

GOING PLACES

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JUST LOVING VANCOUVER



Big cities rarely excite me. “See one – you’ve seen them all!” (as the tired cliché says). And when we touched-down in Vancouver after a 13½ hour flight across the Pacific Ocean (“during which you snored and dribbled the whole way,” insists my wife) I fully expected to be ho-hummed again. But no, far from it! Vancouver quickly proved to be a worthy exception. And I just as quickly fell in love ...

This cosmopolitan showcase is the envy of the Pacific Northwest: wall-to-wall skyscrapers everywhere you look ... fantastic mirror-glass reflections everywhere else ... a maze of waterways, islands, bridges, beaches ... a wow-you waterfront littered with fountains, parks and cafes ... swarms of colourful floatplanes taking off and landing ... and an endless in-out procession of cruise-ships and kayaks, sailboats and ferries.

In case you're wondering, Captain Cook was the first known European to set foot in what is now British Columbia. And, if it wasn't for a little blip by whoever drew the lines on maps, Vancouver could well have been part of the U.S. of A. Instead, this stunning coastal city managed to sneak in to Canada's bottom-left-hand corner – and if you're after a green rainforest, a blue ocean, a white mountain-



Steam clock.



top, or a pink sock-eye salmon, you truly couldn't come to a better place!

We ventured out on foot that first full day in town, snapping brag-worthy photos and successfully dodging wrong-side-of-the-road traffic. Then, later, we ate dinner at the Steamworks Brewery in Gastown while a burnt-orange sun went down over the bay.

Gastown (in case you're wondering again) got its name from “Gassy Jack” Deighton – famous during the late 1800s as a spinner of very tall tales. He arrived, stepping ashore with a barrel of whiskey, and convinced the local millworkers that if they'd build him a saloon, he'd serve them drinks. The saloon was up and running within a day ... and the Gastown district still oozes historic charm.

Next morning, I graciously allowed my wife to go shopping while I took to the skies in one of those floatplanes. And oh, what a blast! And what eye-popping views from up-up-up-above! Little wonder Vancouver regularly tops those lists of the world's greatest places to live ...

We sampled a sandwich on a park-bench somewhere, then went for a good old-fashioned Sunday afternoon drive (remember those when you were a kid?) aboard a comfortable coach, while an



attractive young Vancouverite (speaking French-tainted English) introduced us to her city's landmarks: Lions Gate Bridge, Canada Place, Chinatown, Robson Street, Gastown (where we eyeballed a hissing steam clock), Stanley Park (where we got close-up to some towering totem poles), Prospect Point (where we were greeted by a stripey racoon), and a popular fun-time zone known as Granville Island.

By the end of which we were hungry again – so it was off for a banquet at the Granville Hotel.

An early-morning wake-up call got us out of bed ... the hotel's lift got us to the top floor for breakfast ... a coach got us to the ferry terminal at Tsawwassen (*bet you can't pronounce it!*) ... and a giant BC Ferry took us (coach

and all) to Vancouver Island, some 90 minutes away, across island-studded waters.

We then headed off, under clear blue skies and a hot Canadian sun, on a walking tour of the world-famous-and-utterly-gorgeous Butchart Gardens – where we oohed and aahed and isn't-it-beautifulled for several thoroughly pleasant hours.

This magnificent botanical estate (in case you're still wondering) was created 100 years ago from the remains of an old quarry. It's now a National Historical Site of Canada, expecting its 50-millionth visitor any day now. (*Who knows, that might've been me?*)

Anyway, you'd have to be an unseeing, unfeeling, uncultured klutz not to be blown away by these 55 acres of flowers. One of the loveliest corners on the planet? You'd better believe it!

We strolled along meandering paths and expansive lawns, played hide-and-seek amongst the hedgerows, climbed steps, smelled the roses, sat under shade trees, and snacked at the café.

Then we followed that up with a short tour of Victoria, the truly lovely capital of British Columbia – once touted as Canada's most Ye-Olde-English city.

Back in Vancouver, we grabbed an early night between crisply-ironed sheets on our enormous king-sized hotel bed ... and dreamed of the next leg on this North American adventure: Alaska!



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