



## VICTORIA THE GREAT

Magnolia Hotel & Spa's Festive Trail.

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There are thousands of ways to trim a Christmas tree: from classic white lights to colourful trinkets, frosted fronds to handmade decorations. This year, the Bay Centre in Victoria, B.C., will show off 65 different styles at the annual Festival of Trees, on display until January 5. "It just makes sense that they are here," says a bundled-up shopper of the festive foliage, which was housed in previous years at the Fairmont Empress Hotel (currently under renovation). "This way, everybody who goes to the mall gets to see them."

This merry stop is one of 10 highlighted on the **Magnolia Hotel & Spa's Festive Trail**, part of the downtown boutique property's line-up of curated, self-guided walks. During the winter season, guests can speak to a Christmas Concierge in the lobby before picking up a trail map and taking to the streets to uncover the city's festive highlights. And, with its ambience steeped in fine English sensibility—partly a result of the many British expats that have made their home in Victoria—the city really gets into the spirit of things.

Named after Queen Victoria, B.C.'s capital holds to it dearly the tradition of lavish cake-filled afternoon teas, but there are no sweets as canonically Victorian as Rogers' Chocolates. The sweet emporium was founded here, in the back of a grocery store, by Charles "Candy" Rogers, and celebrates its 130th anniversary this year. New seasonal offerings on the chocolate block include fat pineapple upside-down cake dessert truffles, a chocolate-filled Hat Box for gifting, and one very large milk chocolate Santa Clause that's the size of a small child. Fill up on treats before unwinding in a horse-drawn carriage ride, which clip-clops through the streets at a slow, regal pace.

Disembark for another stop on the festive trail, the Inn at Laurel Point, to see professional bakers' and artists' seasonal takes on a sweet tradition at Canada's National Gingerbread Showcase (up until January 6). Next, rest up while reclining in front of a *Polar Express* viewing at the Royal B.C. Museum's IMAX Theatre, but don't leave without seeking out the meticulously-researched interactive exhibit *Our Living Languages: First Peoples' Voices in British Columbia*. Press buttons to hear "good morning" and "how are you?" in some of the 34 First Nations languages still being spoken in the province today, before moving on to the just-opened *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* exhibition, which showcases work by B.C.-based winner Connor Stefanison. (Parents take note: on weekends before December 21, Santa Clause is in situ at the Old Town Gallery.)

As winter's early dusk inevitably hits, stroll the inner harbour alongside the Parliament Buildings, strung high with twinkling white lights. Loop back to the Bay Centre for some shopping, perhaps, but definitely cap off the night with a ride on the Holiday Ferris Wheel, swirling in Centennial Square. Fear not the chill in the open air, because sweet touches like hot chocolate and marshmallows, or bottled bubble bath and a whisk for a hot soak, may well be waiting in-room at the Magnolia upon your return.



A view of the Parliament Buildings from the Magnolia Hotel.