

Things to do in Victoria and Vancouver Island

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Jonny Bierman (<https://mrhudsonexplores.com/author/jonnymrhudsonexplores-com/>)

British colonial energy with an island charm sets Victoria, British Columbia apart from any other city in North America. With nature at your doorstep, coastal temperate rainforests aplenty, raw and rugged Pacific coastline teeming with year-round life, and urban fixes such as nightlife, spas, local and sustainable culinary, and luxury oceanfront accommodation, you'll surely have more things to do in Greater Victoria and Vancouver Island than you'll have time for. The best places to see in Victoria and up the west coast of Vancouver Island are all accessible by day trip, or you can break it up by staying a night or two in Sooke and Port Renfrew. A vacation to Victoria isn't just an urban escape – it's taking in the air you didn't know could get so fresh while exploring some of the largest trees in North America. It's having a local brew in a fishing village after spotting orcas on a whale watching tour, and it's walking between the ocean and waterfalls on the beach with your man. As one of the largest islands in North America, Vancouver Island packs a punch – and Mr Hudson has your full travel guide to Greater Victoria and Vancouver Island.

The best hotels in Victoria

An icon to the destination and newly renovated in 2018, the Fairmont Empress (<https://www.booking.com/hotel/ca/fairmont-empress.html?aid=886730>) is an oceanside escape that marries elegance, convenience, and luxury. Located just steps from the seaplane terminal and ferry docks that depart to Seattle, the Fairmont Empress compliments the qualities you come to expect in a Fairmont property, with the pride of Victoria's crown jewel. Also newly opened is its Willow Stream Spa. Relax and rejuvenate after a day on the sea or a day on the trails without leaving your hotel.

Seaside luxury outside of the city centre brings the reward of oceanview hot pools and one of Canada's top hotels and spa. The new Oak Bay Beach Hotel (<https://www.booking.com/hotel/ca/oak-bay-beach.html?aid=886730>) is incomparable to any resort

in Victoria. It's a fresh new look, and ideal location amongst estates, golf courses, countryside landscapes, and of course ocean views make this arguably the best hotel in Victoria if you're not fussed about staying 15 minutes outside the city centre. Watch the perfect sunset over the Salish Sea from one of three hot pools open until midnight – and only open to adults.

A vacation to Victoria doesn't have to involve basing yourself at one place – other hotels in the Greater Victoria area to note include Sookepoint Ocean Cottage Resort (<https://www.booking.com/hotel/ca/sookepoint-ocean-cottage-resort.html?aid=886730>) in nearby Sooke, and Wild Renfrew (<https://www.booking.com/hotel/ca/wild-renfrew-seaside-cottages.html?aid=886730>) two hours north in the quaint fishing village of Port Renfrew.



NW Marine Dr Vancouver | Photo: James Wheeler

What to do in Greater Victoria

Take a Tesla and discover Indigenous history, forage, and dine with local Indigenous Chef Shirley.

Victoria has a long history dating back to the pre-colonial time, and it's certainly not forgotten. Indigenous history plays an important role in Victoria as a place and the survival of its people. A stop in Victoria is not complete without a visit to the Royal BC Museum. (<https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/>) Here, you'll get a first-hand look at Indigenous history, culture, and past. The past, although sometimes difficult to talk about, is not forgotten in Canada, and its symbolism of resilience amongst Indigenous people today is seen everywhere. From the Totem Pole's inside and out of the museum, a cedar house, and an interactive instalment about the many Indigenous languages, and much more, this is a permanent interpretation that brings understanding to many travellers' unanswered questions. Visiting international exhibitions are constantly at the Royal BC Museum, so be sure to check what will be on display when you're there.

Whether you are moved by the museum before or after this next part, the total experience is transformational travel at its best. Tesla Tours (<https://www.teslatours.ca/>) has teamed up with Chef Shirley Lang of Kitchens of Distinction to provide a foraging experience in Victoria that is complemented by a one-on-one experience with Chef Shirley. Tesla Tours is probably what you imagine – a guided, personal and private tour in a Tesla giving you a view of Victoria by a local, rarely seen by travellers. Modern-day Victoria is shown in all its glory while you make your way to a

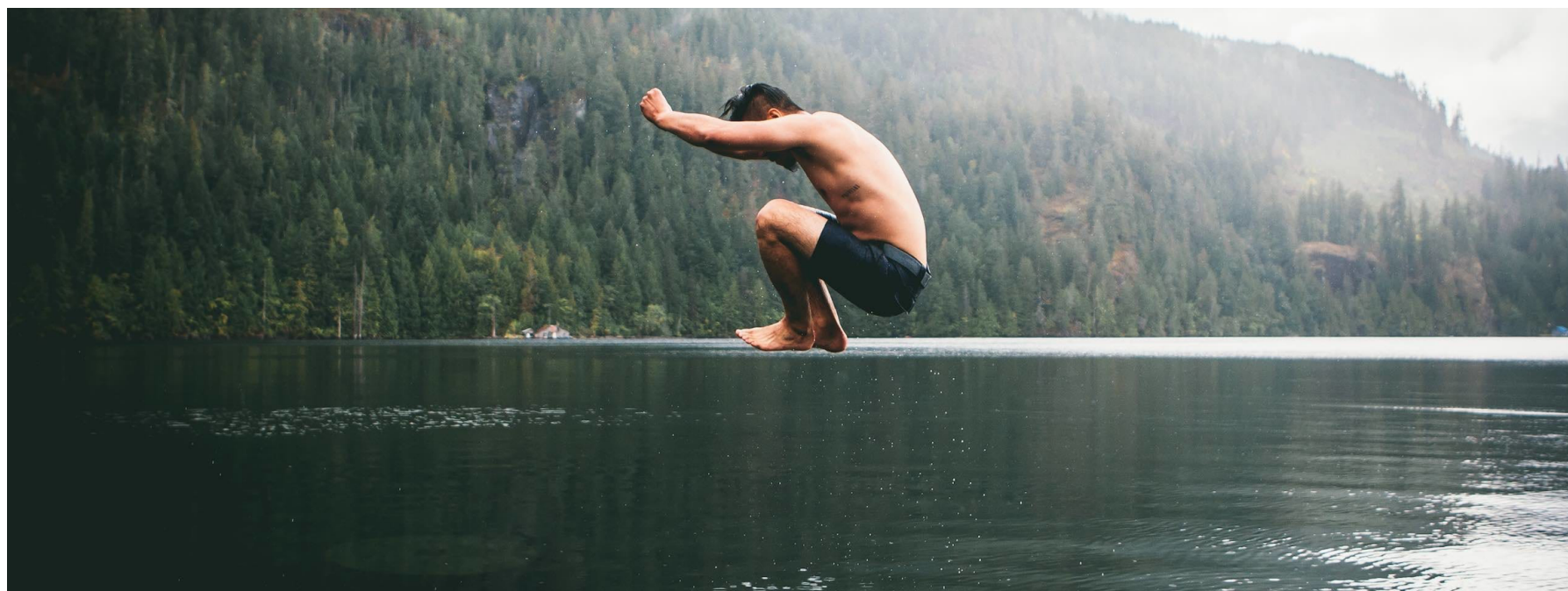
foraging site and pick the ingredients you'll later eat with Chef Shirley, and drink in cocktails as well. This is not only a guided hike but a tour through the biggest pantry around. Hop back in your private Tesla, and onwards to Chef Shirley's kitchen.

Welcomed by cocktails with locally distilled spirits and syrups made of foraged ingredients, Chef Shirley's kitchen welcomes all with open arms. After some appetizers and cocktails, your meal will be paired with Vancouver Island wine and served in a form of boutique culinary bliss. Prior to this tour, Chef Shirley will clear up dietary restrictions so she can put on a feast made with local ingredients for any needs.

What's a trip to the coast without putting the boys on a boat? Eagle Wing Whale and Wildlife Tours (<https://www.eaglewingtours.com/>) depart on large boats and small zodiacs to explore the coast, whale watch and give guests a taste of salty Salish Sea air. Vancouver Island and the surrounding waters are home to resident orca's that can be seen year-round. If you're travelling in spring to fall through, you're more likely to see migratory species such as humpback, minke, and gray whales.

The Butchart Gardens is a sanctuary among a city – a possible stop on your Tesla Tour or an easy trip on your own, the Butchart Gardens (<https://www.butchartgardens.com/>) have been in the making for over 100 years and spread over 55 acres of urban landscape.

Other urban adventures to note include the Pedaler Cycling Tours (<http://thepedaler.ca/>), Merridale Cidery & Distillery (<https://www.merridale.ca/>), North America's oldest China Town in downtown Victoria, and The Teahouse at Abkhazi Garden (<https://www.abkhaziteahouse.com/>).



Great Central lake | Photo: Andrew Ly

What to see in Greater Victoria

Places to visit in Greater Victoria and Vancouver Island stretch far outside of British Columbia's capital city limits. For adventurous boys with time on their hands, the perfect trip would be starting in Victoria for at least two nights, working your way towards Sooke and staying a night there, and continuing to Port Renfrew for a night in the sleepy seaside village. If time isn't on your side, not to worry – these can all be done in day trips.

Mystic Beach

Working your way north from Victoria and Sooke, the first stop is China beach, worthy of a small hike and some rugged coastline photos. Shortly after, Mystic Beach holds true to its name with waves crashing on one side, and waterfalls cascading onto the beach on the other. All along the coast until Port Renfrew, Washington State is viewable across the water confusing visitors who haven't already figured out it's not Canada in the distance through Google Maps.

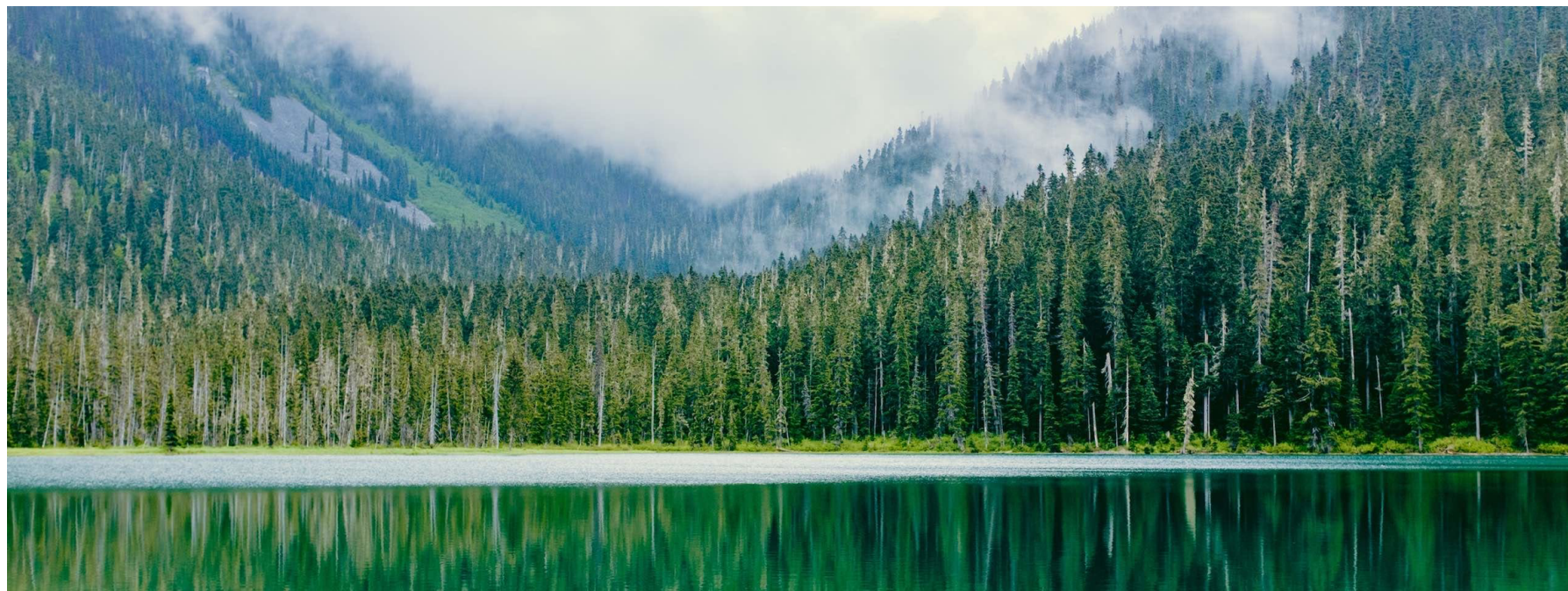
The more north you travel on the windy, single-lane island highway of the Juan de Fuca district, the better it gets. Sombrio's spell has worked so well, travellers stay here for nights and days. Beach camping is a thing here, and if you're up for a night outside of the kingsized bed and spa, the option is there. Before earning your afternoon pint at the Port Renfrew Pub (<https://wildrenfrew.com/renfrew-pub/>), Botanical Beach Provincial Park is calling, and you'll want to answer. Tide pools meet rainforest as your curiosity will keep you exploring here up and over the rocks.

Port Renfrew

A guide to Port Renfrew can fit in a few sentences and have as many words as the village has residents. This stunningly beautiful and noteworthy village has local Indigenous culture that is found all around town and in gift shops. Wild Renfrew (<https://wildrenfrew.com/>) seaside cabins are conveniently located beside the Port Renfrew Pub and worth a nights stay at any time of year.

Avatar Grove

The best is certainly left for last here – Avatar Grove, perhaps British Columbia's best-kept secret is a short drive from Port Renfrew and is literally larger than life. This old-growth coastal temperate rainforest is where you'll find Canada's 'gnarliest tree' among giant cedars and Douglas Firs. A newly built boardwalk snakes through the rainforest on both sides of the gravel road separating it as freshwater streams, and rivers flow through. Rain or shine, this hike is unlike any other found in North America.



Vancouver Canada | Photo: David Sonluna

Where to eat in Greater Victoria

It doesn't get much more oceanfront than the Flying Otter Grill (<http://www.flyingottergrill.com/>) in the Victoria Harbour. This floating restaurant is attached to the seaplane terminal (servicing mainland Canada including Whistler and Vancouver, as well as Seattle) and the real estate is shared with the neighbouring otters and sea lions who often poke up next to the patio. E:Ne Raw Food and Sake Bar (<https://nuboene.com/>) is the place to take advantage of Canada's largest Sake selection at the newly opened downtown Victoria restaurant, while the nearby Agrius Restaurant (<https://www.agriusrestaurant.com/>) uses freshly baked breads, cured meats, and organic ingredients to cook up a French culinary experience in the centre of Victoria. Olo Restaurant (<https://www.olorestaurant.com/>) is in the heart of Victoria's Chinatown and brings the farm to the city centre while maintaining a comfortable and homely feel with sustainable and seasonal local ingredients. The Roost Farm Bakery & Vineyard Bistro (<https://www.roostfarmcentre.com/>) in North Saanich has the 10-acre farm that the owner grew up as the backdrop and location of the locally and family sourced culinary experience. The owner's dad is the supplier of their wheat, chickens, berries, and veggies that comfortably fit a rural island experience.

Shopping in Victoria

Victoria's charm and British colonial feel present a boutique shopping experience that separates it from most other Canadian cities. Perhaps it's because all shops are within walking distance on the historic Johnson Street – or that you won't find sky scrappers amongst the seaside urban centre, or the friendliness of locals always helping you find your way. Whatever it is, don't forget to shop in between all those adventures.

When looking for the best in men's shopping in Victoria, you'll find it all on Johnson Street. Still, Life (<https://stilllifeboutique.com/>) boutique fashion opened its doors in 1984 and serves up a fashionable flare of vintage and modern fashion. Oxford (<https://downtownvictoria.ca/businesses/oxford/>) is a men's apparel store that will personalize your experience from the moment you walk in. Four Horsemen (<https://www.fourhorsemen.ca/>) is also an independent boutique that focuses on contemporary men's clothing from around the world. And to top the shopping experience off, step into a new pair of shoes from Vancouver-founded John Fluevog Shoes (<https://www.fluevog.com/>). Now found internationally in some of the finest cities, this shoe store on Johnson Street is one not to miss.

Other shopping experiences outside of men's apparel include The Victoria Public Market (<https://victoriapublicmarket.com/>), Chintz & Company interior design (<https://chintz.com/>), Fan Tan Home & Design (<https://www.fantanvictoria.com/>), and Parc Modern (<http://parcmodern.com/>).

Nightlife in Victoria

Nightlife and a night out in Victoria are whatever you want it to be – sip on Empress Gin cocktails at the newly renovated Q Bar (<https://www.fairmont.com/empress-victoria/dining/q-bar/>) at the Fairmont Empress, or nestle into a cosy speakeasy with imaginative cocktails that change based on ingredients seasonally available at Little Jumbo (<http://littlejumbo.ca/>). Clive's Classic Lounge (<https://www.clivesclassiclounge.com/>) has an amazing happy hour's with an extensive cocktail list and international wine's and spirits. Veneto Kitchen + Bar (<https://www.venetodining.com/>) has a newly renovated space in a sleek urban setting with incredible cocktails served by master mixologists. And if you're looking to cap the night off at the local gay bar, Paparazzi's (<http://www.paparazzinightclub.com/>) is Victoria's official gay club and a great place to go after some classy drinks around the city.

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