

# INTRODUCING VANCOUVER



*Cameras at the ready for great sea-and-skyscraper city vistas*

RYAN FOX

Cyclists zip around the seawall, glancing at snow-frosted peaks across the water. A floatplane buzzes overhead, shimmying toward its glassy landing strip. A chattering hubbub bounces off the mirrored towers that forest downtown like latter-day totems.

When the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games took over Vancouver in early 2010, there was no shortage of jaw-dropping visuals to accompany global TV coverage. But for anyone living here, these glossy highlights are just the most obvious aspects of the city's charms. In fact, beyond the breathtaking setting lies a comparatively young metropolis that's still trying to discover its true identity – just 150 years after a 'gassy' Englishman kicked it all off with a makeshift pub.

Covering the main attractions will certainly give you an introduction. After that it's highly advisable to dig beneath the surface to find out what makes this laid-back lotusland tick. You'll uncover the 'real Vancouver' in the lively Commercial Dr coffee shops, the hipster haunts of South Main (SoMa), the gay-friendly streets of the West End, the kaleidoscopic thoroughfares of old Chinatown and the historic, reinvigorated Gastown district, where that original pub once stood.

With the Olympics now a distant memory – and the flag-waving multitudes dissolved from Vancouver's streets – there's never been a better time to come and explore this urban, nature-backed metropolis for yourself. Hit those highly individual neighborhoods for a different flavor on every day of your trip. And save plenty of time to jump into the waiting realm of outdoor attractions calling your name from the edge of the city.

## VANCOUVER LIFE

Inspired by their stunning surroundings, Vancouverites have discovered more ways to interact with the outdoors than almost anyone. But the locals are not just a bunch of Lycra-clad, rice cake-noshing fitness freaks. This is one of Canada's top dining towns and it's undergone a seismic shift in great new restaurants in recent years, triggered by an inspiring fusion of international influences and ingredients from across the province. Imbibing has undergone a similar revolution: bars here now proudly showcase distinctive, lip-smacking wines and beers produced right on the city's doorstep. Vancouverites, it seems, have become dedicated and informed 'locavores.' The arts and nightlife scenes are similarly tasty – although you'll have to get creative to discover their sometimes well-hidden highlights.

Wherever you end up rubbing shoulders with the residents, it won't be long before you've told them how much you love their city and they've replied that it's not all perfect. For every Vancouverite who enjoyed the Olympics, you'll find another with a mental shopping list of what else the money could have been spent on. House prices have also been shooting skywards here in recent years, triggering angst among residents who want to stay but can't afford to buy. And that's before you get onto the thorny topic of the Downtown Eastside, the destitute neighborhood that's been a blot on the city's 'best place in the world to live' reputation for decades.

But while the serious side of life is always bubbling beneath the surface, Vancouverites also know how to let their hair down. With its giant free fireworks displays, jazz, fringe and film festivals and dozens of year-round annual events, the 'city of glass' can be great fun for in-the-know visitors. You'll come to Vancouver for the picture-postcard views but you'll stick around for the lively but always laid-back vibe.

'This really is a city where you can ski in the morning and hit the beach in the afternoon'

LAWRENCE WORCESTER



*Stanley Park (p62) – postcard-perfect in the fall – is a sea, sand and forest spectacular dear to the city's heart*

LAWRENCE WORCESTER

# HIGHLIGHTS

## DINING, DRINKING & DISTRICTS

*The lifeblood of the city is its distinctive neighborhoods, many worth a day of exploring. A rolling smorgasbord of great nosh will keep you fueled. While seafood is a good starting point, make sure you dip in to some finger-licking ethnic eateries and taste-trip at a night market.*



LAWRENCE WORCESTER

### 1 Vij's

Fusion is a Vancouver dining trait, pioneered at this contemporary Indian restaurant (p143)

### 2 Gastown

Vancouver's once-grungy original 'hood is now alive with great bars (p154)

### 3 SoMa

South Main's eclectic designer shops are dripping with hipster fashions (p119)

### 4 Commercial Drive

The Drive's coffee-fueled counterculture vibe keeps this area lively (p85)

### 5 Chinatown Night Market

Paper lanterns light up the alfresco market (p79)



LAWRENCE WORCESTER



LAWRENCE WORCESTER





4

LAWRENCE WORCESTER



5

CHRISTOPHER HERWIG

# ACTIVE VANCOUVER

Vancouverites are born wearing Lycra, so you can expect to see plenty of muscle-stretching locals sweating their way around the city. Visitors can mix with the heavy-breathing fraternity on jogging and cycling trails, or at local ski, beach and kayaking hot spots.



1

LEE FOSTER

## 1 Stanley Park

Seawall cycling, jogging or blading are ideal scenery-ogling activities (p182)

## 2 Kayaking

Hop in a kayak and admire the cityscape from the water (p185)

## 3 Grouse Mountain

Cafe diners look down at Vancouver's top winter playground and the city below (p187)



2

DOUG MCKINLAY



3

CHRISTOPHER HERWIG





MICHELE FALZONE/JAU/CORBIS



LAWRENCE WORCESTER

## CITY STYLE

*Set amid mountains, sea and forest, Vancouver is a visual treat for camera-wielding visitors. But it's not just about the natural surroundings here: the city is stuffed with non-natural sights that complement the appeal of those well-known outdoorsy vistas.*

### 1 Public Art

The city challenges with some wild and wacky public art displays (p27)

### 2 Totem Poles

The handsome Stanley Park totems (p63) are stirring reminders of the region's first residents

### 3 City of Glass

Downtown's shimmering glass towers (p35) are Vancouver's modern-day forests



MANFRED GOTTSCHALK



1

ANDREW BAIN



2

RYAN FOX

### 1 Granville Island

Spend an afternoon soaking up waterfront shops and galleries (p88)

### 2 False Creek

The city's colorful miniferries (p227) are the best way to hit the water

### 3 Second Beach

By day a sunbathing hot spot, but come dusk it's a sunset-viewing favorite (p64)

## WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE!

*Surrounded by water on three sides, Vancouver is a port city that will always have a little sea salt running through its veins. For visitors, there are plenty of ways to enjoy this coastal undercurrent.*



3

RICHARD CUMMINS

# THE AUTHOR

## John Lee



Originally from the near-London UK city of St Albans, John first checked out Canada during Vancouver's Expo '86 world's fair, a sunny summer of dancing girls, live music and levitating Japanese trains. Swayed by all

this exotica, he returned home to plot a permanent move. While most BC colleges turned him down flat, the University of Victoria eventually allowed him to study utopian political theory, although it turned out to be not quite as vocational as an MBA. After teaching English in Japan and hopping on the Trans-Siberian Railway for a laugh, he suddenly jumped into a full-time travel-writing career. Moving permanently to Vancouver in 1999, John has since worked on 18 Lonely Planet books. His award-winning journalism, appearing online at [www.johnleewriter.com](http://www.johnleewriter.com), has also run in more than 150 publications around the world, including the *Guardian*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Globe and Mail* and *National Geographic Traveler*.

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### JOHN'S TOP VANCOUVER DAY

Despite being a tea-dependent Brit, no day really gets rolling until a late-morning java, so I walk to the bustling patio café at the Vancouver Art Gallery (p56) and chat with a buddy over a large latte. Catching the number 10 bus nearby, I'm soon at Granville Island (p88), where I nose around the back-alley galleries before ducking into the cavernous Public Market. Lunch quickly becomes a wandering smorgasbord of deli treats as I snack from the bakeries and fruit stands – Okanagan cherries are in season. Feeling drowsy, I hop onboard a miniferry (p227) just outside the market and take a bobbling, sun-dappled cruise along False Creek to Science World (p78). But rather than heading inside the shiny geodesic dome, I jump on the nearby number 3 bus that's heading south up Main St. Within 20 minutes, I'm strolling the cool indie shops of SoMa (p119), picking up a hand-printed greeting card at the Regional Assembly of Text (p119). Checking my watch, I dash for the next bus and head back the way I came along Main, eventually rolling into the Gastown neighborhood for a long-arranged beer with some friends. We meet at the Alibi Room (p155), where the communal tables are already crowded with hipsters supping on the city's best menu of BC microbrews. I go for the tastier selection of four beers, asking the smiling server to surprise me with what's on offer. As a dedicated imbibor, I can tell one of them is my favorite Old Yale Pale Ale. After a barbecued pork belly sandwich, it's time to call a taxi. A couple of us are taking in one of Vancouver's signature spectacles: a Shakespeare play performed on a tented stage at the annual Bard on the Beach festival (p178). It's the best way to spend any summer evening.



# GETTING STARTED

## WHEN TO GO

Vancouver is an all-season city but specific times of year are best suited to certain interests and pursuits. If you're determined to brush up on your snow sports, December to March is the ideal time to strap on your skis. If you want to bask on the beaches and stroll in shorts through the forests, you should bring your sunscreen to town in July or August. And if you're an arts buff and you just can't wait to get your next culture fix, the theater season kicks off in October and usually stretches to April. Summer is the hot season for festivals – especially outdoor ones – but the city stages large and small events throughout the year.

You can expect pleasant temperatures most of the time. In winter, it rarely drops below 0°C in the city and summer sees long, languid days with 20°C a common marker. It can rain here at any time, but the October to February period is the rainiest – remember that when it's raining here, it's often snowing in the hills. Peak season for hotels is midsummer, but there's good weather in late spring and early fall, and these near-shoulder periods can offer great deals for budget-minded travelers.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

While summer remains the peak time for several of Vancouver's biggest festivals, the city has a year-round roster of events that should give most visitors a couple of options whatever time of year they roll in. Tourism Vancouver's website ([www.tourismvancouver.com](http://www.tourismvancouver.com)) gives you a heads-up on many happenings, but check free listings newspapers like the *Georgia Straight* and *Westender* for up-to-date info on smaller events around the city.

### January

#### POLAR BEAR SWIM

Jan 1

[www.vancouver.ca/parks/events/polarbear](http://www.vancouver.ca/parks/events/polarbear)

This chilly New Year's Day affair has been taking place annually in English Bay since 1920, and it might just be the ultimate cure for a hangover. At around 2.30pm more than a thousand people charge into

the ocean...and most usually leap out shivering a few seconds later.

#### DINE OUT VANCOUVER

2nd week of Jan

[www.tourismvancouver.com](http://www.tourismvancouver.com)

The city's top restaurants offer two weeks of three-course tasting menus for \$18, \$28 or \$38, plus a selection of British Columbia wines. Check the list of participating restaurants on Tourism Vancouver's website and book ahead – top spots always sell out. See the boxed text on p138 for other local food fests.

#### PUSH INTERNATIONAL PERFORMING ARTS FESTIVAL

3rd week of Jan

[www.pushfestival.ca](http://www.pushfestival.ca)

A three-week season of innovative new theater, music, opera and dance from around the world or around the corner. Adventurous performance-art fans will love this unusual showcase, staged at venues around the city.

### February

#### CHINESE NEW YEAR

[www.vancouver-chinatown.com](http://www.vancouver-chinatown.com)

Depending on the calendar, this multiday celebration in and around Chinatown can take place in January or February, but it always includes plenty of color, dancing and great food. The highlights are the Dragon Parade and firecrackers.

#### WINTERRUPTION

3rd week of Feb

[www.winterruption.com](http://www.winterruption.com)

Granville Island chases away the winter blues with a warming roster of live music,

## top picks

### QUIRKY FESTIVALS

- Bare Buns Fun Run (p15)
- Polar Bear Swim (left)
- Vancouver Craft Beer Week (opposite)
- Eastside Culture Crawl (p16)
- Parade of the Lost Souls (p16)

theater and family-friendly events. Dress warmly – many of the events are outside, you'll enjoy the hot chocolate more.

## March

### VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL DANCE FESTIVAL

2nd week of Mar

[www.vidf.ca](http://www.vidf.ca)

Local, national and international contemporary artists come together for this calf-stretching spree of workshops and performances, showcasing the city's credentials as a major dance center.

### CELTICFEST VANCOUVER

3rd week of Mar

[www.celticfestvancouver.com](http://www.celticfestvancouver.com)

Downtown's annual St Patrick's Day parade and multi day Irish cultural fiesta attracts those who like their beer to be green-hued at least once a year. Expect some shamrock-tinted shenanigans and a chance to mix with local and visiting Irish folk.

### VANCOUVER PLAYHOUSE INTERNATIONAL WINE FESTIVAL

4th week of Mar

[www.playhousewinefest.com](http://www.playhousewinefest.com)

The city's fave excuse for a drink – and one of North America's oldest wine fests – the week-long schedule includes tastings, seminars and galas. Book ahead, since many events quickly sell out. The core of the festival is the giant tasting room at Canada Place.

## April

### VANCOUVER FASHION WEEK

early Apr

[www.vancouverfashionweek.com](http://www.vancouverfashionweek.com)

If you feel like hitting the catwalk – or at least watching others do so – check out this annual event. A series of shows, galas and educational events highlighting the work of regional and international designers, it's the top draw of the West Coast industry calendar.

### SUN RUN

4th week of Apr

[www.sunrun.com](http://www.sunrun.com)

One of North America's largest street races lures 50,000 runners, speed walkers and wheezing wannabes for a spirited spring jaunt around the city. There's a family-friendly atmosphere as the route twists via Stanley Park, the waterfront and Burrard

Bridge to BC Place Stadium, where you can collapse with a big smile on your face. See the boxed text on p186 for more information.

## May

### VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL MARATHON

1st week of May

[www.bmovanmarathon.ca](http://www.bmovanmarathon.ca)

Smaller than the Sun Run (left), this one's for serious hoofers. Strap on your running shoes and race through the streets, along with hundreds of local fitness fans and athletes from around the world.

### VANCOUVER CRAFT BEER WEEK

1st week of May

[www.vancouvercraftbeerweek.com](http://www.vancouvercraftbeerweek.com)

Reflecting a frothy surge in regional microbrewing, this popular event lures beer-loving locals to tastings, pairing dinners and tippie-fueled gatherings across the city. Expect to rub shoulders with brew-meisters from the likes of Driftwood Brewing, Salt Spring Brewing, Yaletown Brewing and dozens more.

### VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL

3rd week of May

[www.childrensfestival.ca](http://www.childrensfestival.ca)

Bringing with kid-friendly storytelling, performances and activities in a charming tented Vanier Park site, this eight-day Kitsilano event is highly popular. Expect to be lured by face-painters or balloon-twisters while your kids run riot, giddy with ice-cream-smears excitement.

## June

### PORTUGUESE HERITAGE MONTH

Jun

[www.portuguesemonth.com](http://www.portuguesemonth.com)

This showcase of all things Portuguese brings the local expat community together for a month-long roster of cultural happenings, including film, theater, dance, sport and culinary celebrations. Staged at venues around the city and in the surrounding suburbs.

### BARD ON THE BEACH

1st week of Jun

[www.bardonthebeach.org](http://www.bardonthebeach.org)

Shakespeare performed the way it should be: in striped tents with the North Shore



mountains peeking peacefully from behind the stage. A local legend for more than two decades, the four-show roster runs to late September. See p178 for details and book ahead.

**VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLING FESTIVAL** 2nd week of Jun

[www.vancouverstorytelling.org](http://www.vancouverstorytelling.org)

A three-day celebration of the art of storytelling, usually with a different theme each year – expect creative workshops and public readings. An ideal way to meet local writerly types, check its website for additional events including monthly story-swaps.

**CAR-FREE VANCOUVER DAY** 3rd week of Jun

[www.carfreevancouver.org](http://www.carfreevancouver.org)

An increasingly popular day-long event where the main streets of several neighborhoods – in Kitsilano, Commercial Dr, the West End, Main St and North Vancouver – close to traffic and surrender to music, vendors, performers and food. Family-friendly, it's a great way to pretend you're a local.

**DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL** 3rd week of Jun

[www.dragonboatbc.ca](http://www.dragonboatbc.ca)

An epic weekend splashathon for around 180 teams from Metro Vancouver and beyond, this colorful event churns the normally placid waters of False Creek. Around 100,000 landlubbers turn up (for free) to cheer them on from the banks...and partake of the accompanying mini-festival of music, theater and food.

**FESTIVAL D'ÉTÉ FRANCOPHONE DE VANCOUVER** 3rd week of Jun

[www.lecentreculturel.com](http://www.lecentreculturel.com)

Connect with your inner Francophone at this multiday celebration of music and performance from French Canada and around the world. There are performances at venues throughout the city, plus a weekend outdoor show on Granville Island.

**GREEK DAY** 4th week of Jun

[www.greekday.com](http://www.greekday.com)

The local Hellenic community comes together for this rip-roaring showcase of

# top picks

## COMMUNITY FESTIVALS

- Powell Street Festival (opposite)
- Chinatown Festival (opposite)
- Greek Day (left)
- Portuguese Heritage Month (p13)
- Caribbean Days Festival (opposite)

Greek culture. The one-day Kitsilano event (on W Broadway, between MacDonald and Blenheim Sts) features two performance stages, wandering street entertainers and a belt-challenging array of great food.

**VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL** 4th week of Jun

[www.coastaljazz.com](http://www.coastaljazz.com)

Now more than 25 years old, this giant, nine-day music party is second only to Montréal in the gargantuan jazz fest stakes. It combines superstar performances (Oscar Peterson and Diana Krall are past masters) with smile-triggering free outdoor shows in Gastown and Yaletown, and on Granville Island.

## July

**CANADA DAY CELEBRATIONS** Jul 1

[www.canadaday.canadaplace.ca](http://www.canadaday.canadaplace.ca)

Canada Place is the main location for celebrations marking the country's July 1 birthday. Expect music, food and fireworks from 10am onwards, plus an early-evening street parade along W Georgia St. Maple-leaf face painting and impromptu renditions of 'O Canada' are the order of the day. There's also a smaller Granville Island event.

**DANCING ON THE EDGE** 2nd week of Jul

[www.dancingontheedge.org](http://www.dancingontheedge.org)

Top companies and performers from across Canada gather for 10 days of world-leading contemporary dance at venues around the city. Expect some challenging but expertly executed performances. Wear your leotard and they might let you join in (or maybe not).

## VANCOUVER FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL

2nd week of Jul

[www.thefestival.bc.ca](http://www.thefestival.bc.ca)

Kitsilano's Jericho Beach is the venue for this sunny, weekend-long festival of alfresco shows, covering folk, world music and beyond. Wear your sun block and join the 30,000 hippies and hipsters at one of Vancouver's oldest and most popular live music events.

## CARIBBEAN DAYS FESTIVAL

3rd week of Jul

[www.caribbeandaysfestival.com](http://www.caribbeandaysfestival.com)

Great music, dancing and food highlight these two days of fun held at Waterfront Park near Lonsdale Quay in North Vancouver. One of the North Shore's most popular community events, it draws around 15,000 party-loving locals.

## EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

3rd week of Jul

[www.earlymusic.bc.ca](http://www.earlymusic.bc.ca)

This celebration of medieval to baroque music stretches intermittently over three weeks, as lute and harpsichord players roll into town to celebrate some of the world's most beautiful but lesser-known compositions. Expect plenty of chin-stroking musos listening intently to highly authentic performances, mostly held at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

## POWELL STREET FESTIVAL

4th week of Jul

[www.powellstreetfestival.com](http://www.powellstreetfestival.com)

This annual celebration of Japanese Canadian culture is one of the city's most popular and enduring community festivals. Staged in East Vancouver's Oppenheimer Park, it's a fascinating and colorful day of food, music, dance and theater.

## CELEBRATION OF LIGHT

4th week of Jul

[www.celebration-of-light.com](http://www.celebration-of-light.com)

One of the world's largest musical fireworks competitions takes place in English Bay over four nights in late July and early August. Three competing countries (which change each year) put on their most spectacular displays, then come together for a dazzling finale on the fourth night, when the winning country – chosen by popular vote – is announced. Funding has been an issue in previous years, so check ahead to make sure it's still on.

## August

### PRIDE WEEK

1st week of Aug

[www.vancouverpride.ca](http://www.vancouverpride.ca)

A week-long kaleidoscope of gay-, lesbian- and bisexual-friendly fashion shows, gala parties and concerts culminating in western Canada's largest pride parade. Typically held on the first Sunday of August, this saucy mardi gras-style street party draws up to 500,000 people to its West End route: expect bands, disco-beat floats and plenty of gyrating, scantily-clad locals.

### ABBOTSFORD INTERNATIONAL AIR SHOW

2nd week of Aug

[www.abbotsfordairshow.com](http://www.abbotsfordairshow.com)

You'll need a car to get to this three-day event – Abbotsford is 56km southeast of the city – but it will be worth it for what has become 'Canada's national air show.' The displays from world-leading aeronautical teams are thrilling and, if you're in Vancouver during the event, you'll likely see the Canadian Snowbirds noisily buzzing over the city before flying on to their show.

### CHINATOWN FESTIVAL

2nd week of Aug

[www.vancouver-chinatown.com](http://www.vancouver-chinatown.com)

Celebrating the color, traditions and modern-day vibrancy of one of North America's oldest and largest Chinatown communities, this weekend event takes over Keefer and Columbia Sts with performances, hawkers stalls, great food and lots of family-friendly fun.

### MUSICFEST VANCOUVER

2nd week of Aug

[www.musicfestvancouver.com](http://www.musicfestvancouver.com)

Formerly Festival Vancouver, this 10-day grab bag of live music covers every genre, often including orchestral, choral, operatic, jazz, world and chamber music. Venues vary but there's usually a free outdoor stage on the W Georgia St side of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

### BARE BUNS FUN RUN

2nd week of Aug

[www.wreckbeach.org](http://www.wreckbeach.org)

The clothing-free Buns Run takes place – where else? – on Wreck Beach. Among the prizes are those for 'best-decorated buns' and 'wackiest hat.' Apply lots of sunscreen to those



hard-to-reach areas and check the website for further pants-free frolics throughout the year.

## PACIFIC NATIONAL EXHIBITION

3rd week of Aug

[www.pne.bc.ca](http://www.pne.bc.ca)

This smashing country fair has evolved way beyond its original 1910 farm focus. Locals now come every year for music shows, family-friendly performers (check out those Superdogs), retail halls of oddball products (its ShamWow time!) and an artery-clogging menu of food stands: miss the mini-donuts at your peril. Don't forget the fairground, with its kick-ass wooden rollercoaster.

## September

### DAVIE DAY

2nd week of Sep

[www.westendbia.com](http://www.westendbia.com)

The West End community along Davie St, between Broughton and Burrard Sts, invites the city (and visitors) to drop by for a day of live music, food and fun. This is the center of the city's gay community, so you might notice a few drag queens teetering past.

## VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL

2nd week of Sep

[www.vancouverfringe.com](http://www.vancouverfringe.com)

One of the city's biggest arts events, this lively 11-day roster of wild and wacky theatrics draws thousands to large, small and unconventional Granville Island venues. Expect short plays, stand-up routines and satiric comedy revues from local, regional and international performers. The shows usually cost around the \$10 mark, so you can afford to be adventurous.

## VANCOUVER COMEDY FEST

3rd week of Sep

[www.vancouvercomedyfest.com](http://www.vancouvercomedyfest.com)

Ten days of rib-tickling mirth, with Canadian and international acts raising the roof at various venues around town. Improv events feature heavily but there are tons of stand-up comedians doing their thing, too. Book ahead for headline acts, which have previously included Steve Martin and Flight of the Conchords.

## VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

4th week of Sep

[www.viff.org](http://www.viff.org)

Lacking the star-studded glamour of its Toronto rival, this giant, highly popular film fest celebrates smaller, artsy movies. Its 17-day roster covers hundreds of screenings of local, national and international films, plus gala events and industry schmoozes. Book ahead. For other local film fests, see the boxed text on p175.

## October

### VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL WRITERS AND READERS FESTIVAL

3rd week of Oct

[www.writersfest.bc.ca](http://www.writersfest.bc.ca)

Despite the mouthful of a name – with all those writers around, can't they think of something catchier? – this five-day literary event is highly popular. Local and international scribblers turn up for seminars, galas and public forums; past guests have included Salman Rushdie, Irvine Welsh and Douglas Coupland. It's held at venues around Granville Island.

### NEW MUSIC FESTIVAL

3rd week of Oct

[www.newmusic.org](http://www.newmusic.org)

Staged at downtown's Dance Centre, this fascinating four-night event showcases a highly eclectic array of contemporary, often challenging music performances that can range from indie guitar and free jazz to hip-hop and jungle mash-ups. There are workshops for visiting muso types and several pre-show artist chats.

### PARADE OF THE LOST SOULS

4th week of Oct

[www.publicdreams.org](http://www.publicdreams.org)

A spectral Day of the Dead celebration in which a torch-lit procession of spookily dressed performers moves through the streets around Grandview Park, on Commercial Dr. Highly atmospheric, it's a Vancouver Halloween tradition with artsy locals making their own festively macabre torches.

## November

### EASTSIDE CULTURE CRAWL

4th week of Nov

[www.eastsideculturecrawl.com](http://www.eastsideculturecrawl.com)

Dozens of local artists from Vancouver's Eastside open their studios to visitors at this excellent and ever-growing three-day showcase. Expect to come across a wild and wacky array of works, from found art installations to woodblock portraits of iconic Canadians. Perfect for picking up a memorable souvenir.

## BRIGHT NIGHTS IN STANLEY PARK

4th week of Nov

[www.vancouver.ca/parks/events/brightnights](http://www.vancouver.ca/parks/events/brightnights)  
Vancouver's biggest urban park kicks off Christmas with this month-long fairy-lighted wonderland. Wander the forested pathways of Yuletide scenes and elfish dioramas then hop on the miniature train for a fun trundle through Christmas scenes, many with animatronic moving parts. It's the city's most popular seasonal attraction, so book ahead.

## December

### CAROL SHIPS PARADE OF LIGHTS

from early Dec

[www.carolships.org](http://www.carolships.org)

An enduring Vancouver Yuletide tradition, around 50 boats lit up like Christmas trees pootle around the area's waterfront for 20 nights. You can join some of them on board (for a fee) or just enjoy them from the shoreline as they sail past. Check the website so you know where they'll be on a given night and bring your singing voice for a few rounds of 'O Come All Ye Faithful' et al.

### SANTA CLAUS PARADE

1st week of Dec

[www.rogerssantaclausparade.com](http://www.rogerssantaclausparade.com)

Rivaling the summertime Pride Parade for spectator numbers, this giant, smile-triggering Christmas procession is a family favorite. Wrap up warm and find a spot on downtown's W Georgia or Howe Sts and watch the pageant roll past: expect marching bands, youth orchestras, cartoon characters, carol-singing floats and, right at the end, the great man himself. And, yes, he's the real one.

### FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

2nd week of Dec

[www.vandusengarden.org](http://www.vandusengarden.org)

VanDusen's Yuletide tradition – and a clever way to keep the money coming in during the off-season – sees the botanical garden

magically illuminated with thousands of fairy lights. Popular with families, who bring their kids to meet the jolly old elf himself, look out for additional treats like Gingerbread wood and the Candy Cane Express model train. Wrap up and be sure to down a hot choc or two.

## WINTER SOLSTICE LANTERN FESTIVAL

3rd week of Dec

[www.secretlantern.org](http://www.secretlantern.org)

Five Vancouver neighborhoods continue the age-old Winter Solstice tradition by staging mini-lantern parades at the same time (6pm) throughout the city. Expect to see the flickering lights in Yaletown, Granville Island, Chinatown, Strathcona and the Eastside. Music and festivities ensue at indoor venues in each neighborhood.

## COSTS & MONEY

With the Canadian dollar rising in value in recent years, a visit to Vancouver is not the out-and-out bargain it was a few years ago. Even for Canadians, the city is often regarded as one of the country's most expensive vacation spots (although Toronto probably takes the prize for being the priciest Canadian destination).

Wherever you're visiting from, though, there are some creative ways to keep your costs down. Families can take advantage of discounted admission at museums and attractions, and there are passes available that can save a considerable amount for those planning to see many attractions (see Discount Cards on p232). For an even better deal, check the free attractions in the boxed text on p60.

### HOW MUCH?

- 1L of gasoline \$1.10
- 1L of bottled water \$1.50
- Pint of microbrew beer \$6
- Souvenir T-shirt \$20
- Vancouver Sun newspaper \$1.12-2.24
- Movie ticket \$12
- Tim Hortons medium coffee \$1.28
- Transit fare (one zone) \$2.50
- Food-court lunch \$6-8
- Overseas postcard stamp \$1.70



## ADVANCE PLANNING

If you'd like your Vancouver vacation to be as eco-friendly as possible, plan your trip using some of the tips offered in the Green Vancouver section (p47).

Most regional sights and outdoor activities don't require much advance booking, but during the summer peak it's a good idea to book specialized guided tours (p236) before you arrive. The Vancouver Art Gallery (p56) occasionally runs blockbuster exhibitions that require timed-entry tickets – book ahead on its website.

The city's main cultural festivals (p12) – especially the Film Festival, Jazz Festival and Fringe Festival – often require advance booking for many events. Visit their websites before you arrive for purchasing information.

The same is true of many theaters (p178), especially if you are on a tight schedule and want to be sure of getting tickets for a specific day. The hottest ticket in town, where booking ahead is essential, is the annual summertime Bard on the Beach festival (p178).

Many sporting events are easy to get into, but catching a Vancouver Canucks hockey game (p191) is a different story: book as far in advance as possible or you'll be relying on the predatory scalpers outside the stadium.

To see what's on in the city before you arrive, visit the *Georgia Straight* ([www.straight.com](http://www.straight.com)) website for comprehensive listings. Also check *Tickets Tonight* ([www.ticketstontight.ca](http://www.ticketstontight.ca)) for ticket booking and late-breaking discount seats to theatrical and sporting events. And if you're determined to eat in one of the city's top restaurants, check the recommendations in the Eating chapter (p127) and book ahead.

It's also worth remembering that kids stay free at many Vancouver hotels. Some of these have kitchenettes which can help to keep your dining budget down. See p193 for hotel reviews. If you're eating out, many restaurants will prepare half-orders for children, if they don't already have a dedicated kids menu.

The most expensive item in anyone's budget is likely to be their plane ticket and, after that, accommodations. Sleeping at mid-priced hotels or B&Bs, eating at neighborhood restaurants or shopping-mall food courts, and stretching your attractions budget with a few freebies will mean that two people traveling together should be able to keep costs down to \$100 or so each per day.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Beyond Robson** ([www.beyondrobson.com](http://www.beyondrobson.com)) Multi-author blogger site covering diverse aspects of the scene.

**City of Vancouver** ([www.vancouver.ca](http://www.vancouver.ca)) Resource-packed official city site with downloadable maps.

**Inside Vancouver** ([www.insidevancouver.ca](http://www.insidevancouver.ca)) Stories on what to do in and around the city.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Includes info on Vancouver and travelers trading information on the Thorn Tree.

**Miss 604** ([www.miss604.com](http://www.miss604.com)) Vancouver's favorite blogger.

**Scout Magazine** ([www.scoutmagazine.ca](http://www.scoutmagazine.ca)) Food and culture zine, with good restaurant listings.

**Tourism Vancouver** ([www.tourismvancouver.com](http://www.tourismvancouver.com)) Official tourism site, stuffed with trip-planning resources.

**Urban Diner** ([www.urbandiner.ca](http://www.urbandiner.ca)) Up-to-the-minute listings and reviews of area restaurants.

**Vancity Buzz** ([www.vancitybuzz.com](http://www.vancitybuzz.com)) Popular locals-focused blog on the city vibe.

**Vancouver is Awesome** ([www.vancouverisawesome.com](http://www.vancouverisawesome.com)) Vibrant, artsy-focused online magazine.

**Visitors Choice Vancouver** ([www.visitorschoice.com](http://www.visitorschoice.com)) Good maps and an overview of attractions and accommodations.

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