



British Columbia

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Why Go?

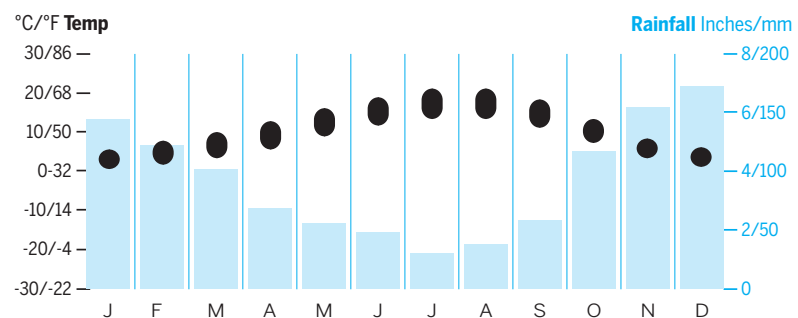
Visitors to British Columbia are never short of superlatives when writing postcards home. It's hard not to be moved by towering mountain ranges, wildlife-packed forests and uncountable kilometers of coastline that slow your heart like a sigh-triggering spa treatment. But Canada's westernmost province is more than a nature-hugging diorama.

Cosmopolitan Vancouver is an animated fusion of cuisines and cultures from Asia and beyond, while vibrant smaller cities like Victoria and Kelowna are increasingly catching up with their own intriguing scenes. And for sheer character, it's hard to beat the province's kaleidoscope of quirky little communities, from rustic northern BC to the laid-back Southern Gulf Islands.

Wherever you head, the great outdoors will always be calling. Don't just point your camera at it. BC is unbeatable for the kind of life-enhancing skiing, kayaking, hiking and biking experiences you'll always remember fondly.

When to Go

Vancouver, BC



December–March Powder action on the slopes of Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains

July & August Beaches, BBQs and a plethora of outdoor festivals in Vancouver

September & October Great surfing and the start of storm-watching season in Tofino

Getting There & Around

BC's vastness is what strikes most visitors, the majority of whom fly into Vancouver or drive across the US border: it's a scary-sounding 1508km drive from Vancouver to Prince Rupert, for example. But while it's tempting to simply stick around in the big city and avoid the car, you won't really have been to the West Coast unless you head out of town.

Despite the distances, driving remains the most popular method of movement in BC. Plan your routes via the **Drive BC website** (www.drivebc.ca) and check out the 36 services covered by the **BC Ferries** (www.bcferries.com) system.

VIA Rail (www.viarail.com) operates three BC train services. One trundles across the north from the coastline to Jasper. Pick up the second in Jasper for a ride back to Vancouver. The third departs downtown Victoria, weaving up island to Courtenay.

PARKS & WILDLIFE

BC's eight national parks include snow-capped **Glacier** and the Unesco World Heritage sites of **Kootenay** and **Yoho**. The newer **Gulf Islands National Park Reserve** protects a fragile coastal region. See the National & Regional Parks chapter (p25) for further information.

The region's 850 provincial parks offer 3000km of hiking trails. Notables include **Strathcona** and remote **Cape Scott**, as well as the Cariboo's canoe-friendly **Bowron Lake** and the Kootenays' Matterhorn-like **Mt Assiniboine**. Check the website of **BC Parks** (www.bcparks.ca) for information.

Expect to spot some amazing wildlife. Ocean visitors should keep an eye out for Pacific gray whales, while land mammals – including elk, moose, wolves, grizzlies and black bear – will have most scrambling for their cameras. And there are around 500 bird varieties, including BC's provincial fowl the Steller's Jay.

Local Culture: Raise a Glass

BC has enjoyed a huge surge in local microbrewed beer, so don't miss out. Steel your taste buds for Surrey's **Central City Brewing** (www.centralcitybrewing.com) and their mildly malty Red Racer ESB. Alternatively, Kelowna's **Tree Brewing** (www.treebeer.com) produces a Hop Head Indian Pale Ale (IPA) that makes your eyes pop out. To prove that beer doesn't need to pack a punch, **Gulf Islands Brewing** (www.gulfislandsbrewery.com), based on Salt Spring Island, crafts Heatherdale Ale, an aromatic, heather-infused brew that's subtle, complex and seductive.

GUILT-FREE FISH & CHIPS

Seafood is BC's main dining choice. Support the sustainability of the region's aquatic larder by checking out restaurants operating under the Ocean Wise system – see www.oceanwise.ca.

Fast Facts

- » Population: 4.5 million
- » Area: 944,735 sq km
- » Capital: Victoria
- » Quirky fact: Home of the world's largest hockey stick (Duncan)

It's Official

BC's official flower is the Pacific dogwood. Also officially, its gemstone is jade and its mammal is the Kermode bear.

Resources

- » Tourism BC (www.hellobc.com)
- » Cycling BC (www.cyclingbc.net)
- » British Columbia Beer Guide (www.bcbeer.ca)
- » BC Government (www.gov.bc.ca)
- » BC Wine Institute (www.winebc.com)
- » WaveLength Magazine (www.wavelengthmagazine.com)
- » Van Dop Arts & Cultural Guide (www.art-bc.com)
- » Go BC (www.gobc.ca)
- » Surfing Vancouver Island (www.surfingvancouverisland.com)

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