



The Return of **Winter Festivals**

BY

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**WITH COVID RESTRICTIONS EASED
ACROSS THE PROVINCE, HOLIDAY
FESTIVITIES ARE BACK ON THE
CALENDAR. HERE'S YOUR GUIDE TO THE
BEST WINTER EVENTS OF THE YEAR**

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As festival lovers know, events last year were cancelled or moved to virtual due to the pandemic, but most indoor and outdoor events for winter 2021-2022 are back on track, and we can't wait!

There are too many winter festivals happening throughout BC to mention here, but we've listed some of the coolest events (pun intended) for you to check out, including traditional indoor markets and outdoor twinkly lights for the entire family—just the ticket to keep those winter blues away.

And to indulge your sense of adventure, BC's northern reaches excel in all things wintry, from ice sculpture competitions to Northern Lights spotting, so don't let frosty temperatures faze you: Dig out your thermal underwear, toque and mittens, and embrace the cold!

Vancouver Christmas Market

WHERE: Vancouver's Jack Poole Plaza (downtown at the Olympic Cauldron)

WHEN: Nov 13 to Dec 24

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Bring shopping bags and an appetite to Vancouver's longest-running market (11 years, not counting last year) based on a traditional German Christmas market. Where else can you browse the wares of more than 50 artisans and 20 food vendors with mulled wine in hand? You can also get the holiday cheer flowing with European beer or hot chocolate.

When your shopping bags are full of Christmas gifts and German-style Christmas ornaments and you've filled up with schnitzel and spätzle, goulash and bratwurst (leave room for the gingerbread), you're never too old to take a spin on the carousel. You can't miss the 30-foot walk-in Christmas tree with thousands of lights. After 5:00 p.m. music

Vancouver Christmas Market.



TOP: LINDSAY ELLIOT; RIGHT: DESTINATION VANCOUVER/CAPILANO SUSPENSION BRIDGE PARK

and family entertainment, and the sky above studded with lights, are sure to get you into the Christmas spirit.

PNE WinterLights

WHERE: Vancouver's PNE grounds

WHEN: Dec 3 to 31

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Back by popular demand, the PNE morphs into drive-through festive fun and you can't help but wonder how the heck they did that—it's mesmerizing and memorable for all ages to enjoy. Cruise down Santa Street to nine enchanted lands where winter creatures reside, through two light tunnels, past a snow globe village filled with live dancers. Be on the lookout for penguins and unicorns, teddy bears and dancing elves.

Get ready for a 30- to 45-minute road trip: Don your Santa hats, dress up the family dog, decorate your vehicle, pack some snacks and bevies (food trucks are also onsite); dial your radio to Santa Radio 100.9 FM for sing-along jingles, and you're good to go.

Canyon Lights at Capilano Suspension Bridge Park

WHERE: North Vancouver

WHEN: Nov 20 to Jan 23

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Gazillions of lights transform a rain forest into a glistening winter wonderland. New this year, the Capilano Suspension Bridge comes alive with multi-coloured changing lights with the canyon illuminated below. The Treetops Adventure connects eight douglas-fir trees that just happen to be the tallest in the world. As if that isn't enough, a team of visual artists individually decorated the surrounding foliage. The third attraction, called *Arc-de-lumina*, is a mesmerizing light tunnel that's part of the Cliffwalk. Dazzling.

Vancouver Festival of Trees

WHERE: Fairmont Hotel Vancouver

Vancouver

WHEN: Nov 26 to Jan 2

WHAT TO EXPECT:

The Hotel Vancouver's lobby will be transformed into a lush forest of more than 20 beautifully decorated Christmas trees



Canyon Lights at Capilano Suspension Bridge Park.

to raise funds for the BC Children's Hospital Foundation. Sponsors, local businesses, organizations and individuals get involved in this heartwarming community tradition. (The Four Seasons hosted for three decades until the property closed in 2020.) A judge's panel votes on trees based on creativity and festive nature and the public votes on their favourite. Because last year was a virtual tour, the Fairmont is excited to welcome you—be the first!

Festival of Trees

WHERE: The Bay Centre, Victoria

WHEN: Nov 17 to Jan 4

WHAT TO EXPECT:

The halls are decked and the Bay Centre is a wondrous forest of 60 unique and amazing trees. Previous creations that produced the Wow factor included Doctor Seuss, Pirates in Trees and Disney movie *Frozen* theme so we can't wait to see what the sponsors and organizers have put together for this season. Now in its 30th year, funds are raised to support the BC Children's Hospital Foundation.

Christmas at the Empress

WHERE: Victoria

WHEN: Nov 20 to Jan 1

WHAT TO EXPECT:

The Fairmont Empress has polished the silver for Festive Afternoon Tea, Christmas on the Veranda featuring s'mores and more dining events including Christmas Day Buffet or a five-course dinner menu befitting the Grand Dame herself. Another great fun-filled tradition is the New Years Eve party, so toast good riddance to 2021 and ring in the New Year with style.

Movie Nights at the Oak Bay Beach Hotel

WHERE: Victoria

WHEN: Nov 28 to Dec 30

WHAT TO EXPECT:

If you've ever attended Holiday Movie Nights in the David Foster Foundation Theatre, chances are you'll recognize some of the audience. "We see the same families return to this event—it's become a tradition," says Anneke Feuermann,



Butchart Gardens.



Whistler Film Festival.

marketing & PR manager. Families never tire of *Elf* and gal pals prefer *Love Actually*. If you don't want to see *Home Alone* or *A Christmas Story* again, bah humbug!

"Our iconic grand fireplace is the backdrop for families to take photos and gaggles of girls usually start the night with a cocktail in the Snug Pub and move on to FARO for a pizza before joining us in the theatre for a glass of sparkling, and I always ask for extra popcorn," says Feuermann, laughing. You can even text for service from the bar during the movie. (Please be sure to include a designated driver, or make a night of it with a sleepover.)

Butchart Gardens Christmas

WHERE: Victoria

WHEN: Nov 26 to Jan 6

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Bundle up for a walk along pathways illuminated with thousands of lights flanked with traditional garlands and Twelve Days of Christmas displays. Afterward, warm up with a cuppa hot chocolate and gingerbread at the Coffee Shop. Reserve afternoon tea or dinner

Vernon Winter Carnival.



Sun Peaks.



in the original Butchart family residence before or after your Christmas garden stroll.

Whistler Film Festival

WHERE: Whistler

WHEN: Dec 1 to 5

WHAT TO EXPECT:

The coolest—both in temperature and vibe—film fest in Canada focuses on up-and-coming

talents. This year women are front and centre with over half the feature films this year made by women. Five films are up for Oscar consideration and six are world premiers.

Do not expect a stuffy red carpet tuxedo affair or anyone snooty. Park your skis in the lobby, wear fleece and expect everyone to be friendly. "In fact, the Whistler Film Fest is also known as "The Hot Tub Film Fest" because actual movies have been created by random encounters with like-minded film buffs," says

Paul Gratton, WFF director of programming, with a laugh. Joking aside, most screenings will feature directors who will reappear onstage for a Q&A. All in, it's fun and energetic and an opportunity to celebrate a return to theatres.

Vernon Winter Carnival

WHERE: Vernon & Silver Star

WHEN: Feb 4 to 13

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Dancing and dining, beer and wine tasting—the "Suds and Cider" event is renamed "Sip and Savour" because it includes wine. But there's a lot more to do besides revelling après-ski. There's winter stuff like snow and ice sculptures "We have events for everyone, all ages and all incomes, says Vernon Winter Carnival society executive director Vicki Proulx. With over 100 events running throughout the city, that's a given. The main event is the outdoor Winter Playground featuring ice, an ice bar and, weather permitting, ice slides. Woohoo!

"We have different events happening during the day for kids, such as snowman building and colouring in the snow and Silver Star hosts the Snow Sculpture Symposium," adds Proulx. Five teams from BC spend five days carving their sculptures from 10 by 12 foot ice blocks. The public can watch the whole process and vote for their favourite. "During the second weekend we are hosting the Snow Pitch Tournament—baseball in the snow. It was wildly popular in the 1980s and we expect it to be a blast this year too."

Holiday Kick-Off

WHERE: Sun Peaks

WHEN: Dec 11 to 12

WHAT TO EXPECT:

There will be elves! Santa rides through the village on a horse-drawn sleigh with his entourage at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday. Afterward, kids can visit a fun ice fishing hut and find Harry the bear (Sun Peaks mascot) wandering about. Catch a few performances of live music and when the sun goes down at 5.30 p.m., the pyrotechnics show called Embers is Instagram worthy: the village is ablaze with lights and fire.

Musical at Key City Theatre

WHERE: Cranbrook

WHEN: Dec 31, Jan 14 to 16

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Based on the classic movie hit *9 to 5*, this musical showcase featuring Dolly Parton (played by a local gal) “is the antidote we need for these crazy times,” says Sioban Stapli, Key City Theatre event manager, and it culminates with a New Years Eve Gala. “Folks fill 602 seats, and there isn’t a bad seat in the house.” Post-show, dress up in big hair, polyester and shoulder pads and disco dance. This year’s theme is, of course, the 1970s. “Then we have fantastic artists throughout March, including a burlesque troop and an Indigenous circus performance group called Red Sky—way cool.”

Griz Days Winter Festival

WHERE: Fernie

WHEN: March 4 to 6

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Pay homage to the Griz, Fernie’s biggest and snowiest celebration of the year. The Griz plays an important role in the amount of powder Fernie receives and each year people partake in the Extreme Griz competition, including axe throwing and keg toss, hopeful they will be crowned Griz for the year. But everyone wins on Griz Days. Expect a parade and pancakes and a wild weekend of fun for the whole family. This year’s theme is “Go Wild!” so pack your faux leopard coat and animal print onesie and celebrate winter with those wild and whacky residents of Fernie.



High on Ice

WHERE: Fort St. John

WHEN: February (Dates TBC)

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Three ice slides on a big snow hill are the biggest hit of the festival. Made out of ice bricks, you (age is no barrier) climb about 30 feet up the backside of the hill and slide down on your butt—just like a playground slide. It

High on Ice.



Griz Days Winter Festival.



Northern Lights Festival.



takes seconds but the guaranteed laughs and whoops will last longer. And it’s free.

Wait, there’s more. While the signature event is ice carving, “we offer ice fishing, horse-drawn sleigh rides, a curling bonspiel and more,” says Marissa Jordan, High On Ice programmer. “It’s a long cold winter up here but we know how to take advantage of what’s available and share.” They share mostly with locals but many out-of-towners attend festivities and other activities like indoor and outdoor skating and the dodgeball tournament. “This year, our 18th and going strong, we have a Winter Wonderland Walk at our new Festival Plaza, filled with Christmas lights and decorations.” So bundle up and come on up!

Northern Lights Festival

WHERE: Fort Nelson

WHEN: March 12 to 22

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Besides the main event—Aurora Borealis—music and art, cultural performances and demonstrations by over 20 recognized First Nations and Canadian artists take place over the 10-day festival.

“Our last event was in 2019 so we are stoked to have visitors back! I’ve never seen our community work so hard to make this festival happen again,” says Brenda Enax, Fort Nelson Event Society. “We love to showcase our beautiful backyard and watching the excitement build from our locals is amazing.

There’s a lot to do when the Northern Lights are switched off. Over 300 international guests rubbed shoulders with the locals during the 2019 festivities. They met on snowmobile trails and in the world-famous hot springs. “We hope you’ll sidle up with the locals this year too. Sheldon will be in the Boston Pizza lounge and he loves a good party,” quips Brenda. In the daytime, families can meet the Fort Nelson Community at the Northern Lights Marketplace and join the Skidoo club with trails complete with warm-up shelters. Speaking of shelter, Brenda describes the Northern Rockies Lodge at Muncho Lake as second-to-none, and Muncho Lake Provincial Park is the perfect place to watch the unforgettable light show.

Brenda and her daughter watch the Kp-Index, a global auroral activity indicator that forecasts aurorae. “We drive to the outskirts, away from city lights with camera ready,” she says. “Once the sky becomes dark the show really starts... everyone must experience this for themselves... seeing is believing.”