British Columbia: Vancouver Island

Tour-Only Itinerary

An explosion of flowers brightens the manicured green expanses of Victoria's Butchart Gardens, and you marvel at the contrast—not just between the colors, but between rugged nature and welcoming civilization that defines Vancouver Island. Where else can you watch breaching whales and foraging black bears one moment, and indulge in high tea the next? Here on Canada's Pacific Rim you've felt the primeval wonder of walking beneath red cedars that predate Columbus, and gleaned First Nations wisdom about medicinal plants from your Snuneymuxw guide. With available spa treatments and gourmet dinners, you haven't exactly been roughing it on your Vancouver Island hiking tour. But British Columbia's wilderness is always present, creeping in around the edges and coloring every experience on this untamed and beautiful island.



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.

Explore Butchart Gardens, a botanical display and one of the world's premier floral show gardens.



Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy with moderate sections with an average of 2 to 4 miles per day. The limited ascents and descents are 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.

DAY 1

Join your British Columbia: Vancouver Island tour. Ferry to Vancouver Island

Rathtrevor Beach Provincial Park; 1-2 miles, easy. Qualicum Falls; 2.5 miles, easy

Your guide(s) will meet you at 7:00 a.m. in the lobby of the St. Regis Hotel (602 Dunsmuir Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada. Tel 604.681.1135). The hotel will have a boxed breakfast for you to eat en route to Vancouver Island. 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. A few short walks and visits will break up your five-hour travel day.

Upon arrival at the ferry terminal, embark on a 1 ½ hour 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 and 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 beneath a soaring canopy leads past tranquil streams and delivers you to impressive waterfalls, which cascade down a gorge bordered 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
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2

Pacific Rim National Park

Schooner Cove Trail; 2 miles, easy. Wild Pacific Trail: Ancient Cedars and Artists loops; 2 miles, easy

Today you set off for a day of walking in 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 most massive trees on Vancouver Island greet you—giant red cedars rise majestically above old-growth Sitka spruce and western hemlock. Two of these mammoth cedars are 800 years old; one measures nearly 40 feet around its base! First Nations tribes revered these trees and once harvested them to carve canoes, build shelters, and extract medicines. They used the bark to weave clothing, hats, and baskets.

Your footpath leads through thick brush and skirts rugged cliffs overlooking Barclay Sound. The Broken Group Islands lie to the east, and to the southwest, the Pacific Ocean fills your view. As you walk, you pass through old-growth forests of towering trees, gigantic moss-draped nurse logs, raised twisted roots, fungi, lichen, and ferns. This primitive terrain is a photographer's dream. Turn to the sea to marvel at distant barrier reefs churning up the surf. Between February and May, you may see whales breaching the water's surface. Keep your eyes open, too, for the "sea lion pool." Sheltered behind a barrier reef, the pool is a prime spot for sea lions and seals. To take in the scenery 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, including the most regal of 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.

Following this dramatic walk, which ends at your hotel, rejuvenate in the resort's ocean-side Jacuzzi or outdoor pool. For dinner this evening, your guides will prepare the freshest salmon BBQ you're likely ever to eat. Savor your meal as you dine overlooking the beach.

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

Accommodation: Black Rock Resort, Ucluelet

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3

Private Zodiac-style bear watch excursion

Wild Pacific Trail: Lighthouse Loop; 2 miles, easy

The highlight for today is a thrilling bear-watching expedition. You'll search for black bears as they seek food along the coast during low tide. Embark on 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 enough to safely and unobtrusively observe the bears. 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. This is the 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 with sweeping views of Barkley Sound and the Amphitrite Lighthouse.

This evening you're free to choose from several dining options, and you may choose to spend your time with a walk into town for a casual dinner at one of the local restaurants or perhaps indulging 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.

Accommodation: Black Rock Resort, Ucluelet
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 4

Newcastle Island

Marine Provincial Park; 3 miles, easy. Transfer to Brentwood Bay

You begin with an early breakfast so you can make the most of your transfer day to the southern tip of Vancouver Island. Your drive takes about five hours, and along the way you pause for two scenic walks—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 Hul-qumi'num dialect, they call Newcastle Island "Saysutshun." The island's shores were an annual homestead for this semi-nomadic tribe, who followed the cycles of the sea for food. Spawning herring drew 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, then depart on your scenic 10-minute ferry ride to the island. You'll 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, relishing 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 to 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 made from seasonally inspired ingredients harvested from the sea and grown fresh on Vancouver Island.

Accommodation: Brentwood Bay Resort & Spa, Brentwood Bay
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5

John Dean Provincial Park

2.5 miles, easy with moderate sections. Butchart Gardens; 1-1.5 miles, easy

Linger over breakfast as you look out on the bay, basking in the warm ambiance of the fireplace indoors or dining al fresco on the terrace with spectacular views of the Saanich Inlet. This meal 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 eating, 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.

John Dean donated his private property in 1921 to found the park, and the remnants of his cabin are 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 in a delightful setting—Butchart Gardens, the pride of Victoria and one of the world's premier floral show gardens. The enterprising Butchart Family initially founded this remarkable botanical showcase in 1904 as a quarry for limestone. Once the rock supply was near depleted, Jennie Butchart had the crevices loaded with topsoil from nearby farms, and planted Japanese, Italian, Rose, and Mediterranean gardens. Throughout the 20th century, the Butcharts' descendants transformed the gardens 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.

This evening, head to a local restaurant overlooking Cordova Bay for a final celebratory dinner. After your meal, stroll along the beach before returning to your hotel.

Accommodation: Brentwood Bay Resort & Spa, Brentwood Bay
Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6

Your British Columbia: Vancouver Island tour concludes

Victoria city and harbor walking tour; 2-3 miles, easy

Spend the final morning of your tour exploring Victoria on foot. Established in 1843 as a fort for the Hudson's Bay Company, Victoria has been called "more British than Britain." You'll see for yourself as you

tour the city, admiring its abundance of Victorian-era architecture, beautiful formal gardens, elegant tea rooms, and double-decker buses. The present-day capital of British Columbia, this 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 by the Parliament and other historical buildings, admire inviting parks and gardens, and trace the scenic centerpiece of the city, the Inner Harbor.

Around noon you bid farewell to your travel companions. You may extend your time in Victoria on your own or depart for Seattle, Washington, by ferry. Country Walkers will provide a complimentary shuttle from Magnolia Hotel to Victoria International Airport (YYJ) arriving by 12:30 p.m. We recommend a flight out of Victoria International Airport (YYJ) no earlier than 2:00 p.m. to allow a 90-minute check-in period.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

	Tour Only
Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
All on-tour meals except 1 lunch and 1 dinner	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour, (two guides for groups of 8 or more)	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz	✓
One extra night in Vancouver and one extra night in Victoria	✓
Airport car service for arrival & departure	✓
Pre- and post-tour breakfasts	✓
Business-class upgrades available	✓