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Destinations/Travel Diary

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Vancouver, BC

There's a fascinating duality to the city of Vancouver. On one hand, it has cosmopolitan and urban commercial areas with excellent restaurants and endless cultural venues - the opera, ballet, and symphony. Then there's the laid back, sporty lifestyle that's relaxed and unassuming. Everyone here seems to be athletic, or at the very least loves to be outdoors as much as possible. It is pretty easy to understand why. Even in the worst weather, the Pacific Northwestern coastline is breathtakingly lush. And everything is in reasonably close proximity; so packing a lot into one day is easily doable. Meet a friend for coffee, visit some art galleries downtown, after lunch kayak in the Pacific, dinner, and then head out for an evening of skiing. There's Stanley Park, just blocks from the city center and world's apart. Tall pines and long nature trails almost give the illusion of being in the wilderness. Kitsilano Beach is a short hop across English Bay and the seawall around nearly seven miles of shoreline provide fantastic ways to take in the skyline across the ocean.

The culture, ethnic diversity and natural beauty all contributed to Vancouver being chosen, along with Whistler, to host the 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

There are also plenty of trendy neighborhoods to explore on foot as well. Yaletown and Gastown (the oldest quarter) are filled with galleries, shops, and cafes. Chinatown - the third largest in North America - has some wonderful gardens and on Granville Island there's a wonderful



green market, art studios
and craft shops.

Vancouver has one of the mildest climates in Canada. It seldom gets oppressively hot and it rarely snows in the city. It does rain, but when it does, no one seems to skip a beat and every activity carries on as if the sun were beaming. May though September is the best time for whale watching. At Whistler, the slopes are open year round and many agree that the best time to visit is from late May though early October.



Of course, the dollar is taking a beating around the world at the moment, so while a stay can be pricier than in the past, the unexpected advantage of having less tourists is that you are a warmly welcomed commodity.

While the land is lovely, it is perhaps the people that are really the most interesting part of a visit to Vancouver. "Culturally the US is a melting pot and Canada is a salad bowl," says Canadian born best selling author and fitness trainer Harley Pasternak. "That's a huge difference for me. People move to the US from different cultures and they really become Americanized. You hear very few languages beside English. Canada is really a salad bowl culture, so even though everything is mixed together, you can really identify each specific vegetable in the salad. It's this amazing cultural mosaic and everyone is living peacefully and we don't really have the racial issues. The Portuguese get along with the Greeks and the Greeks get along with the Italians... there's really this amazing miniature UN kind of thing... they do what they do and eat their food and because they are so close to each other there's this sense of open-mindedness. There is not as much xenophobia or ignorance that I find in other countries. Here you know so much about other cultures that live next door, that there's this global perspective".

Where to Stay:

Pacific Palisades Hotel.

<http://www.pacificpalisadeshotel.com>

Most of the 228 suites at this all-suite hotel have spectacular mountain and harbor views and located amidst the hip shops of Robson Street.

The Fairmont Hotel Vancouver.

<http://www.fairmont.com/hotelvancouver>

A beautiful property near art galleries and fine dining. Inside there's the Absolute Spa, an exclusive Fairmont Gold floor, a state-of-the-art health club, award-winning restaurants and designer shops.



The Fairmont Waterfront.

<http://www.fairmont.com/waterfront/>

A magnificent 23-story contemporary glass hotel with an enclosed walkway to the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Center, the Cruise Ship Terminal. The hotel is also within walking distance from Stanley Park and Gastown.

Wickaninnish Inn Hotel.

<http://www.wickinn.com/accommodations.html>

Near Chesterman Beach, the hotel's suites offer floor-to-ceiling picture windows for amazing views. There's also an Aveda spa in this Tofino resort and pets are welcome.



Center's more than 100 fine shops and has one of the city's best restaurants Chef Rafael Gonzalez', Chartwell.

Opus

<http://www.opushotel.com>

A lovely hotel set in fashionable Yaletown. Vibrant colours, and spa bathrooms inspire the decor and the hotel is also home to Bistro Moderne Elixir, and the dramatic Opus Bar.

Where to Eat:

Tojos

<http://www.tojos.com>

People swoon at the mention of Chef Hidekazu Tojo's name in Vancouver. The food is that good and the sushi is perhaps the best you will ever eat outside of Japan. A must stop.

The Fish House in Stanley Park

<http://www.fishhousestanleypark.com>

This is the perfect romantic stopover during a stroll through the city's enormous park. There are two verandas overlooking the water and inside fireplaces will warm you up on a chilly day. The food is tasty and unpretentious.

Sanafir

<http://www.sanafir.ca>

Sanafir is an Arabic word for "meeting place" and this is the perfect spot on trendy Granville Street to gather with friends. Exotic cocktails, multi-ethnic cuisine and a 1001 Nights décor (be sure to check out the beds in the upstairs lounge) all contribute to a wonderful dining experience.

Metro

<http://www.metrodining.ca>

Vancouver celebrity chef Brian Fowke's emphasis at the sleek Metro and fashionable Rare restaurants is on the freshest local and organic products. The result is an inspired menu of fresh seafood, meat and game available by the ounce.



C Restaurant

<http://www.crestaurant.com>

Set on a waterside patio, with a chic, modern interior, the restaurant is one of the best places in Vancouver for fresh (but expensive) seafood.

Spas

Skoah.

<http://www.skoah.com>

In hip Yaletown, this unpretentious salon specializes in the most amazing and relaxing facials you will ever have.

Spruce Body Lab.

<http://www.sprucebodylab.com>

Get a facial from the Sea Flora line of products made from fresh, organic British Columbia seaweed.

Holt Renfrew.

<http://www.holtrenfrew.com>

After an exhausting day of shopping at this luxury department store (Canada's Neiman Marcus) relax at stunning new spa - Holts Salon and Spa. Multi-hour luxury packages are available.

Absolute Spa at the Century.

<http://www.absolutespa.com>

This is an elaborate oasis of Italian marble, etched glass and murals. The spa is a favorite of celebrities like Gwyneth Paltrow, Janet Jackson, Uma Thurman, Sharon Stone, and Renee Zelweger.

Vida Wellness Spa.

<http://www.vidawellness.com>

Set in the Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre Hotel, Vida is one of the city's best spas using holistic and Ayurvedic techniques.

What to do:

When it comes to nightlife, Vancouver has an endless number of dance clubs, wine bars, theaters, and musical venues to keep visitors entertained. But, its also a city has so much for a traveler to explore during the day including world-class museums and art galleries.



Locals appreciate the active lifestyle the city has to offer, so no matter what the weather, you will still see runners in Stanley Park or kayakers maneuvering through the city's waterways. Just outside of the city limits, there is great skiing, hiking and biking.

The Fraser Valley, heading east from Vancouver, is home to North America's second largest population of over-wintering bald eagles. Sasquatch Tours (www.sasquatchtours.com) operates a two hour cruise on the Lower Harrison River in late fall and early winter to view the eagles. Talking Totem Tours (www.talkingtotemtours.com) offers a weekend focused on the natural habitat of the Bald Eagle and the lifestyles of the Pacific. Xáytem in Mission BC (www.xaytem.ca) is open year round with superb displays of crafts and artwork, cultural interpretation programs and workshops. Seashore Charters, in Prince Rupert, (www.seashorecharters.com) has safe and fun traditional style canoe excursions. Humpback, gray, orca and minke whales pass by throughout the year while eagles and seals entertain in the harbor.

If you prefer to workout indoors, Studeo 55 (www.studeo55.ca) favored by celebrities like Halle Berry and Jessica Alba, has been called the best gym in Canada. The boutique gym features a tranquil yoga studio and costs just \$22 a day for out of town guests.

A less physical, but extremely entertaining experience for the seasoned shopper is to hire a personal shopper (complimentary) at the gorgeous Holt Renfrew

department store (604) 681-3121. The best shopping is found on Robson Street. Be sure to stop into Lululemon to be outfitted for Vancouver's active lifestyle (www.lululemon.com)

Foodies can learn the secrets from the town's best, by becoming a chef for a day. You'll begin the day at one of the city's best restaurants, where you'll plan a menu. The chef will take you for a stroll in the Granville Island Public Market where you will pick up the freshest ingredients possible. Then head back to the restaurant for a fantastic interactive cooking experience with a pro (www.edible-britishcolumbia.com). Edible BC will also set up an incredible gourmet kayaking adventure and fun whiskey tastings (but not in a kayak!)

For more information:

Vancouver Tourist Info Centre (200 Burrard St., Downtown. 604/683-2000. (www.tourismvancouver.com). Downtown Ambassadors (604/689-4357. www.downtownvancouver.net). Granville Island Information Services (604/666-5784. www.granvilleisland.com).

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