

Understand Vancouver

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Learn about the locals and their city, from real-estate prices to that persistent 'no fun city' tag.

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The inside track on Vancouver's flourishing, mostly grassroots, artistic scene – including what the locals like to see and do.

Vancouver Today

Despite the prevalence of Lycra, Vancouverites are not just a bunch of bike-riding hippies. It likely won't be long before you've told the locals how much you love their beautiful city and they've replied that it's not all perfect. House prices have been shooting skywards here since the 1990s – those 'best places in the world to live' surveys that routinely place Vancouver near the top come with a hefty cost-of-living price tag. It's a very real issue on everyone's mind.

Best in Print

City of Glass (Douglas Coupland; 2000) Affectionate homage to the city by one of its leading authors.

Vancouver Special (Charles Demers; 2009) Black-and-white images and warts-and-all reflections on the city.

Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid (Evelyn Lau; 2001) Deeply personal memoir about life on the streets in Vancouver.

The Jade Peony (Wayson Choy; 1995) Immersive memoir of growing up in a Chinese immigrant family in Vancouver in the 1930s.

Vancouver Stories (2005) Collection of evocative short stories on the city from authors including Coupland and Timothy Taylor.

Best on Film

On the Corner (2003) Fictional account of life on the Downtown Eastside.

Carts of Darkness (2008) Documentary exploring the 'extreme sport' of shopping-cart racing among local bottle pickers.

Double Happiness (1994) Generational differences in a colorful Chinese-Canadian family in Vancouver.

The Delicate Art of Parking (2003) Documentary-style comedy about Vancouver parking enforcers.

Income Issues

Get any two Vancouverites in a room and you can take bets on how long it will be before they start talking about house prices. Many locals will tell you they've been priced out of the market and expect to be renting forever (or else moving to suburban Abbotsford). Those who do buy property appear to have healthy joint incomes but still only just squeak by.

It's sometimes said that Vancouver has become the victim of its own success. It's reputedly one of the best places in the world to live – according to various global surveys – and was thrust into the international spotlight as the host of a highly regarded 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. All of which means that even traditionally grungy or cheap neighborhoods such as Gastown, Strathcona, Main St and Commercial Dr – areas that have a long track record of housing the city's artists, bohemians and low-income locals – have become trendy, sought-after spots that command prices unheard of in the city just a few years ago.

Gentrification

The city's sprawling Downtown Eastside district – which includes Gastown and Chinatown – has been rapidly gentrifying in recent years, with historic old buildings now repaired and repainted into live-work spaces and hip coffee shops. Heritage spaces are being restored, but transforming grungy old neighborhoods into cool new hipster havens has a flip side. The locals who have called this area home for decades – many of whom have long-standing drug, poverty or mental-health issues – don't necessarily want to leave and are in no mood to be priced out of the neighborhood. There are dozens of social-housing developments in this area and there likely always will be. While the