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ISLAND ADVENTURE, PART 1 OF 2

# Victoria: a capital experience

**Old-fashioned service and luxury in the heart of Victoria as British charm meets Asian buzz in the city**

By JON MANCHESTER  
 The Okanagan Sunday

**Y**ou don't have to travel halfway around the world to find Old-World charm. In fact, it's right here in British Columbia.

It's only a short ferry ride from the Lower Mainland, but our provincial capital offers a taste of Britain that's hard to duplicate on this continent.

Victoria's historic Old Town, clustered around the Inner Harbour, is an eclectic mix of Edwardian British architecture, bustling Chinatown and modern amenities.

For mainlanders, it's familiar and different at the same time. You're still "at home," but everything's just a little bit different. Add in the fresh sea air and the earlier arrival of spring, and it really does feel like you're a world away.

Lorded over by the stately legislature buildings – beautiful when they're lit up at night – downtown Victoria is best discovered on foot. Everything from the Royal British Columbia Museum to high-end shopping, kitschy tourist shops and myriad dining and entertainment opportunities await within the radius of a few blocks – or you can simply relax by the waterfront and watch the boats bob in the harbour. Get tired of walking, and you can hop a horse-drawn carriage for a romantic tour of the city.

When you're ready to rest your weary bones, The Magnolia Hotel and Spa is a hidden gem just off the waterfront. It offers a luxury, European-style boutique hotel experience with exceptional service.

It's tucked about a two-minute walk from the water and is a favoured spot of visiting political types and celebrities because of its low-key atmosphere and attentive staff.

"We're a little more under the radar than the 'big' hotels," says general manager Bill Lewis. "A lot of our guests don't want to be noticed in the lobby."

With just 64 rooms and a higher staff-to-guest ratio than typical chain hotels, it's the extra touches that have guests raving about the Magnolia on popular travel websites, such as turn-down service, high-end toiletries, locally made chocolates in every room and more.

"The hotel is beautifully managed, in the artful way that emphasizes service while rendering the effort of management invisible," gushed one reviewer.

The Magnolia has been voted one of the top hotels in Canada by Conde Nast Traveler readers and has a four-diamond rating from CAA. Privately and locally owned, it offers a more personal experience than its corporate competition. Such as front desk staff who've been known to offer impromptu concerts on the lobby's baby grand piano.

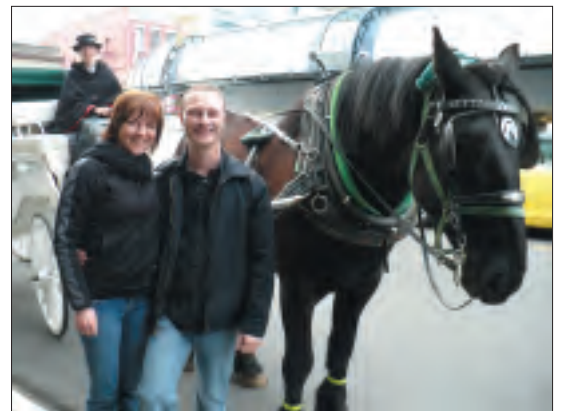
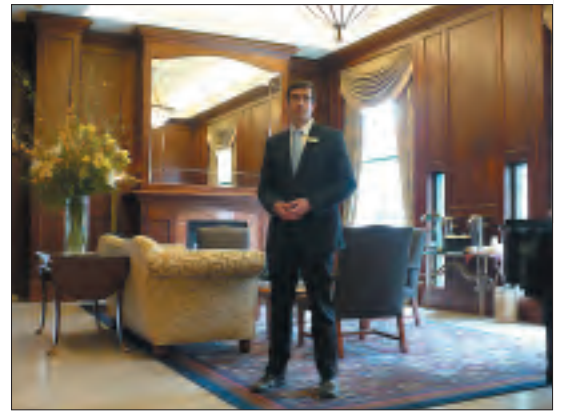
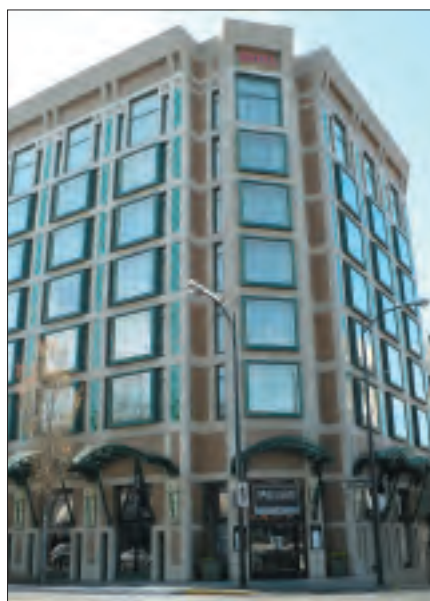
Though built in 1998, the impressive structure was designed with its neighbours in mind and blends seamlessly into historic Old Town. High ceilings, real mahogany in the lobby, classically designed furniture and floor to ceiling windows give it a heritage feel.

"We like to add unexpected touches that people will remember, the little details," said Lewis. "We try to hit the five-diamond service level as much as possible."

Three types of room are offered – superior, superior corner and diamond – although all are luxuriously appointed with granite countertops, big-screen TVs and incredibly comfortable beds. Our enthusiastic aim of documenting a downtown pub crawl was derailed by the comfy quarters.



JON MANCHESTER/The Okanagan Sunday



**Clockwise from top: Victoria's picturesque Inner harbour is presided over by the stately legislature buildings. Magnolia Hotel and Spa general manager Bill Lewis in the hotel's opulent lobby. Horse-drawn carriage rides around the city's sights are popular with tourists. The Magnolia was designed to blend in to Victoria's historic Old Town. A few blocks away, the Gate of Harmonious Interest welcomes visitors to Chinatown.**

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Victoria is about an eight-hour drive from the Okanagan, not much more than an hour by air. It is served by B.C. Ferries from Tsawwassen to Swartz Bay, about an hour and a half voyage through scenic islands and passages. The ride will cost you \$75 for a car with two occupants and there are numerous departures daily. Daily flights are offered from Kelowna Airport by both WestJet and Air Canada. Seats typically range in price from \$100 to \$150, plus fees. Both the airport and ferry terminal are about a 20-minute drive from downtown Victoria. If you're heading to Vancouver first, seaplane service can take you right to the harbourfront, in front of the legislature.

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# Victoria

Continued from page C1

We found ourselves asleep by eight o'clock – or maybe that was just the reality of having a few peaceful days away from three teenagers. The bathrooms offer both a shower and a deep soaker tub.

Our top-floor room boasted a gas fireplace and a commanding view of the harbour with a peek at the legislature, just two blocks away. Off-season rates start at a surprising \$169 given the outstanding level of service and peak at \$349 for the diamond rooms in the summer. Packages are offered including spa treatments, dinners in the excellent Prime steakhouse, wine tours, whale watching (in season) and visits to Victoria's renowned Butchart Gardens.

The hotel also offers meeting and conference rooms for up to 40 people and a fitness centre.

The seven-room in-house spa offers everything from facials to hot-stone massages and couples' treatments, along with the most luxurious robes you will ever wear (my partner, Jacquie, insisted I mention that). She looked suitably relaxed after her massage and hydrotherapy session and ready to tackle more adventures in the heart of the city.

Across the lobby, we enjoyed a sumptuous meal of seafood, carpaccio and lamb, prepared by chef Bruce Batty. The service was again exceptional, and the staff's knowledge of the menu – and the city – was impressive. A deluxe continental breakfast is included for hotel guests. Prime was named one of Canada's best new restaurants in 2010.

A short walk away, through the Gate of Harmonious Interest, you are transported to the Orient in Canada's

## THINGSTOSEE

- Victoria's Chinatown, the oldest in Canada
- Butchart Gardens, opened in 1904, stately English-style gardens with impressive flower displays in summer
- The legislature, grand buildings built in 1897, directly overlooking the harbour
- Craigdarroch Castle, built by wealthy industrialist Robert Dunsmuir
- The Empress Hotel, grand old dame built by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1908
- Royal British Columbia Museum and IMAX theatre

largest Chinatown, second only in North America to San Francisco's.

There, you can stroll through a labyrinth of narrow alleys to discover quaint courtyards, enjoy fresh dim sum or soak up the sights and smells of the sidewalk greengrocers. The many Asian novelty stores offer a great selection of teas and dried goods that are hard to find or much more expensive here in the Okanagan.

The colourful district is designated as a national historic site and features Canada's oldest Buddhist temple.

Victoria, nicknamed the City of Gardens, was named after the queen of the same name. It's one of the oldest cities in the Pacific Northwest, with British settlement beginning in 1841. Much of that character remains, along with many interesting heritage buildings.

It's well worth the visit.

**In Part 2, our Vancouver Island trip gets adventurous as we have a close encounter with sea lions at Parkville and go caving at Horne Lake.**

# Business travel makes comeback

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Business travel is bouncing back.

U.S. companies are forecast to spend five per cent more on travel in 2011 than they did last year — a sign of confidence in the economy that is giving a boost to airlines, hotels and rental-car companies. That's double the growth rate from 2010, which followed two years of decline.

Last year's bump in business travel — companies spent an estimated \$228 billion — helped U.S. airlines post their first collective profit in three years. And profits are rising at hotel chains like Marriott and Hyatt and rental-car companies like Avis and Hertz.

Perhaps the most telling sign of a rebound, industry officials say, is the return of corporate retreats. They had all but vanished during the recession, part of an effort by businesses to avoid the appearance of extravagance at a time of government bailouts and rising unemployment.

Executives sending their workers back on the road say travel is critical to their companies' success.

"You need to have face time," says Robert P. Genco, vice-president of operations for Synopsis, a Silicon Valley company that makes software for microchip manufacturers. Synopsis cut its travel budget

by about 60 per cent during the recession. Now it's nearly back to a pre-recession level, with salesmen and top executives visiting old and new clients in China, India and Japan.

Elyria Foundry, an Ohio manufacturer of metal parts for the wind turbine, natural gas and mining industries, has been sending engineers and salesmen on the road again to let customers know they are important.

"If you look at the younger generation, they seem addicted to text messages," says CEO Bruce Smith. "When you are there in person, the quality of information you transmit goes up dramatically."

U.S. economic output returned to its pre-recession level in the fourth quarter of 2010, and the economy is forecast to grow faster in 2011. But spending on business travel isn't expected to return to its pre-recession level until the middle of 2013, says Michael W. McCormick, executive director of the Global Business Travel Association. That's partly because companies are asking employees to travel frugally.

The average cost per trip in the first quarter is forecast to be \$538, six per cent below the same period in 2008, according to the business travel association.

Corporate travel managers are asking employees to spend fewer nights on the road, stay

at less expensive hotels, rent smaller cars and, in some cases, book cheaper flights that aren't non-stop.

The companies are also asking more of their travel providers. For example, travel managers are asking hotels to throw in free breakfast, Internet, parking and gym use, says Best Western CEO David T. Kong.

The extra miles business travellers are racking up are a boon to an industry that suffered badly during the downturn.

In 2009, business travellers spent \$222.7 billion, the lowest level since 2003, according to the business travel group. That year, the largest U.S. airlines lost a combined \$3.4 billion.

The travel industry's success has always been tied closely to the economy and corporate spending.

By and large, business travellers are more concerned with convenience than price, making plans at the last minute. That's in contrast with leisure travellers, who try to book far in advance to secure the best deal.

Now that the business traveller is back, the industry is reaping the benefits.

—The average price of a domestic round-trip ticket before taxes climbed to \$350 last year, 12 per cent higher than in 2009. Over the same period, the number of flyers on U.S. airlines rose about four per cent.



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