

Beautiful Vancouver has so much to offer as a vacation spot



The Capilano Suspension Bridge

By Mike Cohen
The Suburban

I recently returned from a trip to Vancouver. It was my first time back in the province of British Columbia's largest city in five years.

We split our stay between Vancouver and Whistler. In Vancouver we returned to the Rosedale on Robson where we stayed in the past. Comfort, location, relaxation, entertainment, water and mountain views, this place has it all! As historic Yaletown's only all suite hotel, the Rosedale offers 217 one and two bedroom suites for the price of a conventional hotel room

The 21st floor penthouse suite features two bedrooms with king size beds and accompanying bathrooms, a nice glass table with four chairs, two sitting chairs, a pullout couch and a gorgeous patio complete with a propane barbeque and a table and chairs so you can dine or entertain outdoors with a beautiful view of the city. The galley kitchen has a fridge and freezer, a stove, microwave, toaster, coffee maker, sink, cutlery, dishes and plenty of counter space.

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 Rogers Arena, home of the Canucks, and BC Place, home of the BC Lions

Capilano Suspension Bridge and Grouse Mountain

There are so many amazing activities to choose from. The Capilano Suspension Bridge Park is one of Vancouver's



A sea otter at the aquarium

most popular tourist attractions. Just minutes from the bustle of downtown, the attractions here offer a unique mix of adventure, history and culture making this Vancouver tourist attraction a complete BC experience.

Originally built in 1889, the bridge stretches 450 feet (137 m) across and 230 feet (70 m) above Capilano River. Much has been added to the 27-acre park. The two year old Cliffwalk is the park's newest attraction – a cantilevered walkway clinging to the granite cliff high above Capilano Canyon. Treetops Adventure features seven suspension bridges through the evergreens taking you up to 100 feet (30m) above the forest floor, offering a unique squirrel's eye perspective of the forest. Guided nature tours, the Kids' Rainforest Explorer program and the Living Forest exhibit enhance this unique rainforest encounter. You can also enjoy seasonal musical entertainment and First Nations culture. Be sure to take photos at the Totem Park and with the Capilano Tramps. Top it off with a visit to the gift shop full of quality merchandise. Admission prices range from \$12 to \$34.95 depending upon the season. There is a free shuttle service from downtown.

After experiencing the Capilano Suspension Bridge, we headed a little further up the road to Grouse Mountain. This spot offers the perfect destination for a truly rewarding and memorable experience. Here there are a variety of cultural, educational and outdoor adventures to choose from. Most of Grouse Mountain's summer and winter activities are complimentary with an admission ticket. We began by taking the Skyride up the mountain. High above towering Douglas firs, breathtaking views of the city of Vancouver, sparkling Pacific Ocean, Gulf Islands, and snowy peaks unfold as you take this journey. North America's largest aerial tramway system is your gateway to the majestic nature of The Peak of Vancouver, and an experience in itself. Whether you're in search of the perfect photo, or a picturesque dinner at The Observatory, your adventure begins with the Skyride. It operates 365 days a year, departing every 15 minutes from 8:45am to 10:00pm. In summer months, the first downhill Skyride departs at 7:30am. A round trip Skyride is included with an Alpine Experience ticket or annual membership.

Once up there, we headed directly to a fabulous show where some special birds were the stars. Right next door

was the bear habitat, with two grizzlies protected from the public by electric fences. We watched as they walked about, ate grass, lay on their backs and inched closer than we expected to folks with cameras in hand. The Eye of the Wind, meanwhile, is inspiring and revolutionary. This is the world's first and only wind turbine that allows you to stand in a clear glass view POD at the top of the tower, three metres from its massive, rotating blades.

The Aquarium and Playland

At the Vancouver Aquarium you come to face-to-fin with over 70,000 animals, including beluga whales, steller sea lions, dolphins, seals and more! Enjoy the dolphin and whale shows, sea otter feeds, and shark dives. Free-roaming animals abound in their popular Amazon Gallery. For a unique hands-on adventure, ask about the Animal Encounters program. You can call their easy to remember phone number - 604.659.FISH . Purchasing tickets online is a great way to speed up your access to all that the Aquarium has to offer. This is a self-supporting, non-profit society dedicated to effecting the conservation of aquatic life through display and interpretation, education, research and direct action. Your entrance admission supports their conservation and research efforts. Admission prices range from \$19 to \$30.

If you like amusement parks, Vancouver's Pacific National Exhibition 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. Designed by the legendary ride construction team, Carl Phare and Walker LeRoy, the Playland Wooden Coaster rides over half a million people annually. The flume, though, ranks as my favorite ride. We all got soaked to the skin, but lined up three times to experience it again and strike just the right pose to purchase one of those promotion photos. 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. The "Kids



The Joe Fortes rooftop garden

Playce” has a variety of tamer rides, including the merry-go-round, KC’s Raceway, cool cruisers, the super slide, raiders, helicopters, tea cups and honeybee express. There are the traditional carnival games, an arcade and plenty of food options. The PNE is wheelchair accessible. Disabled access is provided at one bathroom stop near the midway.

Live Theatre

If you are planning a summer visit to Vancouver, then you must include Theatre Under the Stars 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. The summer of 2013 featured Legally Blonde and How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying on the stage. My family and I saw the former, purchasing our tickets online. Reserved tickets are \$29 to \$42 for adults and \$24 to \$29 for children and youth. We really enjoyed this our second experience of watching theatre “under the stars.” The atmosphere on the warm summer night was superb. A better backdrop you will not find. The show was of high quality, including the acting, singing, sets and costumes. Unquestionably this is a well oiled machine. If you are in Vancouver for a few weeks during the summer and have young children or teens, consider the theatre camp for those aged eight to 18.

For live theatre, check out the magnificent Arts Club Theatre Company at 1585 Johnston Street next to the public market. Shows are Tuesday through Sundays at what is called Western Canada’s largest not for profit organization of its kind, having been in operation for 49 years.

While we were in town, the Arts Club was presenting the Tony Award winning Avenue Q. Originally conceived as a television series, Avenue Q’s “autobiographical and biographical” coming of age parable was developed as a stage produc-

tion at the 2002 National Music Theatre Conference at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut. It opened Off Broadway in March 2003, co produced by The New Group and the Vineyard Theatre. With more than 2,500 performances, Avenue Q ranks 23rd on the list of longest running shows in Broadway history. The show ended its Broadway run on September 13, 2009, and then reopened Off Broadway at New World Stages in October 2009.

Car Rentals

In preparing for my Vancouver trip, I made the rounds with the different rental car companies. Whether I called them directly, went online or tried the Priceline.com or expedia.com routes, the prices were always much too high. Then I came across Lo-Cost Rental Car, an outfit based just near the Vancouver International Airport and the best prices and customer service I can report upon.

Lo-Cost strives to be above their competition in every way possible. This includes no charge pick-up/ drop-off and seven days a week working hours, guaranteed lowest rental rates and first class multi-lingual customer service. They have been around for more than 30 years.

You can reserve online, but what I liked was the ability to speak to people on the ground and not some random operator.

They are conveniently located at 5551 No. 3 road in downtown Richmond, directly across the street from Lansdowne Mall, steps away from Lansdowne Sky train Station on the Canada Line, five minutes from YVR Vancouver International Airport and 17 minutes away from downtown Vancouver by Sky train. From the airport you need only give them a call and they will come pick you, your family and your luggage up from the airport free of charge.

Dining Out

There are some superb restaurants in Vancouver. Here are two in particular I strongly recommend.

First let me tell you about Joe Fortes Seafood & Chop House on downtown Thurlow Street. We were a party of five on the night we chose to dine there and this was an extraordinary experience from the moment we were seated on the gorgeous roof garden. This is indeed one of the city’s finest restaurants.

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.

Joe Fortes Seafood & Chop House has been specializing in classic, American cuisine since 1985. The kitchen prepares each dish with a focus on natural flavours and features the finest ingredients collected from Pacific Northwest farmers, fishermen and food artisans. Serving more than 50 kinds of fresh fish, including their legendary three-tiered Seafood Tower on Ice, premium oysters and succulent chops, their signature dishes have become a favourite of locals, celebrities and tourists alike.

This was more than just a dinner for our group – it was an experience. We decided to share the magnificent Seafood Tower on Ice - Atlantic lobster, chilled crab, local oysters, clams, mussels, scallop ceviche, smoked local albacore tuna and poached jumbo prawns and a couple of orders of King crab tempura.

While we enjoyed every morsel of these appetizers, it was time to select our main courses. That was no easy task and you can check out the menu online to understand what I am talking about. Would it be seafood or beef? Four members of the group decided to have the best of both worlds – splitting the filet mignon and the most delicious cuts like butter piece of fish we’ve ever experienced - miso marinated sable fish with sides of rice and scallop potatoes. I opted for the prime rib, with Yorkshire pudding and mashed potatoes.

Did we have room for dessert? Our server Alisha suggested we try some sweet indulgences. We agreed and along came the dessert trio – Tahitian vanilla crème brulee, tiramisu, molten center chocolate cake, brandied cherries, biscotti and vanilla gelato.

Needless to say, reservations are recommended here.7

We did have a nice Montreal connection at the restaurant. The hostess who showed us to our table, Tori Simons, is a second year McGill University student in Anatomy and Cell Biology.

The Sandbar on Granville Island at 1535 Johnston Street is a neat 300 seat restaurant which serves up some incredible seafood.

Along with your menu comes a clipboard called the Seafood Fresh Sheet, with holes punched next to the items that are fresh that day. We started off with some splendid sushi as an appetizer and also shared shrimp dumplings and cold poached prawns. For the main courses, selections varied from the amazing Mahi Mahi, the Ahi Tuna, a two pound Atlantic lobster and pan seared scallops. Open seven days a week from 5:30 p.m. onwards, we will definitely return to this spot on our next trip and hopefully try other members of the group.



Theatre Under The Stars is presenting Legally Blonde The Musical this summer