

Vancouver ventures

STRIDING FERVENTLY TOWARD ITS AIM OF BECOMING THE GREENEST CITY IN THE WORLD BY 2020, VANCOUVER IS THE KIND OF HOLIDAY DESTINATION YOU COULD HAPPILY CALL HOME.

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Drenched by more than a metre of rain each year, Vancouver is laced with exquisite forests, parks and gardens. There is a powerful sense of a city set in wilderness, with black bears wandering into outer suburbs.

Many visitors are drawn to this verdant city by its dramatic natural setting. Vancouver aims to become the greenest city in the world by 2020 and sustainability initiatives are embedded in its urban heart. It has North America's greenest building – the regenerative Centre for Integrated Research on Sustainability at the University of British Columbia – and, by 2020, all new buildings in the city will have to be carbon neutral.

Canada geese take off from the grassed roof of the Vancouver Convention Centre while sea planes, from the carbon neutral Harbour Air fleet, lift off across the bay.

This dog-friendly city has a fine public transport system. All taxis are hybrid

cars, running on biodiesel, and electric vehicle recharging stations are springing up across the city.

Visitors can cycle around 300 km of bike lanes; explore artists' studios at Granville Island or visit book stores and yoga studios in the former hippy haven Kitsilano.

Food is innovative, with many restaurants serving seafoods recommended by Vancouver Aquarium's Ocean Wise sustainability program. The locavore movement enjoys a strong following.

Karri Schuermans, former City of Sydney marketing manager, who runs the award-winning, carbon neutral, Chambar restaurant with her husband, chef Nico Schuermans, says a lot of work is going on behind the scenes to make Vancouver the world's greenest city. "I think you have to dream big, go for it and make it happen."



Stanley Park



Carrall Street Greenway



Grouse Mountain

Climb the 2,830 steps of 'Mother Nature's Stairmaster' or take the Skyride to the summit of the 1,127 m mountain. On top catch a chairlift to the base of the wind turbine for the Eye of the Wind tour. In winter, snowboard or ski on one of 26 ski runs. Summer activities include ziplining or watching raptors in the Birds in Motion show. www.grousemountain.com

Stanley Park

Cycle, roller blade or take a tram ride around this 400 hectare park. Options range from visiting the Vancouver Aquarium to spotting wildlife on Beaver Lake or one of the forest trails. In summer, bask on one of the beaches or guzzle maple and walnut icecream at the scenic lookout on Prospect Point. www.vancouver.ca/parks/parks/stanley

Wreck Beach

Steep steps lead down from the main campus of the University of British Columbia through shimmering woodland to this 7.8 km 'clothes optional' beach'. Up to 14,000 visitors can pack the pebbly shores of Canada's first nudist beach on a hot weekend, with musicians playing anything from reggae to jazz and vendors offering veggie burgers and fruit drinks. www.wreckbeach.org >>

Granville yachts



Grouse Mountain



Fairmont rooftop garden



Abitano Beach



Rediscover Granville



Fairmont Waterfront Hotel

This hotel combines welcoming, impeccable service with strong sustainability practices. Chefs select herbs from the rooftop garden while the hotel's beehives produce around 300 kg of honey a year. Front rooms enjoy views across the bay to snowy peaks, with the Vancouver Convention Centre and Seawall walking paths across the road. There is free parking for electric vehicles and charging stations are provided onsite. www.fairmont.com/waterfront

Listel Hotel

Guests at the Listel Hotel delight in wobbling the springy, life-size metal figures that stand outside the lifts. These are among more than 250 original artworks, some from famous artists, displayed in public areas and hotel rooms. Pieces are curated by the leading Buschlen Mowatt Galleries and the Museum of Anthropology. The Listel has excellent eco credentials, including a zero waste policy and converts non-recyclables into electricity. www.thelistelhotel.com

Coast Coal Harbour Hotel

Pets are welcome at this 20-storey hotel, within easy walking distance of Stanley Park and close to tourist hubs like historic Gastown. The hotel has a zero waste management policy and its carbon offset program allows guests to purchase carbon credits. www.coasthotels.com



Chambar

'Moose horns' sculpted from recycled skateboards decorate this trendy restaurant. Belgium three-star Michelin-trained chef Nico Schuermans produces memorable food, including grilled organic asparagus with saffron Dungeness crab butter and peppercorn-crusted bison flatiron with seductive, smoked tomato, bearnaise sauce. The restaurant became carbon neutral largely by dramatically cutting waste. Chambar offset emissions through CowpowerBC, which supports farmers converting manure into renewable energy. www.chambar.com

Raincity Grill

This restaurant has won numerous food awards and is famous for its 100-mile tasting menu, which includes North Arm Farm beetroot salad with goats cheese mousse and Salspring Island honey mussels. All the fish served is Ocean Wise and live caught. Most other food is 'either certified organic or produced in organic, ethical style'. www.raincitygrill.com

Edible Canada Bistro

Situated on Granville Island, customers of Edible Canada can leave their cars to recharge at the free electric plug-in parking stalls outside while dining at recycled fir tables inside. The chefs source food from small culinary artisans and pluck herbs from planter boxes surrounding the restaurant. The bistro serves sustainable seafood in memorable dishes like Kasu and birch syrup sablefish, and also supports the Growing Chefs! urban agriculture program for kids. www.ediblecanada.com



The local wildlife

FACT FILE

GETTING THERE

Several airlines fly to Canada via the United States, but only Air Canada offers direct Sydney to Vancouver flights, cutting time and emissions. Places featured are within 45 minutes of Vancouver city centre.

WHEN TO GO

The best time of year is the summer months of May to August. Skiers favour winter or spring, while autumn is good for fall leaf displays and wildlife spotting.

LOGISTICS

Australian passport holders do not need a visa to visit Canada.

CARBON OFFSET

A return flight from Sydney to Vancouver creates 4.2 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, which costs around \$97 to offset. www.carbonplanet.com

