

DAY TRIPS & EXCURSIONS

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Wherever you wander in Vancouver, the rest of the province seems to be calling you from almost every corner. It could be the snow-capped crags peeking at you between the glass towers of downtown; the region's dense and ancient forests waving at you from the other side of an inlet; or the nearby islands whispering your name as you stroll along the waterfront. Your best response to all these enticements is to go with the flow. Vancouver may be an enjoyable place to visit but it's the surrounding treasures that truly make it a great vacation destination – if you don't get away to one or two of these while you're here, you haven't really seen British Columbia (BC).

Victoria, the provincial capital, and Whistler, BC's favorite outdoor playground, are the region's big-ticket locales and both are possible day trips if you're on a tight timeline, although an overnight trip is preferable, if you can manage it.

The former has a reputation as a tweed-curtained 1950s evocation of old-empire England, but this image has slowly receded in recent years. The city's iconic landmark buildings are still there, but the tourist-trap olde-world restaurants and Tudor-framed shops have been reinvigorated with a new generation of funky eateries and businesses, without abandoning the charming aesthetic that draws two million visitors yearly.

Whistler is North America's top ski resort and is fast becoming a year-round destination with its menu of summertime adrenaline-rush activities. Despite getting all gussied up as the 'host mountain' for the recent Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, the town retains a bit of a nonconformist image and draws people from all walks of life. You can see baggy-pants-wearing snowboarders, muddied-up mountain bikers and women in business suits all downing coffee within a few meters of each other.

En route to Whistler along winding Hwy 99, Squamish is the place to go for rock climbing and eagle spotting. The colorful Southern Gulf Islands lure art fans and retreat seekers with their bewitching bluffs, bays and teensy, often quirky communities. And for those who think they have no time for excursions when visiting the region, consider Bowen Island, little more than a stone's throw from West Vancouver, or Buntzen Lake, just an hour from the city and a breathtaking natural spot that's far from the madding tourist crowds.

The accommodation prices listed in this chapter are for peak season, which runs from late May to early September. Whistler is the exception, when December to February is the prime time, with prices to match.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Tottering around Vancouver's Stanley Park seawall on a rented bike does not count: you really have to dive head first (not always literally) into the activity side of BC's outdoor wonderland if you want some stories to tell when you get back home. Highlights include scuba diving or kayaking (try a sunset kayak tour) in [Victoria](#) (p208), where you should also hop on a bike: the city constantly brags about having more cycling routes than any other in Canada.

For breadth of activities, you can't beat [Whistler](#) (p214) – especially if your idea of thrills includes screaming like a banshee or wetting yourself (or both). In summer, the popular alpine resort attracts zipliners, hikers, rock climbers and white-water rafters, while winter delivers action from skiing to snowboard-

ing to nighttime snowshoeing. If you prefer rock climbing in the morning and a choice of kiteboarding or mountain biking in the afternoon, [Squamish](#) (p219) is ideal. Alternatively, if you're just craving a quick nature break from the city, [Buntzen Lake](#) (p220) is a breathtaking tree-hugger's fave.

PLANES, TRAINS & BOATS

While getting around is usually the least exciting part of any vacation, in BC the reverse is true. The region is blessed with some great transportation options that also turn out to be among the best ways to encounter the forests, islands and coastlines for which the province is justly famous. You'll understand exactly what we mean if you take a 35-minute [floatplane trip](#) (p209) between Vancouver and Victoria: