



## Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen



### Vancouver: one of the most accessible cities in the world

Olympic fever has hit the city of Vancouver. And why not? The Winter Olympic Games will take place here and in Whistler February 12 to 28, 2010 followed by the Paralympic Winter Games for athletes with disabilities March 12 to 21, 2010. Everywhere you go there is a reminder of this. It is estimated that the games will be attended by 2.3 million people and include 5,000 athletes and officials, 10,000 media and 14,000 volunteers. Vancouver ([www.tourismvancouver.com](http://www.tourismvancouver.com)) is the largest city in the province of British Columbia.

#### First ever disabled Mayor



Mayor Sam Sullivan

Vancouver enjoys a reputation as being one of the most accessible cities in the world among travelers with special needs. Whether using wheel-

chairs, white canes, seeing eye dogs or hearing aids, Vancouver leads the way in making the area a more livable place for people with disabilities through its progressive transportation systems, innovative housing and recreational opportunities. It is perhaps no coincidence that Vancouver also happens to have Canada's first-ever disabled mayor. Sam Sullivan, whose three year mandate ends in November, was paralyzed from the waist down after a skiing accident at the age of 19. This left him as what is called a C 4/5 quadriplegic, meaning his injury occurred high enough on his spinal column to qualify him as a quadriplegic—but low enough that he retained some use of his hands (he can still write, drive and use the telephone.) He

is the founder of six non-profit organizations that have improved the lives of thousands of North Americans with disabilities, including the Tetra Society, which recruits technically-skilled volunteers to create assistive devices for people with disabilities (30 chapters throughout North America), and the Disabled Sailing Association which provides opportunities for people with disabilities to sail (20 chapters in North America). He is an avid sailor, and also enjoys hiking using an assistive device he co-invented called the TrailRider, a one-wheeled vehicle that enables people with disabilities to travel and participate in hiking/camping trips and is in use throughout North America.

"People are disabled by the barriers and obstacles in their lives," Sullivan told Inspirations in an interview. "What I have worked to do is remove those barriers, so that a person's physical impairment is not so disabling."

In 1993 Sullivan was elected to Vancouver city council. Twelve years later he became mayor. His role as the flag bearer at the closing ceremony of the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy was viewed by an audience around the globe. As mayor he was involved the city's planning for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. This includes the construction of over \$100 million for venues and the Olympic Village in Southeast False Creek – the largest and greenest housing development in North America.

#### Paralympic Flag Given Prominence

In our interview, Mayor Sullivan lamented that he will not be at the helm when the Olympics take place. He failed to win the nomination from his party to seek a second term in office. Nonetheless, when the Olympics and Paralympics take place he will be an interested observer. Since the Games were awarded to Vancouver he has had the Paralympic flag fly at the same height as the Olympic flag, something that was followed at the provincial legislature. Given his disposition, he appreciates the fact there is such a strong Paralympic movement. "I hope that some of the things I did and advocated for will result in the Paralympics gaining a higher profile here," he said.

Does Mayor Sullivan see himself as

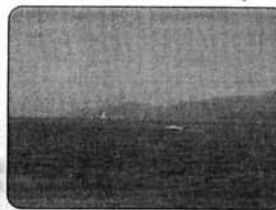
reputation of dealing with people who have special needs. "Some people do say that Vancouver is successful in this area because they have a disabled mayor," he said. "The opposite is true. We have a disabled mayor or because Vancouver is so accessible. So many people have worked hard to make this a reality. I am just one of the beneficiaries."

#### Effective Transportation System

Among travellers with disabilities, Vancouver boasts an effective transportation system, innovative housing and recreational opportunities.

For example, as one of the most barrier-free airports in the world, the Vancouver International Airport exceeds the national and provincial Building Code standards for people with hearing, visual or mobility impairments. The airport's terminal features include: ticket and service counters with amplified hand-sets; low-mounted flight information monitors designed for easier viewing with high-contrast typeface; visual paging monitors and public address systems displayed in written form; information kiosks equipped with closed-captioned decoders; tactile guidance maps of the terminal building; accessible public telephones and services for the deaf; and accessible washrooms; facilities for service dogs are to be built in the near future.

The mayor is particularly proud of the role he played in creating a new entrance to the Granville Street SkyTrain station on September 22, 2006, making this previously inaccessible station accessible for disabled patrons. Nonetheless he is quick to point out that he wishes to consider himself as "the mayor for everyone" adding "the beauty about Vancouver is that we have very capable advocates. One of the laments of the disability movement is that as we become more successful we lose our leadership. Forty or



A view of the Pacific Ocean

an "Inspiration" to other individuals with disabilities? "I hope I can somehow inspire people to look at getting on with things and experiencing much more full and active lives," he responded.

Mayor Sullivan also refuses to take credit for Vancouver's excellent

50 years ago the world was not as accessible to individuals such as I. Therefore, at the time I probably would have been forced into a leading advocacy role. But that is not the case for myself or many others in my position. We have been allowed to follow our dreams."

In 1990, Vancouver became the first city in Canada to provide scheduled bus service to people with disabilities. There's also a free wheelchair-accessible trolley ride around Stanley Park, (604.801.5515).

#### Accommodations

There are more than 24,000 rooms in Greater Vancouver and more than 13,000 in the downtown core. While the average rate is just over \$120, rooms can go for as little as \$60 or more than \$1,000 a night. The best hotel deals are offered October through April. The Rosedale on Robson ([www.rosedaleonrobson.com](http://www.rosedaleonrobson.com)) is located in an excellent area and is consistently improving its services for special needs guests.

As historic Yaletown's only all suite hotel, the Rosedale offers one and two bedroom suites for the price of a conventional hotel room. You can choose from an array of suites with two double beds or a queen. The suites offer the comforts of home with fully equipped galley kitchens. For the businessperson, you can access high speed internet WiFi as well as ample workspace. If you need time to relax, head to the indoor swimming pool or the second floor garden terrace. For the fitness minded, there is an exercise area and equipment is at your disposal.

Handicapped rooms are available, pets are welcome (pet-free floors are also available), and the hotel is completely non-smoking. The fact that WorkSafe B.C. (the workmen's compensation board) uses the hotel for its staff has provided General Manager James Miller, a native of Montreal, with some excellent in-house advisors where catering to special needs guests is concerned. "The people from WorkSafe B.C. have certainly sensitized us to some of the things that will make things easier for our special needs guests," Miller said. "Something as simple as our door sills being too thick for wheelchairs to get over. We will be installing some roll-in showers and special railings as well."

The hotel offers complimentary coffee, tea, hot chocolate and freshly baked goods every morning in "Goody's" from 6:30-9:30 a.m. Rosie's on Robson Restaurant and Pub is very popular among locals stopping by for dinner before enjoying a night out at the theatre, concert, or a hockey game. Unique to the Rosedale on Robson is their event desk, which offers popular sports, theatre and concert packages. Other features include secure underground parking with in/out privileges,

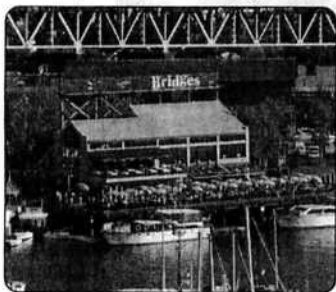


valet parking, and safety deposit boxes. Just steps away from the symphony, opera and live theatre, nearby venues include the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Vancouver Playhouse, Centre For Performing Arts, and the Orpheum and Vogue Theatres. Sports enthusiasts can walk to GM Place, home of the Vancouver Canucks, and BC Place, home of the BC Lions. Close by are Granville Island, Chinatown, Kitsilano, English Bay, Stanley Park, Capilano Suspension Bridge, Grouse Mountain, Edgewater Casino, Vancouver Art Gallery, Telus World of Science, golf courses, and beautiful beaches.

### World of Science

When I told people I was going to Vancouver, those who have been there before insisted we make time to visit TELUS World of Science and Science World ([www.scienceworld.bc.ca](http://www.scienceworld.bc.ca)), located at 1455 Quebec Street across the street from the Main Street/Science World Skytrain station. It features hundreds of interactive exhibits in five galleries. One involves a simulated wheelchair race where you get to test your upper body strength. Racing a wheelchair, we discover, requires you to use many muscles. Here we also learn about wheelchair posture. Racing wheelchairs, it turns out, can reach speeds of 32 km per hour on a flat course. Science World is handicapped accessible, with ramps leading to each level. Communications Coordinator Pamela Findling told me that there are many volunteers throughout the Centre with special needs, one of whom is blind.

Science World's exhibits are designed to engage and entertain a broad spectrum of people, from toddlers to senior citizens. Younger children may find a gallery like Kidspace most interesting, whereas adults might have more fun in a gallery like BodyWorks. Is my face symmetrical? What will I look like in 30 years? Where did I come from? These are just a few of the questions that the BodyWorks gallery has explored this year, allowing visitors to get a peek into what our bodies look like with powerful, interactive stations where they can stretch a rope out to see how long intestines



Bridges Restaurant

are, capture their face on camera and watch themselves age and use their powers of observation to try to read facial expressions correctly.

For a mere \$5 extra, you can enjoy an Imax film in one of the world's largest dome screens and a sensational wrap-around digital sound system. We saw the film *The Alps*, which captures the incredible true story of a mountaineer on a personal journey to make peace with the mountain that killed his father.

### Playland Amusement Park

I always like to check out amusement parks. Located on the site of Vancouver's Pacific National Exhibition ([www.pne.ca](http://www.pne.ca)) on East Hastings Street, 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. Designed by the legendary ride construction team, Carl Phare and Walker LeRoy, the Playland Wooden Coaster rides over half a million thrillseekers annually. Now I must confess that I normally avoid rollercoasters. Nonetheless, I convinced my family to wait in line for a half hour. That first drop was incredibly frightening, but a major rush at the same time. I am glad I did it. Ditto for the flume, in which we all got soaked to the skin. Other popular rides include the wild mouse, hell's gate, wave swinger, crazy beach party, the corkscrew, rock climbing, the hellevator, the pirate ship and music express. The "Kids Playce" has a variety of tamer rides, including the merry-go-round, KC's Raceway, dune buggies, the super slide, Pirate adventure, elephants, helicopters and honeybee express. There are the traditional carnival games, an arcade and plenty of food options. This place is a lot fun and I would highly recommend you spend the day there. Special needs individuals in wheelchairs can enter rides via the exit gate to avoid the lineup and to be placed on properly.

### Cultus Lake Waterpark

Cultus Lake Waterpark ([www.cultus.com](http://www.cultus.com)) is the leader in the waterpark industry on the West Coast. Whether you are on vacation or just taking a much needed break, watersliding is a great recreational activity. This is a family oriented park, providing guests with rides for all ages. For thrill seekers there are some extreme waterslides. Open Victoria Day to Labour Day, I spent the day there with my family. It was a one hour and 20 minute drive from down-

town Vancouver to Chilliwack, but well worth the trip. There are pathways throughout for anyone in wheelchairs. The visually impaired can go on any rides, as long as they are accompanied by someone else. Autistic children generally enjoy water parks. But as my colleague Tania Piperni points out, she only recommends them for a child who



Cultus Lake Waterpark

would not be overstimulated by the environment.

At Cultus Lake I strongly recommend the new Colossal Canyon, a family raft ride that is like no other. Our family went on this twice. It is quite a thriller. The same goes for the Valley of Fear, which includes one incredible drop that has you experiencing panic and a thrill at the same time. The 72 foot free fall and speed slide has you moving at a rapid pace. There are three other slides which are much tamer. For little ones, a much more sedate area exists. I found the adventure river, in which you travel in a circle on a small tube, very relaxing. The two large hot tubs indeed warm you up. Cultus Lake is full of greenspace. You can find shade under trees or rent an umbrella. It is a great way to spend a warm summer day.

### Theatre Under the Stars

If you are planning a summer visit to Vancouver, then you must include Theatre Under the Stars ([www.tuts.ca](http://www.tuts.ca)) at the Malkin Bowl. The program's best of Broadway musicals have been delighting audiences in Stanley Park since 1940. Every July and August they present two wonderful productions on alternating nights. Last summer Jesus Christ Superstar and Annie Get Your Gun were on the stage. My family and I saw the former, purchasing our tickets online at [www.ticketstonight.ca](http://www.ticketstonight.ca). This was a convenient choice since we were able to print them off the computer and avoid any lineups the night of the show. We got there a bit early and grabbed a light bite to eat in their small concession stand. Reserved tickets are \$36 for adults and \$34 for children versus \$31 and \$29 for general admission. We really enjoyed the experience of watching theatre "under the stars." Here is a tip. Bring insect repellent so the flies don't get to you. Stay tuned to their website to see what pro-

ductions are planned for 2009. The Malkin Bowl is fully handicapped accessible.

### Dining Out

In terms of dining recommendations, make sure to include Bridges ([www.bridgesrestaurant.com](http://www.bridgesrestaurant.com)) and the Mill Marine Bistro ([www.millbistro.ca](http://www.millbistro.ca)) in your planning. Located next to the public market on historic Granville Island, Bridges serves the freshest seafood Vancouver has to offer. Set near the Arts Club Theatre and Maritime Market, Bridges offers magnificent views of Vancouver's waterfront, mountains and city center. Bridges Dining Room, Bar, Bistro and outdoor dining are the quintessential summer experience in Vancouver. Served by public moorage, Aquabus and False Creek Ferries, Bridges is easily reached by the water and has hundreds of free parking stalls for automobile access. It is open daily, from 11 a.m. On the evening my party dined there we were seated on the patio. Our party shared some appetizers: hot garlic prawns, the tuna duo and the sweet red pepper and spinach dish. We enjoyed their salad and then sampled the crab and halibut cake burger, the fresh halibut fish and chips, their signature smoked wild salmon pizza and their grilled wild BC sockeye salmon. For dessert we left room for the tiramisu, chocolate mousse cake and a ice cream sundae for the delighted child at the table. The patio and main floor are completely handicapped accessible.

As for the Mill, this is among the properties of 34 year old Daniel Frankel, who is already a veteran in the Vancouver hospitality business. As president, CEO and founder of the Daniel Hospitality Group, he and his management company oversee a growing number of operations, including the Stanley Park Pavilion, Stanley's Parks Bar and Grill, the Prospect Point Lookout Complex in Stanley Park, the Mill Marine Bistro and Bar, the Mill Dock, Delilah's Restaurant and Martini Bar, the Coal Harbour Café & Catering Operations and Danny's Dogs & Shakes. He built the Mill from scratch in 2003. This place truly epitomizes the west coast casual dining scene, smack on the waterfront in Coal Harbour, overlooking the north shore mountains. Try the original Mill nachos, edamame (Japanese soy beans in the pod with rock salt), a big salad, the Lotsa Lox pizza, the BC Salmon Burger and some superb pastas. The Mill does have handicapped access, with ramps by their east and west side entrances.

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