

Introduction to British Columbia

British Columbia, the westernmost province of Canada, stretches from the Pacific Ocean to the towering heights of the Rocky Mountains, sandwiched in between is some of this planet's most magnificent scenery - an enormous variety of terrain including spectacular mountain ranges, glaciers, rivers, lakes, rugged coastline and hundreds of islands.

The province's largest city is **Vancouver**, a splendid conglomeration of old and new architectural marvels, parks and gardens and sheltered beaches on the coast in the southwestern corner of the province. The provincial capital is old-world **Victoria**, perched at the southeastern tip of **Vancouver Island**, just across the Strait of Georgia from Vancouver. Victoria boasts an intriguing mixture of old English architecture, customs and traditions, along with modern attractions, cosmopolitan restaurants and an infectious 'joie de vivre'.

But most of British Columbia lies away from the cities, in the surrounding vastness. The protected coastal waterways, the rugged west coast of Vancouver Island, the famous Canadian Rockies and many other mountain ranges, the remote northern wilderness and the intriguing Queen Charlotte Islands provide experiences you'll never forget, along with enough ohh-and-aah scenery to keep even the most jaded jetsetter in awe. In these wild areas, you'll find endless opportunities for hiking or climbing, viewing the abundant wildlife, fishing in the hundreds of lakes and rivers or immersing yourself in native culture.

Brief History

Human habitation of what is now British Columbia began around 15,000 years ago, when *Homo Sapiens* migrated from northeast Asia across a land bridge spanning the Bering Strait. During this time, the northern latitudes of North America were covered by an ice cap, forcing these people to travel south down the west coast before fanning out across the ice-free southern latitudes. As the ice cap receded northward, the people drifted north also, perhaps only a few kilometers in an entire generation. Two distinct cultures had formed – one along the coast and one in the interior. Within these two broad groups, many tribes formed, developing distinct cultures and languages. Along the coast you will still find the remains of the **Coast Salish, Kwagiulth, Tsimshian, Gitksan, Nisga'a, Haida** and **Tlingit** cultures and more land inward about the **Interior Salish**.

It was only a little more than 200 years ago that the first European explorers began to chart the northwest corner of North America.

Today the names of **James Cook, George Vancouver, Simon Fraser, Alexander Mackenzie** and **David Thompson** grace everything from rivers and regions to cities.



Traveling through British Columbia you can't help but notice all the totem poles decorating the landscape. All totem poles are made of red cedar painted black, red, blue, yellow and white, with colored pigment derived from minerals, plants and salmon roe. They are erected as validation of a public record or documentation of an important event. Six types of poles are believed to have evolved in the following order: house post (an integral part of the house structure), mortuary (erected as a chief's or shaman's grave post, often with the bones or ashes in a box at the top), memorial (special events), frontal (a memorial or heraldic pole), welcome and shame poles. None is an object of worship; each tells a story or history of a person's clan or family. The figures on the pole represent family lineage, animals or a mythical character.

Over the years many totem poles have been removed from their original locations. Both historic and more modern poles can be viewed at **Stanley Park**, Vancouver and **Thunderbird Park**, Victoria. The **Museum of Anthropology** in Vancouver also has an excellent collection.



Relative to the rest of Canada, British Columbia's climate is ideal for golfing, especially on Vancouver Island, where the sport can be enjoyed year-round. Many of the province's 300 golf courses are set in spectacular mountain, ocean or lake settings. The semiprivate, private and resort courses usually boast the most spectacular locations. The mild climate and abundance of water create ideal conditions for the upkeep of golf courses in the south of the province. Four areas have developed as premier golfing destinations: **Vancouver Island**, **Whistler**, the **Okanagan Valley** and the **Columbia Valley**. Each features multiple resort-style golf courses.

Vancouver

Introduction

Let your mind fill with images of dramatic, snowcapped mountains rising vertically from a city's backyard. Century-old inner-city buildings and steel-and-glass skyscrapers facing the sheltered shores of a large wide inlet. Manicured suburbs perching along the edge of the sea, fringed by golden sandy beaches. Lush tree-filled parks and beautiful flower gardens overflowing with color. These are the magnificent images of Vancouver. But you can also savor the aromas of just-brewed coffee and freshly baked bread wafting from cosmopolitan sidewalk cafés, join in the bustle at seaside markets, bake on a local beach, or simply relax and do some people-watching in one of the city's tree-shaded squares. By night, Vancouver's myriad fine restaurants, nightclubs and performing-arts venues beckon visitors to continue enjoying themselves on into the wee hours. Rain or shine, Vancouver is an alluring and unforgettable city.

Vancouver is Born

It wasn't until the discovery of gold up the Fraser River in the late 1850s that settlement really took hold in the area. The town of New Westminster, just southeast of present-day Vancouver, was declared British Columbia's first capital in 1866.

Sawmills and related logging and lumber industries followed and soon several boomtowns were carved out of the wilderness. The first was Granville (now downtown Vancouver). In 1886 Granville, pop. 1,000, became the city of Vancouver. Today, Vancouver is Canada's third-largest city and for many years now, chosen as 'world's best city to live'.

Sights

Canada Place
Vancouver Art Gallery
The Landing
China Town
Robson Street
Stanley Park
Vancouver Aquarium
Vancouver Museum
Museum of Anthropology
VanDusen Botanical Garden
Queen Elisabeth Park

Theater

Theatre under the Stars – Stanley Park
Bard on the Beach
The Playhouse
Vancouver Little Theatre
Hot Jazz Society
Toni's and Tina's Wedding

Dining

Shopping

Festivals and Events

Travel Tips

'Travel Agent' would like to ensure you have the best possible experience while in Canada. In this section we've provided helpful information that our visitors have appreciated.

Climate and Clothing

The climate in Canada varies across the country, and according to the season. There are four distinct seasons in all regions, but actual temperatures and humidity vary.

Rockies and other Mountain Areas

The greatest variation of temperatures is to be found in the mountains. Mountain temperatures average from -16°C in the winter to 24°C during the summer. However, when visiting the Rockies, be sure to have layers of comfortable clothing available in case of a sudden change in weather conditions (in the mountains, even summer evenings tend to be cool).

If you are planning on walks or hikes, bring sturdy shoes and a warm jacket. If you plan to visit the Rockies in the winter, come dressed for snow – make sure your outer clothing is warm and wind/water repellent.

Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island

Vancouver and Victoria rarely experience temperatures below freezing. These cities enjoy the mildest weather in Canada, averaging 5°C in the winter and 23°C during the summer. However, an umbrella and raincoat are recommended for Vancouver year-round – just in case it rains.

Currency and Credit Cards

The currency used in Canada is the Canadian dollar. Canadian bills are accepted in denominations of \$100.00, \$50.00, \$20.00, \$10.00 and \$5.00. Coins are in denominations of \$2.00 (called a “toonie”), \$1.00 (called a “loonie”), \$0.25 (called a “quarter”), \$0.10 (called a “dime”), \$0.05 (called a “nickel”), and \$0.01 (called a “penny”). We recommend carrying Canadian dollar travellers cheques, as they are accepted as currency at most hotels, stores and restaurants. Most major credit cards are widely accepted across the country – principally Visa, Mastercard and American Express.

Banking

Currency and travelers cheques can be exchanged at airports or foreign exchange services, but the best exchange rate is to be found at any of the Canadian chartered banks. The major banks are: Bank of Montréal, Bank of Nova Scotia, Royal Bank, CIBC (Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce), and Toronto Dominion Bank. Automated teller machines (ATMs) are common throughout Canada, and as well as being located at banks, they can be found in some grocery stores, gas stations, variety stores, shopping centres, bus depots, train stations and elsewhere.

Electricity

Electricity is supplied at an alternating current of 110 volts. Plugs in Canada are either two flat, parallel prongs, or one cylindrical and two flat parallel prongs.

Mail

A regular-sized letter or postcard mailed within Canada costs \$0.48, and \$1.25 to other international destinations (subject to change). International mail can take up to two weeks for delivery from Canada.

Sales Tax

Provincial sales tax exists in almost every Canadian province. It is added to the advertised price of consumer goods, restaurant meals and drinks in bars. It appears as a separate item and is not a service charge or gratuity. Current applicable taxes are as of 2001 are:

Provincial Sales Taxes

British Columbia 7%

Alberta does not currently have taxes of this kind.

Gratuities

Service charges usually are not included on bills in restaurants or bars in Canada. It is standard practice to tip service personnel 12% to 15% of the bill.

Airport Customs and Immigration

All international visitors must clear Canadian Customs and Immigration at the arrival airport. Visitors will receive customs documents from in-flight personnel to complete before landing. Once on the ground, retrieve luggage and follow the directions to the

Customs Hall. Visitors will be required to state what articles they are bringing into Canada, country of origin, their Canadian destination and their duration of visit in Canada.

When leaving Canada, the regulations of the destination country will apply. Check with the airline customer service desk if uncertain about any of these regulations.