

# VOGUE

## Why Victoria, British Columbia, Should Be Your Next Weekend Getaway

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Bastion Square from the Inner Harbour, in Victoria, British Columbia, July 2009



From Seattle's '90s grunge scene to the coffeehouses and food trucks that made Portland one of the most influential food cities in the country, the Pacific Northwest has for decades been America's capital region of cool. Just north of the border, Vancouver, with its drizzly weather and craft breweries, is a Canadian cousin to those hipster havens. But Victoria, on the southern tip of Vancouver Island in British Columbia, has traditionally been left out of all that cool talk.

Maybe it's that the mountains and water that lie between Victoria and the mainland push all the clouds and rain and existential moodiness back toward the east (with an average of 2,183 hours of sunshine a year, Victoria is one of the sunniest cities west of the Canadian Rockies); until recently, Victoria seemed more like the kind of place you'd visit with your granny than hit up for a girls' weekend.

While Victoria's long-held nickname refers to a place suited to the "nearly dead and newly wed," those demographics are being overshadowed by an influx of creative, entrepreneurial types, largely driven across the Strait of Georgia by Vancouver's skyrocketing real estate prices. Vancouver's loss is Victoria's gain:

Today the city has about 900 tech companies and counting—it’s becoming known as Tectoria—and lots of gorgeous old brick warehouses, which now house stylish indie boutiques stocked full of local designs along with great bars, bakeries, and restaurants.

So lace up your walking shoes or hop on a bike—there’s really no need for a car in town—and discover how quaint, quiet Victoria has grown into the perfect spot for a cool Northwest getaway. Here’s the best of what to see, do, and eat while you’re there.



### **Eat and Drink**

Cliff Leir built his first brick oven in his driveway in his teens; today he’s famous for the tangy, chewy baguettes and rye country boules he pulls out of the wood-fired oven at Fol Epi. Check out the bakery’s Yates Street location at night for dinner at Agrilus for seasonal dishes such as roasted brassica shoots with pickled cipollini onion and egg yolk vinaigrette, and albacore tuna with oyster mushrooms and watercress. The bread plays double duty come dessert, after steeping in sweet milk for hours to infuse the flavor of toasted sourdough sorbet.

Inspired by old-time speakeasies, Little Jumbo feels both historic and thoroughly fresh, with its constantly changing cocktail list (try the Tiki Fizz, spiked with local producer Sea Cider’s Rumrunner) and shareable plates such as charred Humboldt squid with a kimchi and XO sauce kick.

Located in the attic of another restaurant, Perro Negro is the perfect hideaway “para picar”—to pick or nibble—on tapas such as croquetas, octopus with chorizo, and Spanish boquerones. Wash them down with a frothy Oaxacan sour (mezcal, tequila, citrus, thyme, black pepper syrup, and egg white) before moving on to Bodega for more tapas and classic cocktails like a whiskey sour or negroni, reinvented with sherry.

## What to Do

Victoria's picturesque Inner Harbour is the starting point for a delicious day at sea with The London Chef Dan Hayes, Canada's answer to Jamie Oliver. The chef's newest offering, "West Coast, Best Coast," is the tastiest way possible to explore the island coastline: After crabbing and fishing for wild salmon, Hayes prepares an at-sea lunch of ceviche and sashimi using your haul. (There's also an on-board mimosa bar—not your typical day on a fishing boat.)

Venture over to the LoJo district: blocks of restored warehouses, shops, and hotels built during the gold rushes of the 1850s and 1890s. Today those brick heritage buildings are home to beautiful independent boutiques (look for the green "we are local" signs). Among the musts: Tonic Jewelry, where owner Honor Cienska crafts delicate earrings and necklaces out of silver, copper, and gold at the back of the store while you browse the collections of other local makers; stock up on small-batch anise fennel and rose-geranium soaps from local producer Soap Rebel at lifestyle emporium Nest & Cradle; the well-edited selection of designer fashion and denim at Bernstein & Gold lives up to the store's tagline, "beautiful things and spa," and then some.

New Victoria may have swapped her high tea for an Earl Grey-infused gin sour, but the super-British vestiges of Old Victoria are still enchanting. Afternoon tea at the Fairmont Empress is an elegant, century-old tradition worth keeping. Less than two miles from the center of town, Government House is the official residence of British Columbia's lieutenant governor, the queen's representative in the province (yes, the monarchy has a role in provincial and national-level government in Canada). Wander the grounds to explore the 19th-century stables, carriage house, and other service buildings, or just enjoy the beautiful gardens and views of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Olympic Mountains.

## Where to Stay

Tucked away on quiet Courtney Street, the Magnolia is an elegant 64-room boutique hotel steps from the Inner Harbour. It's a tough call whether the best amenity here is the onsite spa or Curated Trails program, a collection of themed insider guides that will point you toward Victoria's many hidden gems. Book a complimentary bike and head out on the "Bikes, Beans, and Blooms" route, which meanders through romantic local gardens and also visits a number of local coffee roasters. To sleep where the royals stay, check in to the Fairmont Empress, the city's 108-year-old grande dame. Slightly further afield is the Oak Bay Beach Hotel, a posh waterfront resort in Victoria's ritziest residential area, about four miles from town.