

An overnight stay in Granville Island

By Mike Cohen
The Suburban

I love Vancouver, so when I knew we had to be in Los Angeles for a few days I made sure to arrange for a flight which enabled us to stay overnight in British Columbia's largest city.

What is the most enjoyable spot in Vancouver to hang out? Without a doubt, Granville Island (www.granvilleisland.com) earns that title.

Imagine an island in the middle of a city. Granville Island is moulded by a fascinating history, buzzing with a colourful artistic community. It's a living, breathing urban oasis filled with fine waterfront restaurants, theatres, galleries, studios, unique shops, cafes and the most spectacular fresh food market you've ever seen. Their website says that no visit to the city is complete without spending at least a day here and that is just what we did,

We sought out and found a place to stay right on site. The Granville Island Hotel (www.granvilleislandhotel.com) may just be Vancouver's best kept secret. This hidden gem offers guests a one-of-a-kind experience. The newly renovated hotel offers a sense of sophisticated elegance with all the comforts of home.

No two rooms are alike at this hotel. The standard rooms have deluxe mattresses, duvets and triple sheeting, ensuring a pleasant sleep. You have a choice between either two double beds or one king. Rooms come with water views, park views, and some have private balconies. Bedding selections and views are available by requests only.

Given the beautiful weather when we arrived we asked for a Superior corner room with a balcony. It was a beauty, very large in size and perfect for entertaining some family members who live in Vancouver. The room had a large sized working desk, a small pullout couch, two tables and two chairs. At the end of the incredibly comfortable bed was a bench to place your luggage or sit on. As for the balcony, what a beautiful option to wake up to when the weather is nice – a picturesque view of the water front and the city. There are chairs to sit on as well.

We had a microwave next to a full sink, a completely stocked mini bar, great lighting, a safety deposit box in the cupboard, bathrobes, "very" high speed internet, a 42 inch flat screen LCD TV with HD channels and a bathroom to die for – huge in size with two sinks, a large mirror and a gigantic shower.

When we walked by the front desk with our family member's dog, the staff member handed us a cookie

for the adorable canine. We were on the third floor, home to a nice health club outfitted with a number of stair masters, flat screen TVs and a hot tub.

The lobby is very welcoming, leading towards meeting rooms on one side and the very popular Dockside Restaurant, open for breakfast, lunch and supper, on the other. There is a live fish tank surrounding the bar, an in-house brewery and an endless wall of different wines. This has become a popular spot for weddings.

Sales and Marketing Manager John Fialkowski went to McGill and spent much of his youth in West Island Senneville, with his grandparents. "I have good memories from the West Island," he says. "Senneville is so rural, quite a contrast to nearby Montreal."

Fialkowski, 32, studied in urban geography at McGill, but ended up going into the hotel business. He started at a place called the Stone Willow Inn near Stratford as the restaurant manager and then headed to British Columbia, first as the manager of a small hotel in New Westminster and then to the Granville Island Hotel as front desk manager. Two years ago he moved to another hotel, but returned to Granville in April with his new position.

In his capacity, Fialkowski books groups and meeting rooms, sets rates and markets the property. "It is a one of a kind place," he says. "You are basically in a seaside resort. I take my bike to work. When I get in I look out the window and I see sailboats."

My brother in law tells me that Granville Island is recognized as one of the top 10 tourist attractions in the world. We arrived on a Sunday evening. When I went for a walk the following mid-morning the place was jammed with people.

At the market it was fun to browse the aisles and sample local and exotic flavours from the very best farmers, bakers, butchers and fishmongers. There were crafts galore and buskers too. Daring improvi-



McGill grad John Fialkowski on the dockside by the Granville Island Hotel.

sational comedy, modern interpretations of classic plays and contemporary theatrical productions are presented at venues on site. And whether it's a casual nibble or gourmet dining, you'll discover why Granville Island is famous for its food. My favourite spot here is the Sandbar at 1535 Johnston Street – a short walk from the hotel. The 300 seat restaurant is usually packed, serving up the freshest seafood in a warm, sophisticated atmosphere.

The Emily Carr University of Art and Design is based on Granville Island, offering exhibitions to the public. Right next door you will find glassblowing, jewellery making and other artisans' studios.

You can take a rental boat around scenic English Bay or hop on an Aquabus or a False Creek Ferry for a quick jaunt around the False Creek Inlet. This is also the place for starting off on an unforgettable sea kayak adventure or whale watching tour.



A bird's eye view of the hotel and its picturesque location.