



Vancouver, British Columbia

Multicultural diversity and spectacular natural resources make this city a favorite destination

by Cristina Barone

Vancouver, British Columbia, surrounded by water on three sides and set against the stunning backdrop of the Coast Range mountains, is the kind of place that literally takes your breath away. Visitors can indulge in water sports, skiing, hiking, or simply enjoy the beaches or the vibrant culture of a large city—all in a single weekend.

The third-largest city in Canada,

Vancouver has come to life within the last century. Beginning as a small lumber-based community, the city was officially incorporated in 1886, the same year that most of it was destroyed by fire. Vancouver was rebuilt using more modern methods, and with the addition of a transcontinental railroad, its population grew from five thousand in 1887 to one hundred thousand in 1900.

After World War II, Vancouver began to change rapidly, and many high-rise apartment buildings were built in the downtown area.

In 1986, on Vancouver's centennial anniversary, the city played host to the Expo '86 world's fair, the largest event in the history of British Columbia and considered by many to be the main impetus for the population boom that occurred as Vancouver was "discovered"—even by many Canadians.

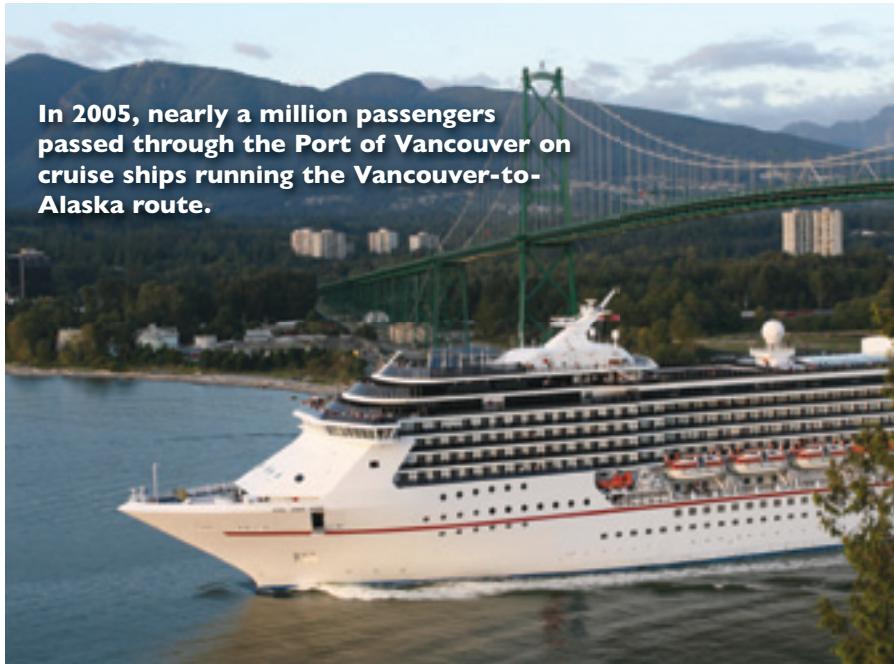
Vancouver also has a large Asian population. In 1997, as China's takeover of Hong Kong loomed, many wealthy Hong Kong citizens emigrated to the Vancouver area. This diversity, coupled with the fact that more than one-third of its residents are between the ages of 25



(Top) Night scene of Burrard Inlet, Vancouver. (Left)
Granville Island Brewing serves finely crafted beers in its tasting room.

and 45, makes Vancouver a city rich in culture and youthful in spirit.

The city's variety of citizens also makes it a great place to eat. "For restaurants, there is a huge diversity," says Carol



In 2005, nearly a million passengers passed through the Port of Vancouver on cruise ships running the Vancouver-to-Alaska route.

Gomez, a lifelong Vancouver resident. The city boasts fresh seafood and delectable international cuisine, especially Japanese and Chinese. Some even argue that the sushi is better in Vancouver than in Tokyo. And just as in nearby Seattle, Vancouver citizens love their coffee. One intersection of Robson Street even has two different Starbucks locations on opposing corners. This coffee culture adds to the enjoyment of traveling the area



on foot. "Walk, coffee, walk, coffee—we need that boost," Gomez says.

Vancouver's surroundings make it an ideal location for visitors and residents alike. "We've got the ocean and the mountains," says Gomez. "There is the city and shopping, and then a short drive away, you can hike." Grouse Mountain—a mere fifteen-minute drive and accessible by public transportation—is a popular destination for those looking to get out of the city and into the outdoors. Vancouver also offers bungee jumping, helicopter rides, sky diving, hang gliding, and hiking trails—so immersed in wilderness that hikers commonly wear bells to ward off bears.

Golf courses are open year-round, and for surfers there is Ambleside Park, a short distance from downtown over the spectacular Lions' Gate Bridge. Those daring enough to tan in the nude can do so at Wreck Beach by the University of British Columbia. Vancouver is also preparing to host the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Its diverse landscape has made Vancouver the third-largest film production center in North America after

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For an incredible look at the city of Vancouver, it's hard to beat the view from Grouse Mountain. (Right) Although there is no snow, the ski lift on Grouse Mountain takes visitors on a 20-minute ride overlooking the city.

Hollywood and New York. The area has served as a backdrop—or sometimes as a stand-in for other cities—in such films as *Rumble in the Bronx*, *The Fantastic Four*, and *X-Men: The Last Stand*, as well as television shows such as *Smallville* and *Stargate SG-1*.

The climate is another big draw with air that is cool, fresh, and smog-free. Vancouver defies the image of being a “frozen neighbor to the north.” In fact,

the city rarely sees a snowfall. “If we get snow, it might last for one day and then it’s gone,” says Natasha Meens, a current resident of Victoria, British Columbia, who lived in Vancouver for seven years. The one potential drawback of the weather—frequent rain—actually contributes to Vancouver’s attraction. “The rains are what give us the giant forests and the greens,” says Meens.

The pristine beauty of Vancouver has

served to make it a popular cruise destination. In 2005, nearly a million passengers on 272 cruise ships passed through the Port of Vancouver on the Vancouver-to-Alaska route.

One place to spot colossal cruise ships leaving the port is Stanley Park, located on the western end of downtown Vancouver. This one-thousand-acre park, much beloved by the residents, is a giant cedar forest surrounded by beaches and

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water. A seawall stretches six miles around the park, making it a great place to walk, jog, or bike. Several shops close to the park's entrance offer bike rentals.

Near the seawall at Brockton Point stands a well-known collection of totem poles, a symbol of the area's indigenous population. Totem poles can also be seen in the park surrounding the Capilano Suspension Bridge, just outside the downtown area. This area also features hiking trails and smaller bridges suspended in trees, but the real highlight is the century-old suspension bridge that spans 450 feet across a 230-foot drop.

In addition to its gorgeous surroundings and diverse cuisine, Vancouver also features many cultural events that make the city vibrant with activity. The Celebration of Light is an annual fireworks exhibition, choreographed to music, that takes place over several days around the end of July in Vancouver's English Bay. "It's on the water. People come in boats, come in planes. People come from far and wide



for this," says Meens.

In addition to serving as a major contributor to classical, folk, and popular music, the city draws musical acts from around the world. Vancouver holds two annual music festivals: the International Folk Music Festival and the International Jazz Festival. The city is home to two professional orchestras and a major opera company. It features a thriving theater and film scene. The annual Vancouver International Film

Festival exhibits a large number of works from around the world, especially documentaries and works by Asian filmmakers.

Vancouver really does have it all. If you plan to visit anytime soon, just beware—you might never leave. ☺

Cristina Barone is a graduate student in urban planning at the University of Florida in Gainesville. She loves to travel and experience new places and cultures.

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