



British Columbia

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Bistro 694 (p702)
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- ➔ Ask for Luigi (p654)
- ➔ Nova Kitchen (p678)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Free Spirit Spheres (p702)
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- ➔ Shades of Jade Inn & Spa (p679)
- ➔ Skwachays Lodge (p650)
- ➔ Old Courthouse Inn (p680)

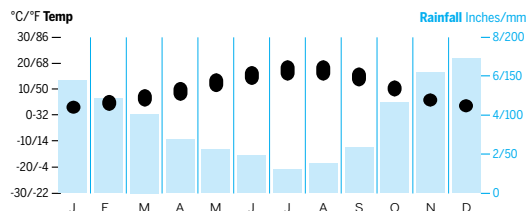
Why Go?

Visitors to Canada's westernmost province should pack a long list of superlatives to deploy here; the words 'wow,' 'amazing' and 'spectacular' will only go so far. Luckily, it's not too hard to wax lyrical about the mighty mountains, deep forests and dramatic coastlines here that instantly lower heart rates to tranquil levels.

There's much more to British Columbia (BC) than nature-hugging dioramas, though. Vancouver fuses cuisines and cultures from Asia and beyond, while mid-sized cities such as Victoria and Kelowna are creating their own vibrant scenes. It's also hard to beat the welcoming, sometimes quirky character of smaller communities – from Cumberland to Powell River and to Salt Spring – that are the beating heart of BC.

Wherever you head, the great outdoors will always call. Don't just point your camera at it: BC is unbeatable for skiing, kayaking and hiking experiences that can make this the trip of a lifetime.

When to Go Vancouver, BC



Dec–Mar Best powder action on the slopes of Whistler and Blackcomb mountains.

Jul & Aug Beaches, patios and a plethora of outdoor festivals in sun-dappled Vancouver.

Sep & Oct Dramatic surfing and the start of storm-watching season in beachy Tofino.

Parks & Wildlife


BC's national parks include snowcapped **Glacier** and the Unesco World Heritage sites of **Kootenay** and **Yoho**. The newer **Gulf Islands National Park Reserve** protects a fragile coastal region. Visit the website of **Parks Canada** (www.pc.gc.ca) for information.

The region's almost 1000 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. Land mammals – including elk, moose, wolves, grizzlies and black bears – will have most visitors scrambling for their cameras, and there are around 500 bird varieties, including blue herons and bald eagles galore. Ocean visitors should keep an eye out for orcas.

Getting Around

The sheer size of BC can overwhelm some visitors: it's a scary-sounding 1508km drive from Vancouver to Prince Rupert, for example. While it's tempting to simply stick around Vancouver – the main point of entry for most BC-bound visitors – you won't really have experienced the province unless you head out of town.

Despite the distances, driving remains the most popular method of movement in BC. Plan your routes via the handy **DriveBC website** (www.drivebc.ca) and check out the dozens of services offered by the extensive **BC Ferries** ( 888-223-3779; www.bcferries.com) system.

VIA Rail (www.viarail.com) operates two 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. A third line on Vancouver Island may also reopen in the coming years.

VANCOUVER

POP 604, 778

Walkable neighborhoods, drink-and-dine delights and memorable cultural and outdoor activities framed by dramatic vistas – there's a glassful of great reasons to love this lotusland metropolis.

Downtown is just the start of Vancouver. Walk or hop public transit and within minutes you'll be hanging with the locals in one of the city's many diverse and distinctive 'hoods. Whether discovering the coffee shops of Commercial Dr or the hipster

BC FAST FACTS

- Population: 4.7 million
- Area: 944,735 sq km
- Capital: Victoria
- Fact: BC is North America's third-largest film and TV production center.

haunts of Main St, the indie bars and restaurants of Gastown or the heritage-house beachfronts and browsable stores of Kitsilano, you'll find this city perfect for easy-access urban exploration. Just be sure to chat to the locals wherever you go: they might seem shy or aloof at first, but Vancouverites love talking up their town.

History

The First Nations lived in this area for up to 16,000 years before Spanish explorers arrived in the late 1500s. When Captain George Vancouver of the British Royal Navy sailed up to these shores in 1792, he met a couple of Spanish captains who informed him of their country's land claim (the beach they met on is now called Spanish Banks). But by the early 1800s, as European settlers began arriving, the British crown had gained an increasing stranglehold.

Fur trading and a feverish gold rush soon redefined the region as a resource-filled Aladdin's cave. By the 1850s, thousands of fortune seekers had arrived, prompting the Brits to officially claim the area as a colony. Local entrepreneur 'Gassy' Jack Deighton seized the initiative in 1867 by opening a bar on the forested shoreline of Burrard Inlet. This triggered a rash of development – nicknamed Gastown – that became the forerunner of modern-day Vancouver.

But not everything went to plan. While Vancouver rapidly reached a population of 1000, its buildings were almost completely destroyed in an 1886 blaze (quickly dubbed the Great Fire, even though it only lasted 20 minutes). A prompt rebuild followed and the new downtown core soon took shape. Buildings from this era still survive, as does Stanley Park. Originally the town's military reserve, it was opened as a public recreation area in 1888.

Relying on its port, the growing city became a hub of industry, importing thousands of immigrant workers to fuel economic development. The Chinatown built at