



foodism*

TORONTO, ONE BITE AT A TIME



RABBIT RABBIT

It's easy to fall down a rabbit hole of interesting bottles and international flavours at this new restaurant just steps from downtown and Chinatown. "It's your friendly neighbourhood wine bar with world-class cuisine," says owner Sydney Cooper, who brought on Top Chef Canada alum Billy Nguyen to create the knock-out menu that ranges from delicate scallop ceviche and creamy udon noodles to some of the best roasted carrots I've ever had. Sampling a mix of local and international wine, every pour I try is delicious, intriguing and seems to have a story behind it. There are also a few fun things to find in the modern, eclectic dining room that's lined with a serious art collection on loan to the wine bar. rabbitrabbitwinebar.com

GETTING THERE

Porter and Air Canada fly five hours direct from YYZ to Victoria starting around \$300 round trip.



The Insider

From wine bars and food trucks to saunas on the Pacific Ocean, **Taylor Newlands** tours the gems of Victoria, B.C.

THE LOCAL MOVEMENT in Canada is booming right now, but communities like Victoria, B.C., have long been experts in supporting their own. Set on Vancouver Island, the city is only accessible by flight or ferry, and locals proudly proclaim that if both of these were to suddenly stop running, Victoria is self-sufficient enough to rely solely on its own bounty.

Adjacent to the gorgeous waterfront where flowers of all shapes and colours bloom and boats set sail for whale-watching expeditions, the walkable downtown is brimming with local shops selling everything from trinkets, gifts and puzzles to sustainable clothing and furniture. On a four-day trip, I barely have enough time to stop and admire all the eye-catching window displays or wander in through the beckoning open doors.

Set in a restored grand bank from the early 1900s, Munro's Books is a stately shop with magnificent architecture. Bibliophiles could easily spend an afternoon here getting lost among the towering shelves, discovering sections of Canadian literature or Indigenous authors. Following Government Street over to Market Square, I pass dozens of hole-in-the-

walls like this, each with its own story.

On the way to the historic Fan Tan Alley — a delightfully narrow pathway lined with shops in Victoria's Chinatown, the oldest one in Canada — Silk Road Tea Store doles out remedies and skincare products. Here, Canada's authority on tea, Daniela Cubelic, makes blends that offer real health benefits.

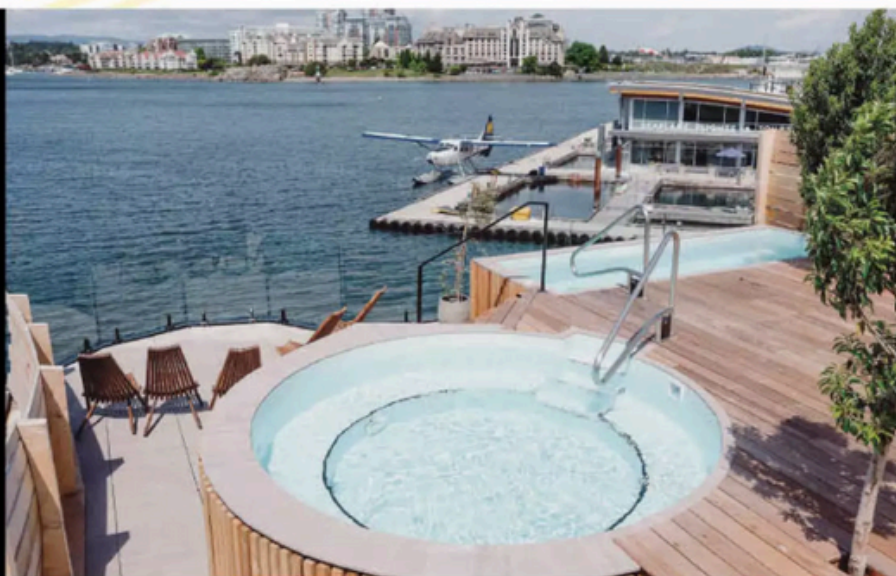
The restaurant and bar scene is just as full of local legends. In Market Square right downtown, Whistle Buoy Brewing Company makes their beer onsite using hops grown on a farm right outside the city on Vancouver Island. Restaurant menus skew local and seasonal, from the B.C. wine and beer to the ingredients in cocktails — and, of course, what's on the plate. I was born and raised here in Canada, yet in Victoria, I try maple blossoms and pinecone for the first time, presented in beautiful, delicious and inventive dishes. At Finest at Sea, I eat kelp pakoras made with seaweed foraged by local marine biologist Amanda Swinimer, who hosts informative beachside seaweed tours through her company Dakini Tidal Wilds.

Everything feels intentional and interconnected in this beautiful, slow-paced island city that's full of local flavours, treasures and stories to discover. **I**

HAVN SAUNAS

Hydrotherapy circuits are all the rage right now, but unwinding in an infinity hot tub overlooking the water with the soundtrack of sea birds and boats in the background is an entirely new experience.

A group of friends transformed an old WWII workshop barge into HAVN Saunas, a light wood and plant-filled oasis of saunas, hot tubs, cold tubs and showers floating in Victoria's harbour. In between dips, loungers on the deck are primed for sunbathing, while a cozy café area below deck offers big, cushy couches and large arching windows to stare out at the water. Book the first slot of the day to enjoy the space before the other guests arrive. havnasaunas.com



FINEST AT SEA

B.C. fishing company, Finest at Sea runs a food truck, retail store and processing plant near Fisherman's Wharf. They bring their wild-caught, sustainable seafood products directly from their fleet of boats to the mouths of hungry customers (with a few steps in between). Order seasonal fish and chips, loaded grilled fish tacos, kelp pakoras made with foraged seaweed and some locally made sodas. Then, grab a picnic table on the charming, tree-lined patio that's tucked between the fish shop and the neighbouring Imagine Studio Café. finestatsea.com



THE MAGNOLIA HOTEL & SPA

Near the waterfront and downtown Victoria, The Magnolia Hotel and Spa is a family-owned boutique hotel that's as charming as they come, with impeccable service to boot. In the spacious guest rooms, floor-to-ceiling windows let in natural light and views of the city, while stunning bathrooms feature soaker tubs and spa-like showers. The crown jewel is The Courtney Room restaurant where local, seasonal ingredients shine, especially in the Chef's Seasonal Tasting Menu. When I visit, ravioli with Dungeness crab almost has me licking my plate clean in the white tablecloth dining room. Expert wine pairings take everything to the next level. magnoliahotel.com



END DIVE

Reading the menu might leave you with more questions than answers, but all you really need to know is that this relaxed restaurant in downtown Victoria specializes in creative, locally focused seafood and vegetable dishes that come in large, shareable portions, alongside great (and interesting) cocktails. Charred sprouting brassicas and fireweed are turned into something akin to a caesar salad, blue gallo mussels arrive swimming in a slurpable curried cream sauce, black pearl oysters are dressed to the nines and creamy sourdough bucatini comes covered in breadcrumbs. It's all wonderfully weird and delicious. enddiverestaurant.com