

# Spend a Restorative Weekend in Victoria

Combining the splendour of land and sea, Victoria is a haven for enjoying the natural landscape and regional gastronomy.

Writer **Sabrina Pirillo**



On the southern tip of **Vancouver Island**, Victoria lures outdoor enthusiasts attracted by the Pacific Ocean’s vast world of treasures and old-growth rainforests that mimic scenes from a fairytale. Victoria’s postcard-like setting makes for a restorative weekend getaway to relax and rejuvenate while recharging with nourishing cuisine.



Bilston Creek Farm photo by Sabrina Pirillo

## Land Adventures

With a mild year-round climate and spectacular scenic routes, Victoria’s hiking trails are a natural escape. **East Sooke Regional Park** includes more than 3,459 acres of protected landscape. Rugged west coast shorelines and isolated pocket beaches and tidal pools allow for exploration or scuba diving, along with incredible views of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Olympic Mountains. Although the **Centennial Park Loop** is only 2.3 kilometres, it travels through an incredible stretch of old-growth forest. The big, beautiful trees give hikers a shaded path as they navigate this splendid yet leisurely trail.

Surrounded by forest, spend an afternoon at Bilston Creek Farm strolling through the lavender fields that evoke a feeling of calm and peace, like being in Provence on the west coast of Canada. Prolong the serenity by heading through the surrounding forest to a beach with a trickling waterfall. Also on-site, **Wildwood Saunas** offers a detoxifying Nordic-style sauna plus an invigorating cold-plunge tub while enjoying the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape.





Wildwood Saunas photo by Sabrina Pirillo

## Seascapes

With an oceanic playground at your fingertips, there is no shortage of aquatic adventures in Victoria, including whale watching, snorkelling, scuba diving, and paddleboarding. A short distance from the magnificent Inner Harbour, **Fisherman's Wharf** features shops, restaurants, and marine experiences from boat tours to water ballet.

James Bay is a great spot for snorkelling, fishing, or just taking in the serene surroundings and majestic Olympic Mountains. For something a little different, a shoreline forage tour with Amanda Swinimer, seaweed harvester, author, speaker, educator, and owner of **Dakini Tidal Wilds**, will teach you about hand-harvested seaweed from the Pacific Northwest (estimated to house 650 species of seaweed). Swinimer, who has a BSc in marine biology, has been sustainably hand-harvesting wild, edible seaweed for two decades. This fascinating educational experience includes identifying several types of seaweed, learning about their health benefits, and how to cook them.



## Sustainability and Regional Ingredients

Meals that are sustainably sourced are an important part of Victoria's dining scene.

Located in a heritage home in the James Bay neighbourhood, **Nourish Kitchen & Cafe** offers a diverse array of local dishes.

Around the corner from the Inner Harbour, **The Courtney Room** in **The Magnolia Hotel & Spa** highlights the island's exemplary ingredients from the land and sea. Executive chef Brian Tesolin takes pride in collaborating with local vendors, celebrating the Pacific Northwest's culinary scene and the abundance of Victoria's seasonal ingredients, from foraged kelp that garnishes a cocktail on the seasonal drink menu, *An Exploration of the Pacific North West Vol. 1*, to the bounty of menu offerings. The Chef's Seasonal Tasting Menu gives diners the opportunity to taste foie gras parfait made with sea buckthorn, cold smoked dry aged amberjack, and duck confit and stinging nettle ragu.

Recently named the Best New Restaurant on Canada's 100 Best Restaurants List 2024, **Marilena Cafe + Raw Bar** features local and global seafood paired with fresh regional ingredients. These dishes are crafted at the hands of Victoria's homegrown executive chef Kristian Eligh. A devoted free-diver and fisherman, Eligh blends love for his city with his appetite for coastal cuisine, composing exquisite dishes that deliver Victoria's local flavours on a plate. The Japanese raw bar includes everything from nigiri to sushi rolls, while the dining menu serves oysters and local dishes like miso glazed sablefish and Vancouver Island Kuterra steelhead with charred leek, asparagus, gribiche, and wild foraged greens.