

Spectacular natural beauty and fine dining best describes Vancouver



by Mike Cohen

Surrounded by water on three sides and nestled alongside the Coast Mountain Range, Vancouver is Western Canada's largest metropolitan area with so much to offer in terms of natural beauty, attractions, beaches, five star accommodations and culinary delight.

Whether you're looking for a stretch of sand to spread out and relax with a good book, an outdoor court to spike a volleyball, or a catwalk to strut your stuff, Vancouver's got it. Kitsilano Beach Park, located practically downtown, features one of the largest swimming pools I have ever seen and we spent a fantastic day there. Bar none this is my favorite Canadian city to visit and given the fact we had just over a week there, my "to do" list has a lot of options to explore next



time and that will certainly come much sooner than later.

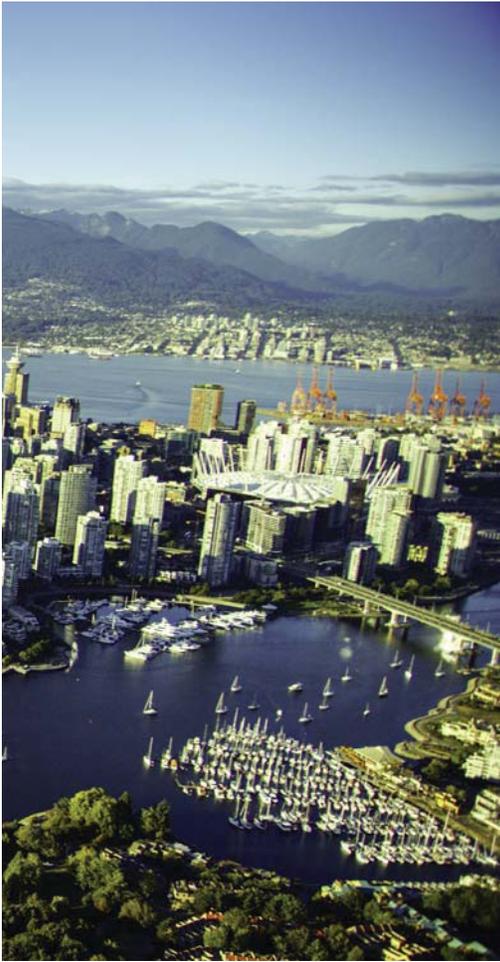
Where to Stay

There are more than 24,000 rooms in Greater Vancouver and more than 13,000 in the downtown core. For this trip we based ourselves at the Landis Hotel & Suites (<https://www.landissuitesvancouver.com>) located downtown at 1200 Hornby Street. The property offers deluxe, executive and penthouse suites. They are in the midst of renovations, replacing carpeting with hardwood floors and outfitting the rooms with new furniture. Our executive suite featured a master bedroom with a luxurious king bed and a second bedroom with a comfortable Queen bed. Both had cozy duvets and triple sheeting, black-out drapes, closet space with mirrored glass doors and a radio alarm clock. The kitchen offers ample cooking and storage space, and includes a full-size fridge with a freezer, a stove, an oven, a dishwasher, microwave, toaster and coffee maker. You can enjoy your meals or snacks in the dining area located on an enclosed balcony with city views. The glass-top table seats four. As well, you can sleep extra guests on the pull-out sofa sleeper in the nice-sized living room, which also features a 37 inch flat

screen HDTV. Guests can relax after a busy day in the deep soaker tub in the full bathroom, which also features a shower and double sinks with a granite countertop. This is one of few hotels in Vancouver to feature all-suite accommodations and an indoor pool to play around in.

Sea to Sky Gondola

There are a lot of marvelous tourist attractions. On this trip we tried something new, The Sea to Sky Gondola (www.seatoskygondola.com). It is located on Highway 99 just south of Squamish, a scenic 45 minute drive (depending upon traffic) from downtown Vancouver. A 10 minute gondola ride will take you up to a truly magical place with some of the most spectacular views you will ever see and activities for all interests and ages. We really enjoyed the experience, especially the memorable photographs we took where the backdrop was spectacular. As you rise from the water's edge on the valley floor, the view opens up before you: the bright blue water of Howe Sound, dotted with green islands and backed by the steep mountains of the Coast Range; the majestic Stawamus Chief; and a bird's eye view of the town of Squamish with the rugged, snow-capped mountains to the north. The ride up



and down is a thrilling adventure for all ages and provides new views of Shannon Falls and the famous Squamish Chief climbing area. You will arrive at the Summit Lodge where the experience continues. A popular spot for spectacular photos is the 100 metre Sky Pilot Suspension Bridge. There are events happening year-round at the Sea to Sky Gondola.

Playland

If you like amusement parks, Vancouver's Pacific National Exhibition (www.pne.ca) on East Hastings Street is the place to go. The 15 acre Playland Amusement Park is a popular attraction. Open from late April through the end of September it has hosted millions of thrill seekers of all ages since it opened in



1910. Playland's marquee attraction, the beloved 1958 Wooden Roller Coaster, remains the most popular ride on the site and one of the most highly regarded wooden coasters in the world. The flume, though, ranks as a favorite as well. Other popular rides include wave swinger, west coast wheel, breakdance, the scrambler, the corkscrew, rock climbing, the hellevator, bumper cars, the pirate ship and music express.

Sports Action

If you are a sports fan, Vancouver is home to the NHL's Canucks, Major League Soccer's Whitecaps, the CFL's BC Lions and minor league professional Scotiabank Field at Nat Bailey Stadium June through the end of August.

Dining Out

There are some superb restaurants in Vancouver. Here are some in particular I strongly recommend Joe Fortes Seafood & Chop House (www.joefortes.ca) on downtown Thurlow Street has become our "go to" place while in Vancouver. One of Joe Fortes many unique qualities is the immediate sense of character and personality that guests recognize the moment they step inside. The main dining room is anchored by a soaring horseshoe oyster bar. This Grand Room boasts large, cozy booths, perfect for hosting a high-powered lunch or dinner meetings, as well as intimate dinner dates. From the mezzanine, diners enjoy a bird's eye view of the action and live musical entertainment below. The mahogany-walled wine room offers guests a unique and discreet setting in which to enjoy an intimate lunch, or a private corporate celebration. The more casual side of Joe's is experienced in the bistro and bar area where locals and out-of-towners alike mingle, soak up the live music and keep their eyes open for visiting celebrities. For a breath of fresh air, guests can step up to Vancouver's most desirable roof garden and into an urban oasis featuring a living green wall, cozy outdoor fireplace and bustling horseshoe bar. Serving more than 50 kinds of fresh fish, including their legendary Seafood Tower on Ice, premium oysters and succulent chops, their signature dishes have become a favourite of locals, celebrities and tourists alike.

The Sandbar on Granville Island (www.vancouverdine.com/sandbar) was packed the night we chose to dine there. Guests can enjoy the bustle of the market, the non-stop energy of False Creek and the shores of Vancouver's West End. Walk up the wood post staircase, the only item that was salvaged from the historic Mulvaney's Restaurant site, and elevate your view of the city waterfront. The busy animated open



kitchen gives the guest that "Granville Island Market feeling" plus an up-close look at the chefs as they prepare their seafood creations. The Sandbar serves up the freshest seafood in a warm, sophisticated atmosphere. Along with your menu comes a clipboard called the Seafood Fresh Sheet, with holes punched next to the items that are fresh that day. The magnificent Sandbar Tower - eight jumbo prawns, 12 oysters, ahi tuna poke, salmon sashimi, king crab and lobster - is a good starter to share. They have some excellent sushi here as well.

Bridges (www.bridgesrestaurant.com), also on Granville Island, has been a landmark on Vancouver's waterfront for over 27 years. It serves the freshest seafood the city has to offer. Bridges operates a second floor dining room with 150 seats inside and a 40 seat terrace. On the main floor is a 120 seat bistro and a 100 seat bar with its own terrace. During the summer months they operate Vancouver's largest patio, with a license for 300 seats on the waterfront. We enjoyed the fresh oysters, calamari with house made tzatziki, the grilled chicken club burger and the mixed green salad with a salmon filet.

Finally, we got to experience Gotham Steakhouse and Bar (<https://gothamsteakhouse.com>) at 615 Seymour Street for the first time. The menu is simple and classic steakhouse, with only the finest ingredients making the cut. Hand-crafted cocktails and extensive wine list make decisions just a little harder, but satisfaction guaranteed. The a la carte menu features classic steakhouse favourites, perfectly prepared and presented in an atmosphere of luxurious comfort.

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