



Delectable British Columbia By Jane Mundy

Some of the best chefs in the world have made British Columbia their home, and for good reason—from Fraser Valley duck and wild Pacific salmon to organic blueberries and wild mushrooms, the raw ingredients for spectacular cooking are right in their backyard. B.C.'s chefs reflect the rich cultural landscape, from Asian tastes to European techniques and innovative regional cuisine. While a visitor to Western Canada has plenty to enjoy, it's almost guaranteed that some of the most memorable accounts of a visit will involve the spectacular food.

Dining out in Vancouver

Vancouver is a culinary melting pot. What some elsewhere might consider ethnic food counts as local in Vancouver, and the city long ago embraced its Asian influences. There's a world of food to explore here, from inexpensive food carts and noodle houses

to stylish hotel dining rooms serving multiple-course tasting menus.

Vancouver's Chinatown is the second largest in North America, and the neighborhood boasts great cuisine at almost any time—many restaurants serve dim sum for breakfast, and the Chinatown night market, running May through September, offers authentic street food. Visiting chefs and epicures ranging from Anthony Bourdain to Julia Child have enthused over dishes such as the spicy garlic squid at Phnom Penh, and diners are similarly ecstatic about the flatbread with lamb sirloin and cilantro, along with other dishes served at Bao Bei Chinese Brasserie.

Gastown is a burgeoning food destination—seemingly planned with out-of-town visitors in mind and just minutes from the downtown core. Walk down a historic cobblestone street to Salt Tasting Room for its plates of cheeses and cured meats, paired with wine and sherry by the glass. Nearby, The Irish Heather's Long Table Series offers a neighborly nosh for less than \$20, including an artisan beer. Just on the edge of Gastown, diners can take a seat at a long communal table at Wildebeest, a new restaurant that has delighted diners with its 48-hour braised short ribs, and its heritage romano beans and black Spanish radishes. Also on Gastown's periphery, Fat Dragon demonstrates how well Vancouver chefs have meshed a passion for local, fresh food with Asian influences—through dishes such as



HUBERT KANG

Top: The Vancouver skyline rises against the vivid backdrop of the North Shore Mountains.

Above: Bao Bei Chinese Brasserie is among the restaurants that are earning Vancouver a prized spot on the culinary map.

Bottom left: Sustainable seafood is a highlight at Yew, at the Four Seasons Hotel in Vancouver.

Did You Know?

British Columbia is home to one of North America's largest film and television industries. In 2011, the \$1.1 billion industry employed around 35,000 people in B.C., and the lengthy roster of motion pictures filmed in B.C. includes *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol* and *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn*.



DON RIDDLE, COURTESY: FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

the delectable Szechuan cured pork belly—and a nose-to-tail approach, such as with its roasted half-pig's head.

Once upon a time, the only place in town to get a decent meal was at a hotel. Today, Vancouver's hotel restaurants are once again ascendant. Hawksworth, in the Rosewood Hotel Georgia, has justly garnered multiple awards, including "Restaurant of the Year" by *MacLean's* magazine. At the Four Seasons Hotel, chef Ned Bell's seafood-centric menu at Yew is earning high marks for sustainability as well as for its exceptional quality.

Take a boat ride to Granville Island to find the best of what Canadian producers have to offer—everything, literally, from soup to nuts. Edible Canada offers unique food gifts to take home, and its next-door bistro can satisfy the appetite you've worked up with a crispy-skin salmon perfectly paired with a Blue Mountain Pinot Noir.

Victoria

The elegant city of Victoria, on Vancouver Island, has a delicious reputation: In addition to having the second-highest number of eateries per capita in North America, Victoria is considered Canada's capital of craft breweries. Visitors can join a brewery tour and tasting at Phillips Brewing, or have a pint and enjoy the ocean views at gastropubs such as Spinnakers and Canoe. Vis à Vis Wine & Charcuterie Bar in Oak Bay—Victoria's oldest neighborhood—offers a great opportunity to sample B.C. wines, and servers suggest pairings for dishes such as oysters in horseradish mignonette and pork belly with grapefruit from a selection of 24 local and international wines by the glass.

At Fisherman's Wharf in James Bay, The Fish Store's fish and chips are notable in that the fish is delivered by local fishermen (when in season) and



Gastropubs such as Canoe are turning the spotlight on the exceptional food and beer found in Victoria.

CHRIS MASON STEARNS



The Okanagan Valley has more than 150 wineries, and the region's sunny climate and expansive views make al fresco dining a must.

served straight from the floating store, without ever reaching land. Nearby is Puerto Vallarta Amigos, a floating restaurant and Victoria's newest culinary star, which serves excellent Mexican preparations; not surprisingly, seafood is a specialty. One of Victoria's most notable culinary and cultural experiences—high tea at The Fairmont Empress Hotel—can also be enjoyed near the city's waterfront.

The Okanagan Wine Country

Pairing food with wine is de rigueur in wine country. The Okanagan Valley has a sunny climate and more than 150 wineries, and al fresco dining is almost obligatory.

The Golden Mile Wine Trail comprises nine wineries, including a terrific winery restaurant at Tinhorn Creek. Locals and wine tourists come to Miradoro for its panoramic views of the South Okanagan Valley and for its rustic Mediterranean cuisine.

The Westside Wine Trail features superb wine-makers in family-owned wineries, just minutes from Kelowna. A highlight of any visit is lunch at Quails' Gate Old Vines Restaurant, and a trip is incomplete without a stop at Mission Hill—the Okanagan's centerpiece. For the ultimate "wow" experience, arrive just before sunset at Terrace Restaurant.

And don't miss ...

The Vancouver Art Gallery (vanartgallery.bc.ca) is the largest art museum in Western Canada. Works by Canadian artists form the core of the permanent collection; upcoming exhibits include "Art Spiegelman Co-Mix: A Retrospective of Comics, Graphics and Scraps," February 16–June 9, 2013.

Every autumn, the **Vancouver International Film Festival** (viff.org) thrills audiences with the best of global cinema. Founded in 1982, the festival is now one of the world's largest, with annual attendance surpassing 130,000; in 2012, the festival featured 380 films from 75 countries.

The waters around Vancouver Island are rich with marine life, and **whale watching** is a favorite activity for visitors to Victoria. A number of charter operations offer naturalist-guided tours, and day trips to the Salish Sea to view resident pods of orcas; visit victoria.travel.bc.ca for a list of operators.

Beluga whales, sea otters and other types of marine life can also be viewed up-close at the **Vancouver Aquarium** (vanaqua.org). Located in Stanley Park, the aquarium is the largest marine-wildlife museum in Canada, with more than 70,000 animals from around the world.

Over the last decade, the **Whistler Blackcomb** ski resort (whistlerblackcomb.com) has received an annual average of nearly 40 feet of snow. Visitors come to the resort every winter to ski or snowboard the resort's more than 8,000 acres of terrain.

With an elevation climb of almost 2,800 feet, the 1.8-mile **Grouse Grind** deserves its reputation as a strenuous hike, but the views of Vancouver from Grouse Mountain make the experience unforgettable.

Whistler

Renowned for its stellar accommodations and dining, the year-round resort at Whistler has several notable restaurants, including Bearfoot Bistro and Araxi.

A great way to experience Araxi is via the Longtable Dining Series, an unforgettable outdoor dining experience that takes place each summer. The series provides an opportunity to sample the region's culinary charm, and to meet locals and other visitors over a spectacular meal. The 2012 series took place in Rainbow Park, and Araxi executive chef James Walt crafted tasting menus featuring local ingredients such as beef from Pemberton Meadows and produce from Root Down Organics.

Additional treats can be found at Aura, in Nita Lake Lodge in Creekside. Dishes such as Fraser Valley pork loin and bison rib eye offer a memorable taste of Whistler.

Cooking Schools

A hands-on cooking class is an excellent way to experience Western Canada's culinary scene—and to take home some new skills.

In Vancouver, participants in regular classes

from The Dirty Apron Cooking School commence the evening with a glass of Prosecco, and progress through preparing a meal's courses following themes such as the seasonal "Fall Into Flavor" and "You & Julia: Inspired by *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*."

In Victoria, The London Chef similarly has state-of-the-art equipment and an immaculate, spacious kitchen. Here, chef Dan Hayes leads classes along themes such as "Kids in the Kitchen" and "Secrets of Vancouver Island Seafood." In the Okanagan, Mission Hill Winery offers memorable workshops in its demonstration kitchen, including a "Cook Like a Chef Professional Series" that culminates in a three-course, wine-paired dinner.

For all these cooking schools, book well in advance—the experience and the education are bound to be delicious. ■

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Getting There: Alaska Airlines (800-ALASKAAIR, alaskaair.com) offers frequent service to communities throughout British Columbia. For more information, go to alaskaair.com and hellobc.com.

Weight restrictions don't apply.



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