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British Columbia: Vancouver Island

Walking Vacation + Air Package

An enchanting coastal wilderness of misty rainforests, towering cedars, and rocky shoreline, Vancouver Island's landscape is truly inspirational. Hike clifftop trails to lookoffs, gazing out at the crashing waves, searching for whales and sea lions. Embark on an exciting bear-watching excursion aboard a Zodiac boat through the narrow fjords and calm inlets of Claquot Sound. Learn about First Nations traditions on Newcastle Island, and stroll through colonial elegance in charming Victoria. Trailside lunches and fine dining feature delectable west coast cuisine, such as smoked salmon with fresh, local vegetables. Relax in comfort as you admire the view from your room at oceanfront five-star accommodations. Steeped in striking natural beauty and urban charm, this guided hiking tour of Vancouver Island is a truly memorable experience.





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Cultural Highlights

- Set out in search of black bears during a private Zodiac expedition, exploring hidden coves and inlets inaccessible by land
- Follow moss-covered trails in Pacific Rim National Park, along dramatic coastlines and through lush rainforests, past some of the largest and oldest cedars on earth
- Savor a lunch of fresh, local fare at Butchart Gardens then explore this botanical showcase, one of the world's premier floral show gardens

What to Expect

This tour is one of our Fully-Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy with moderate sections with an average of 2 to 4 miles per day. The limited ascent and descent is gradual or only in very short sections. The terrain includes narrow, well-maintained boardwalks (in the rainforest), wide trails along the coast, sandy beaches, and city streets. Trails in Qualicum Falls and John Dean Provincial Park are rocky with roots and can be slippery when wet. The days on this tour are quite full to allow for the inclusion of diverse regions of cultural and historical importance and two long transfer days of approximately 5 hours. A ferry ride of 1.5 hours, a short boat transfer of 10 minutes, and a 2.5 bear watch excursion on a Zodiac-style boat are also included.

Tour Duration: 8 Days

Group size: 18 max

DAY 1: Flight and Arrival

Welcome to Vancouver! Upon arrival at Vancouver's International Airport (YVR), a representative holding a Country Walkers sign will meet you as you exit the baggage-claim area. Please note that there may be up to a 45-minute wait if there are other guests arriving within the same time frame. A complimentary small-group transfer will be provided to the St. Regis Hotel in downtown Vancouver, approximately 35 minutes away. The remainder of the day is at your leisure (no meals included).

If you are going to be delayed meeting our transfer representative for more than 15 minutes due to delayed or lost luggage, please contact our One Call travel assistance to advise of your delay and they will contact our transfer service. Our drivers are generally able to wait for up to 45 minutes from the time your



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flight lands, after which you would be responsible for your own transfer.

Please note: If you arrive early, your hotel room may not be available until 3:00 p.m., in which case you may store your luggage with the reception desk.

Depending on your time of arrival, you may wish to explore this dynamic cultural center of British Columbia on your own. Nestled between mountains and sea, Vancouver is a beautiful and ethnically diverse city and a treat to explore. After you settle in to your hotel, you can lace up your walking shoes and head to Stanley Park. This lush 1,000-acre public green space is surrounded by Vancouver Harbor and English Bay. Alternately, immerse yourself in Vancouver's thriving arts scene at the Vancouver Art Gallery, known for its works by regional artists, or the Museum of Anthropology with its impressive First Nations collections of totem poles and cedar-carved masks adorned with feathers.

Accommodation: St. Regis Hotel

DAY 2: Join your British Columbia: Vancouver Island tour and ferry to Vancouver Island

Awakening refreshed, your hotel will provide an included boxed breakfast at your hotel before meeting your group at 7:00 a.m. in the lobby of the St. Regis Hotel. After a brief introduction to the group, your adventure begins.

After receiving your boxed breakfast, depart the bustle of Vancouver City for the tranquil, unspoiled wilderness of Vancouver Island. Your five-hour travel day will be broken up with a few short walks and visits. Upon arrival at the ferry terminal, embark for an hour-and-a-half-long sail across the scenic Strait of Georgia, leaving the gleaming cityscape and cedar-lined shores behind. Arrive in Nanaimo, the island's "Harbor City," and disembark to continue your drive to Rathtrevor Beach Provincial Park. Here, savor a freshly prepared picnic of local ingredients after exploring the shoreline of the park's wide, sandy beach.

Departing after lunch, you set off for a short drive to Little Qualicum Falls Provincial Park on the shores of Cameron Lake. One of the island's most picturesque parks, this pastoral haven is home to old-growth Douglas-fir forest and colorful wildflowers in the spring. A loop trail past tranquil streams and fields and under the soaring canopy delivers you to impressive waterfalls cascading down a rocky gorge bordered



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by steep mountain peaks.

Arrive late this afternoon at your home for the next three nights. After time to refresh, join your companions in the lounge for an optional pre-dinner drink and then depart for a scrumptious dinner in Ucluelet, whose name in the indigenous First Nations language translates into “people of the safe harbor.” Feast on fresh, seasonal cuisine harvested nearby. After a rewarding day in this Pacific paradise, fall asleep in your luxurious rainforest-view suite.

Accommodation: Black Rock Resort, Ucluelet

DAY 3: Pacific Rim National Park

Today you set off for a day of walking in the Pacific Rim National Park and along the Wild Pacific Trail. Home to mossy rainforest, wind-sculpted trees, rocky cliffs lashed by roiling waves, and stunning beaches, this area offers some of the most dramatic walking on the west coast.

Following a relaxing lunch on Long Beach, you transfer to the nearby Ancient Cedars Loop Trail, where some of the largest trees on Vancouver Island greet you—giant red cedars rising above old-growth Sitka spruce and western hemlock. Two of these mammoth cedars are 800 years old; one measures almost 40 feet around its base! First Nations tribes revered these trees and once harvested them to carve canoes, build shelter, and extract medicines. Their bark was used to weave clothing, hats, and baskets.

Your footpath, hand-carved out of thick brush, skirts rugged cliffs overlooking Barclay Sound and the Broken Group Islands to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the south and west. As you walk, you pass through old-growth forests of towering trees, gigantic moss-draped nurse logs, raised twisted roots, fungi, lichen, and ferns. The primitive terrain is a photographer’s dream. Seaward, marvel at outer barrier reefs churning up the surf. Between February and May, whales breach the surface. Keep your eyes open, too, for the protected “sea lion pool.” Sheltered behind a barrier reef, it’s a prime spot for sea lions and seals. To take in the drama around you, pause at viewing nooks and decks for a bird’s-eye view of surge channels, tumbling cliffs, and wide sandy beaches. You might spot some of the 300 bird species that migrate through the Ucluelet Peninsula such as the most regal of the winged predators at the “eagle sentry point.” At Big Beach, there’ll be time to explore tidal pools and enjoy a delicious picnic lunch of fresh local specialties.



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Following this dramatic walk straight to your hotel, rejuvenate in the resort's ocean-side Jacuzzi or outdoor pool. For dinner this evening, savor the freshest salmon BBQ you're likely to ever eat, skillfully prepared by your guides overlooking the beach.

*Please note: As many trails in this area are tide dependent, walks and schedule may vary.

Accommodation: Black Rock Resort, Ucluelet

DAY 4: Private Zodiac-style bear watch excursion

The highlight for today is a thrilling bear-watching expedition in search of black bears seeking food along the coast during low tide. Embark in an open-air, 24-foot, rigid-hulled Zodiac-style boat and head into the calm fjord inlets of Clayoquot Sound. You stop in sheltered bays to marvel at these majestic creatures as they forage in tidal pools for crabs, clams, and barnacles. The shallow draft of your boat lets your experienced pilot bring you close so you can safely and unobtrusively observe. During your outing, you may also spot bald eagles, seals, and other sea life. Warm gloves, hats, and drinks are provided.

Later, explore another section of the Wild Pacific Trail as you walk the Lighthouse Loop from Terrace Beach, site of an ancient First Nations canoe beach and an ancient midden, or dumping site that dates back at least 5,000 years. Interpretive signs share the rich history of this area, once home to over 10,000 Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations peoples. Learn about this fascinating area as you wind your way through a mossy rainforest to a rugged and wind-swept coastline, skirting rocky headlands that offer dramatic views of Barkley Sound and the Amphitrite Lighthouse.

This evening is free to choose from a few dining options, walk into town for a casual dinner at one of the local restaurants or perhaps take the time to indulge in a spa treatment at the hotel (not included in the tour cost). Your guides will be available to assist with recommendations and transfers to or from town.

*Please note: As the bear watch is tide dependent, walks and schedule may vary.

Accommodation: Black Rock Resort, Ucluelet

DAY 5: Newcastle Island

You begin with an early breakfast so you can make the most of your transfer day to the southern tip of



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Vancouver Island. Your drive takes about five hours, but you pause for two scenic walks along the way—a chance to stretch your legs and get a glimpse of some of the tallest trees on Vancouver Island, many more than 800 years old.

After an easy stroll through Cathedral Grove, you continue another hour to the pedestrian ferry for your short shuttle to Newcastle Island, part of the Snuneymuxw First Nations Traditional Territory. The Snuneymuxw are a coastal Salish people who have long called Vancouver Island home. In their Hulqumí'num dialect, they call Newcastle Island “Saysutshun.” The island’s shores were an annual homestead for this semi-nomadic tribe that followed the cycles of the sea for food. Spawning herring brought them here between January and April and they built a series of longhouses for shelter. Aside from being a fishing ground, Saysutshun served other important purposes for the Snuneymuxw: it was a training ground for competitive canoe pullers, a source of botanical medicines, and a place of healing where families would soothe their hearts, minds, and bodies after the death of loved ones. Enjoy your box lunch before your scenic 10-minute ferry ride. Meet a Snuneymuxw guide and learn about some of the edible plants and traditional medicines used to this day. Then follow a well-maintained trail through the Marine Provincial Park, enjoying coastal views before venturing into the island’s interior, a pristine paradise of Douglas firs, oaks, and dogwoods.

Later, continue the drive to Brentwood Bay, on the outskirts of Victoria and your next hotel, the lovely Brentwood Bay Resort where your oceanfront room welcomes you with beautiful views from its balcony. This evening savor another dinner of seasonally-inspired ingredients harvested from the sea and grown fresh on Vancouver Island.

Accommodation: Brentwood Bay Resort & Spa, Brentwood Bay

DAY 6: John Dean Provincial Park

Linger over breakfast on the bay, enjoying the warm ambiance of the fireplace indoors or dining al fresco on the terrace with spectacular views of the Saanich Inlet. This is another chance to savor the freshness of Vancouver Island cuisine, perhaps sampling a house-smoked salmon Benedict with fried capers and crispy garlic herb potatoes. After another satisfying meal, you transfer to John Dean Provincial Park, a preserved wilderness sitting atop Mount Newton and overlooking Saanich Bay, the Gulf Islands, and the Cascade Mountains.



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John Dean donated his private property in 1921 to found the park, the remnants of his cabin still visible in the woods. Wildlife abounds and you may spot red-tailed hawks, bald eagles, and turkey vultures soaring overhead. You may also hear pileated woodpeckers doing their work on some of the area's largest Douglas Firs. Lunch today is on your own and in delightful setting, Butchart Gardens, the pride of Victoria and one of the world's premier floral show gardens. This remarkable botanical showcase was initially founded by the enterprising Butchart Family in 1904 as a quarry for limestone. Once the rock supply was near depleted, Jennie Butchart had the crevices loaded with top soil from nearby farms, planting Japanese, Italian, Rose, and Mediterranean gardens. Throughout the 20th century, the Butcharts' descendants transformed it into a pleasure park of world-class proportions. Today, it is a National Historic Site of Canada.

You return to your hotel early this afternoon, where you may indulge in the spa amenities if you wish or stroll along the marina.

Gather for a final celebratory dinner.

Accommodation: Brentwood Bay Resort & Spa, Brentwood Bay

DAY 7: Your British Columbia: Vancouver Island tour concludes

Spend your final morning exploring Victoria on foot. Established in 1843 as a fort for the Hudson's Bay Company, Victoria has been called "more British than Britain," an adage that lives and breathes in its abundance of Victorian-era architecture, beautiful formal gardens, elegant tea rooms, and double decker buses. Now the capital of British Columbia, the small city enjoys a breathtaking setting on the Strait of Juan de Fuca as Washington State's Olympic Mountains rise in the distance.

Learn about Victoria's frontier and colonial past as you stroll past the Parliament and other historic buildings, pass by inviting parks and gardens, and trace the scenic focal point of the city, the Inner Harbor.

Around midday check into your lovely, five-star post-tour hotel just minutes from the harbor. If your room is not ready on arrival the front desk will store your luggage as the rest of your day is on your own to further explore the city.



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Accommodation: Magnolia Hotel & Spa

DAY 8: Departure

This morning a complimentary small-group transfer is provided to the Victoria Airport based on your departure time. (Your departure transfer time will be communicated to you by your guides on tour.)