

★ TOP 10



Not to be missed!

Our TOP 10 hits – from the absolute No. 1 to No. 10 – help you plan your tour of the most important sights.

★ ICEFIELDS PARKWAY ▶ 134

Two-dozen glaciers and over twenty peaks make the Icefields Parkway, through the Banff and Jasper National Parks, the most spectacular of all of Canada's scenic roads.

★ OKANAGAN ▶ 114

A captivatingly diverse terrain: the lush, verdant Okanagan Valley and its appendix, the semi-arid Osoyoos Desert, are two of the best wine producing areas in North America.

★ STANLEY PARK ▶ 52

This wonderful park was first a military reserve, which spared the old-growth forest hemlock and Douglas fir, leaving it just as it was before the arrival of European explorers.

★ PACIFIC RIM NATIONAL PARK ▶ 92

The old fishing port of Tofino is now a popular starting point for tours to the whales, bears and the other natural wonders of the national park, which is studded with islands.

★ INNER HARBOUR, VICTORIA ▶ 90

One of the most beautiful natural harbours on the Pacific coast with the Empress Hotel, a hotel steeped in tradition that opened in 1908, as the starting point for relaxing strolls.

★ WELLS GRAY PROVINCIAL PARK ▶ 116

The park's numerous spectacular waterfalls – the most impressive is the high Helmcken Falls – are the main attraction on this excursion.

★ CALGARY TOWER ▶ 167

The prairies to the east and the soaring mountain wall of the Rockies to the west – the observation platform on the 191m (627ft) high tower is the ideal place to get your bearings.

★ GLACIER & MT REVELSTOKE NATIONAL PARKS ▶ 118

Canadian nature at its most dramatic: steep mountains with precipitous avalanche chutes, 400 glaciers and Rogers Pass, a scenic mountain pass.

★ ROYAL TYRRELL MUSEUM ▶ 168

The museum's striking dinosaur exhibits and great location in the arid, otherworldly Alberta Badlands, make the excursion from Calgary very worthwhile.

★ GRANVILLE ISLAND ▶ 58

The heart and soul of trend-setting Vancouver – galleries and indie theatres, organic gardeners, artists and bon vivants, they all come together on Granville Island (▶ left).

THIS IS VANCOUVER

City of Light and the Long View

Vancouver goes from strength to strength. Always among the world's most beautiful and vibrant cities, it continues to grow, its reputation enhanced by the 2010 Winter Olympics and its streets ever more dynamic and cosmopolitan.

The weather in the streets might not always be the best – it rains in Vancouver...and then it rains some more – but the setting is sublime; the environment is clean and safe; the well-integrated multicultural population embraces diversity with enthusiasm; you can ski pretty much year-round; there's swimming and sunbathing on beaches just minutes from city centre downtown; the city's Stanley Park is one of North America's biggest and wildest; and the restaurants are world class.

Vancouver's skyline reflected in the water

Zest for Life

Vancouver gives the lie to Canada's perceived image problem, the notion that this is a country that's worthy but dull, beautiful but boring – nice place, nice people, no fun. With its zest for life, spectacular scenery, excellent nightlife, urban beaches, funky cafés, fashionable bars and wild outdoor activities, Vancouver gloriously rejects the cliché with a flair that rivals West Coast hotspots such as San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Stroll around Canada Place to see how the city celebrates modern architecture and its magnificent port (► 60). Look up at the mountains – that's where the locals ski in Olympic standard conditions and facilities; then look out to sea – that's where they sail their boats. Or sit in a café on Granville Island (► 58) – that's where they shop, stroll and people-watch.

Pacific Player

Vancouver's location on the Pacific has resulted in a long history of immigration from China and other Asian countries, and today Vancouver's Chinatown is the third-largest in North America, while about half of the 2.5 million inhabitants in the greater Vancouver area are Asian. The Pacific has been a lifeline for British Columbia (BC) since coastal First Nations peoples thrived on its maritime bounty. About three quarters of BC's citizens live on the coast and the Pacific and Asian markets play an increasingly important role in Vancouver's economy and society.



Getting Your Bearings

Sydney would disagree, Rio too, and San Francisco might demur, but it's hard to think of a city more beautiful than Vancouver – or one where it must be such a pleasure to live. Set between ocean and mountain, the city is scenically unrivalled, the waters of the Pacific bounding the downtown core, the peaks of the Coast Mountains rearing majestically in the near distance.

Hedonism among locals is unbridled, and no wonder, for Vancouver's lucky, multicultural residents can ski, sail, sunbathe (Vancouver even has beaches), hike, fish, dive and much more, all within a few minutes of the city centre. Wilderness – literally – is just a bus ride away, in the mountains above North Vancouver, while the world-class winter and summer resort of Whistler is a mere 90 minutes away by road.

Whether or not you take advantage of this natural playground, it's hard to resist Vancouver's summer allure, when the city's café and cultural life – vibrant at the best of times – takes to the streets and parks (Vancouver's infamous rain can put a damper on things the rest of the year).

Outstanding museums, galleries, gardens and shops also abound, but you could simply revel in the cityscapes and still have a great trip – the vibrant port that underpins the city's prosperity, the natural splendour of Stanley Park, the high-rise Downtown, the busy market on Granville Island, the beach at Kitsilano and the grittier and more historic corners of Gastown and Chinatown. You can see Vancouver in three days but you'll probably want to stay longer.

TOP 10

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- ★ Granville Island ▶ 58

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At Your Leisure

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John Fluevog Shoes shop in Gastown