rustic log cabins in a forest at beach's edge: Tigh-Na-Mara has been welcoming families for decades, and the new luxury log suites are just right for romantic getaways. See p. 179.
- **Strathcona Park Lodge** (Strathcona Provincial Park; ☎ 250/286-3122): A summer camp for the whole family is what you'll find at Strathcona Park Lodge, with rustic lakeside cabins and guided activities that range from sea

kayaking and fishing to rock climbing and mountaineering. See p. 214.

- **Rockwater Secret Cove Resort** (Half Moon Bay; ☎ 877/296-4593): Stroll the boardwalk above the waters of the Strait of Georgia to your platform tent—filled with all the luxuries of a high-end hotel room. “Glamour Camping” is all the vogue, and it’s hard to imagine a more scenic locale to rediscover tenting joys, particularly from the resort’s outdoor “spa without walls.” See p. 227.
- **Buffalo Mountain Lodge** (Banff; ☎ 800/661-1367): Rustic charm meets upscale comfort on the Tunnel Mountain bluff behind Banff. Buffalo Mountain Lodge is centered on a large, handsome log lodge building with an intimate fireplace-dominated bar and elegant dining room. The woodsy, holiday-card-perfect atmosphere extends to the guest rooms, with fireplaces, slate-tiled bathrooms, and balconies overlooking the forests. Definitely worth the splurge. See p. 390.
- **Tekarra Lodge** (Jasper; ☎ 888/962-2522): Quaint little cabins ring a central lodge building at this well-loved getaway. The cabins are atmospherically rustic; best of all, you’re a mile distant from Jasper’s busy town center. See p. 408.
- **Becker’s Chalets** (Jasper; ☎ 780/852-3779): These very attractive new cabins are set right along the Athabasca River. Some units are as large as houses. Jasper’s best restaurant is here as well. See p. 407.
- **Overlander Mountain Lodge** (Jasper East; ☎ 877/866-2330): Forget the wildly overpriced rooms in Jasper Townsite and stay here, just .5km (½ mile) outside the park gates. Lovely new cabins plus a handsome older lodge with a good restaurant make this an in-the-know favorite. See p. 409.
- **The Emerald Lake Lodge** (Yoho National Park; ☎ 800/663-6336): Location, location, location: Sumptuous lakeside cabins at the base of the Continental Divide make this a longtime favorite family-vacation spot. See p. 415.

13 THE BEST NORTHWEST REGIONAL CUISINE

See “A Taste of British Columbia & the Canadian Rockies,” in chapter 2, for more information on the style of cuisine unique to this region.

- **West** (Vancouver; ☎ 604/738-8938): In a sleek, jewel-box dining room, absolutely fabulous West starts with classic techniques and the finest Pacific seafood, fish, and other regional ingredients to provide an up-to-the-second dining experience. Book the “chef’s table” in the kitchen to watch the chefs at work. See p. 79.
- **The Blue Crab Bar and Grill** (Victoria; ☎ 250/480-1999): You might think that the food would have a hard time competing with the view at this restaurant in the Coast Hotel, but you’d be wrong. The creative chef serves up the freshest seafood, the presentation is beautiful, and the dishes are outstanding. See p. 113.
- **Sooke Harbour House** (Sooke; ☎ 250/642-3421): This small country inn has one of the most noted restaurants in all of Canada. Fresh regional cuisine is the specialty, with an emphasis on local seafood. Views over the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Washington’s mighty Olympic Mountains are spectacular, nearly matching the wine list. See p. 153.
- **Masthead Restaurant** (Cowichan Bay; ☎ 250/748-3714): Sitting above a

- busy marina, with islands and mountains rising in the distance, the Masthead's views are mesmerizing and its trappings—the century-old clapboard structure was built as a fine hotel—are charming. But the food here is absolutely up-to-date, an exploration of Vancouver Island's rich *terroir*. See p. 162.
- **Shelter** (Tofino; ☎ 250/725-3353): Fine dining in Tofino has always been synonymous with the Pointe, the wonderful restaurant at the Wickaninnish Inn. But the tourist boom in Tofino created an explosion of fantastic new places in this remote corner of Vancouver Island. Check out Shelter for its youthful vigor and absolutely fresh and authentic flavors—everything is right off the boat or just off the land. See p. 193.
 - **Araxi Restaurant & Bar** (Whistler; ☎ 604/932-4540): A longtime Whistler favorite that just keeps on getting better. Chef James Walt is capable of gastronomic alchemy, producing dishes that are inventive yet tradition-based and full of flavor. Choose one of the tasting menus; then face the wondrous stupefaction by selecting something delicious from the 12,000-bottle wine inventory. See p. 243.
 - **Bearfoot Bistro** (Whistler; ☎ 604/932-3433): The food scene in Whistler is extremely dynamic, as you'd expect at North America's top ski resort and recent Olympic host. To get noticed amid Whistler's many restaurants requires something special—and Bearfoot Bistro's got it. With very inventive food served in three- or five-course meals, this is like having a cutting-edge Iron Chef in charge of your dinner. See p. 243.
 - **All Seasons Café** (Nelson; ☎ 250/352-0101): Innovative preparations and rich, hearty flavors are the hallmarks of the cuisine at this superlative restaurant in a downtown Nelson heritage home. Food this stylish and up-to-date would pass muster anywhere; to find it in Nelson is astonishing. See p. 333.
 - **Belvedere** (Calgary; ☎ 403/265-9595): The moody, noirish atmosphere of this elegant fine-dining room lights up when the food arrives: Easily one of western Canada's top restaurants, Belvedere offers an inventive dining experience focused on Pan-Canadian ingredients and impeccable French-by-way-of-Tokyo technique. See p. 350.
 - **River Café** (Calgary; ☎ 403/261-7670): You'll walk through a quiet, tree-filled park on an island in the Bow River to reach this bustling place. At the restaurant's center, an immense wood-fired oven and grill produce smoky grilled meats and vegetables, all organically grown and freshly harvested. On warm evenings, picnickers loll in the grassy shade. See p. 351.
 - **Hardware Grill** (Edmonton; ☎ 780/423-0969): Although located in one of Edmonton's first hardware stores, there's nothing antique about the food at the Hardware Grill. A very broad selection of inventive appetizers makes it fun to snack your way through dinner. See p. 366.
 - **Maple Leaf Grille & Spirits** (Banff; ☎ 403/760-7680): In a soaring, two-story dining room that's at once rustic and classy, the Maple Leaf serves up Banff's most sophisticated mountain cuisine. The menu focuses on regional ingredients, fresh preparations, and a friendly unstuffy welcome that lets you relax into having a great time with inventive, delicious food. See p. 394.

14 THE BEST FESTIVALS & SPECIAL EVENTS

- **Vancouver's Three F Festivals:** The Folk, the Fringe, and the Film are the three F's in question. The Folk Fest (p. 33) brings folk and world-beat music to a waterfront stage in Jericho Park. The setting is gorgeous, the music great, and the crowd something else. Far more urban is the Fringe (604/637-6380; www.vancouverfringe.com), a festival of new and original plays that takes place in the arty Commercial Drive area. The plays are wonderfully inventive; better yet, they're short and cheap. In October, the films of the world come to the Vancouver International Film Festival (www.viff.org). Serious film buffs buy a pass and see all 500 flicks (or as many as they can before their eyeballs fall out).
- **Celebration of Light** (Vancouver): This 3-night fireworks extravaganza takes place over English Bay in Vancouver. Three of the world's leading fireworks manufacturers are invited to represent their countries in competition against one another, setting their best displays to music. On the fourth night, all three companies launch their finales. See p. 33.
- **Market in the Park** (Salt Spring Island): The little village of Ganges fills to bursting every Saturday morning, as local farmers, craftspeople, and flea marketers gather to talk, trade, and mill aimlessly. With all ages of hippies, sturdy housewives, fashion-conscious Eurotrash, and rich celebrities all mixed together, the event has the feel of a weird and benevolent ritual. See p. 141.
- **World Championship Bathtub Race** (Nanaimo): Imagine guiding a claw-foot tub across the 58km (36-mile) Georgia Strait from Nanaimo to Vancouver: That's how this hilarious and goofily competitive boat race began. Nowadays, dozens of tubbers attempt the crossing as part of July's weeklong Marine Festival, with a street fair, parade, and ritual boat burning and fireworks display. See p. 169.
- **Calgary Stampede:** In all of North America, there's nothing like the Calgary Stampede. Of course it's the world's largest rodeo, but it's also a series of concerts, an art show, an open-air casino, a carnival, a street dance—you name it, it's undoubtedly going on somewhere here. In July, all of Calgary is a party—and you're invited. See p. 343.
- **Edmonton International Fringe Theatre Festival** (Edmonton): Every August, Edmonton plays host to North America's largest fringe theater festival, an 11-day spectacular offering theatrics, performance, and a nonstop street party atmosphere. The festival attracts 150 theater companies and performing troupes from around the world, plus an audience of over 600,000. See p. 359.