

S
TRAVEL

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH COLUMBIA

LOOP YOUR WAY AROUND THESE NATURAL WONDERS

BY NATALIE COMPAGNO & GREG FREITAS





COURTESY OF SEA TO SKY GONDOLA

The viewing platform over Howe Sound can be reached via the Sea to Sky Gondola.

In road trips, as in wheels, the circle is the perfect shape. Why retrace your steps when you have the wind in your hair and you're off in search of new adventures? Mixed tapes are similar — carefully selected songs to be experienced in a certain order, over and over again.

Pop in this Canadian mixed tape and groove out on a loop or a shuffle through Vancouver, Whistler, the east coast of Vancouver Island, and Victoria, ending up back in Port Angeles. Immerse yourself in a playlist of natural wonders, vibrant cultures, and captivating experiences. The only thing you need to pack is your sense of spontaneity. It's time to hit play.

VANCOUVER

Side A: 'Run To You' by Bryan Adams

Vancouver is a jewel in the Canadian crown that deserves constant rediscovery. A mercurial foreign friend, the skyline seems to shimmer and hypnotize. Fashion, art, and food mix with easy outdoor entertainment just minutes away from downtown.

Stroll the world's longest waterfront path at **Stanley Park**, cross the **Capilano Suspension Bridge** in North Van, or for a leg burner, climb the 2,830 steps of **Grouse Mountain**. Take a few days to peruse more than 300 works of public art, or duck into the **Vancouver Art Gallery** to admire the works of Emily Carr — one of Canada's most accomplished artists.

'The Kid Is Hot Tonight' by Loverboy

Treat yourself to urban luxury at **Paradox Hotel Vancouver**. Splurge on a suite, the freestanding oval tub with skyscraper views, fluid layout of the large space, and balcony with lounge chairs that make guests wish they lived there. The Paradox staff is exceptionally friendly, and the location is perfect for exploring on foot. The onsite **Mansion Nightclub**, with its dance floor



over a swimming pool, is next level, while **Karma Lounge** is where all the koolkats hang. Hit the remote-control blackout curtains like a rock star and order room service every morning. You're worth it.

'Rockin' in the Free World' by Neil Young
Like many of the world's great cities, Vancouver has a walkable, bustling downtown core, fully alive day and night. Sate your appetite and your historical curiosity with a tasty **Gastronomic Gastown Tour**. The neighborhood nicknamed for its earliest tavern keeper, "Gassy Jack" Deighton, was the site of the first European city here when it was known as **Granville**, population 1,000. Today, it is filled with historic sights and characterful pubs and eateries. Don't miss **Kozak**, a Ukrainian culinary success story. The owners immigrated in 2012, sold their baked goods at farmers' markets, ending up with this sleek modern restaurant. The holubtsi stuffed cabbage rolls and



From top: The popular Granville Island Public Market features bars, gourmet food stalls and artisan boutiques. The Capilano Suspension Bridge is 450-feet long.

varenyky handmade pierogies are so full of flavor, you might order seconds.

Ethnic foodie finds abound throughout the area. **Richmond, B.C.**, is well-known for the best Chinese food in North

America, so book a tour with **Vancouver Foodie Tours** to help decipher the overwhelming variety. Michelin recently alighted in Vancouver, doling out eight stars. Don't miss **Kissa Tanto** both for its

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FROM TOP: ROY JOHNSON / ALAMY, THOMAS KURMEIER / GETTY IMAGES

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surprising blend of Italian and Japanese influences, as well as its 1960s Tokyo décor. Also highly recommended: **Miku**, for epic sushi with views to match, and Francisco Higareda's twin elevated Mexican restaurants **Ophelia's** and **Monarca** — one devoted to each parent — whose elaborate décor pulls focus until the mezcal margaritas arrive.

'Wake Up' by Arcade Fire

Make time for **Granville Island Public Market**. Take the water taxi there — a friendly seal just might escort you — then plan to spend the afternoon. Graze at the food stands, pop into the smart shops, and post up at the outdoor cafés surrounded by water on every side. Get lost in the craft maze or search out delights such as **Nooroongji Books**, **Kroma Artist's Acrylics**, and **Dream**. So many treasures, so little time.

After being on the water, consider a grand finale in the air. A **Gulf Island Seaplane** tour over Vancouver will take your breath away, infusing joy and wonder at the beauty of the area. Indigenous and family owned, it is a welcoming and highly recommended local business.

SQUAMISH

'Sundown' by Gordon Lightfoot

Heading north along the coast, pull over for the **Sea to Sky Gondola**, a 10-minute joy ride to vertiginous views, 2,900 feet above **Howe Sound**. With each bit of elevation, a larger vista unfolds. Good weather unlocks a full slate of activities, with mountaintop yoga, live music, and morning hikes. Check the website for schedules. Have local wine or a snack at the **Summit Lodge**, gazing out to the west at **Vancouver Island**, before hitting the road again.

WHISTLER

'Call Me Maybe' by Carly Rae Jepsen

Whistler Blackcomb is renowned as the largest ski resort in North America. The off-season lures are lesser known



but equally compelling, from sybaritic spa pampering to 50 kilometers of trails connected by the **Peak 2 Peak Gondola**. Site of the 2010 Winter Olympics, thrill seekers can still hurtle downhill at 80 mph at the **Whistler Sliding Centre's Passenger Bobsleigh Experience**.

Whistler Village is always busy, so for a more vacation-like vibe, check out the under-the-radar **Creekside** neighborhood. The original base of Whistler Mountain, Creekside today is filled with indie, owner-operated shops. Stop into **Rocket Coffee** for a caffeine fix — the groovy '70s and '80s music art will have you buzzing as well. As you head to the restroom, kiss the lipstick mirror that states in neon: "video killed the radio star." The locals are excited about **Mekong**, which opened this year, bringing elevated Thai food to the valley.

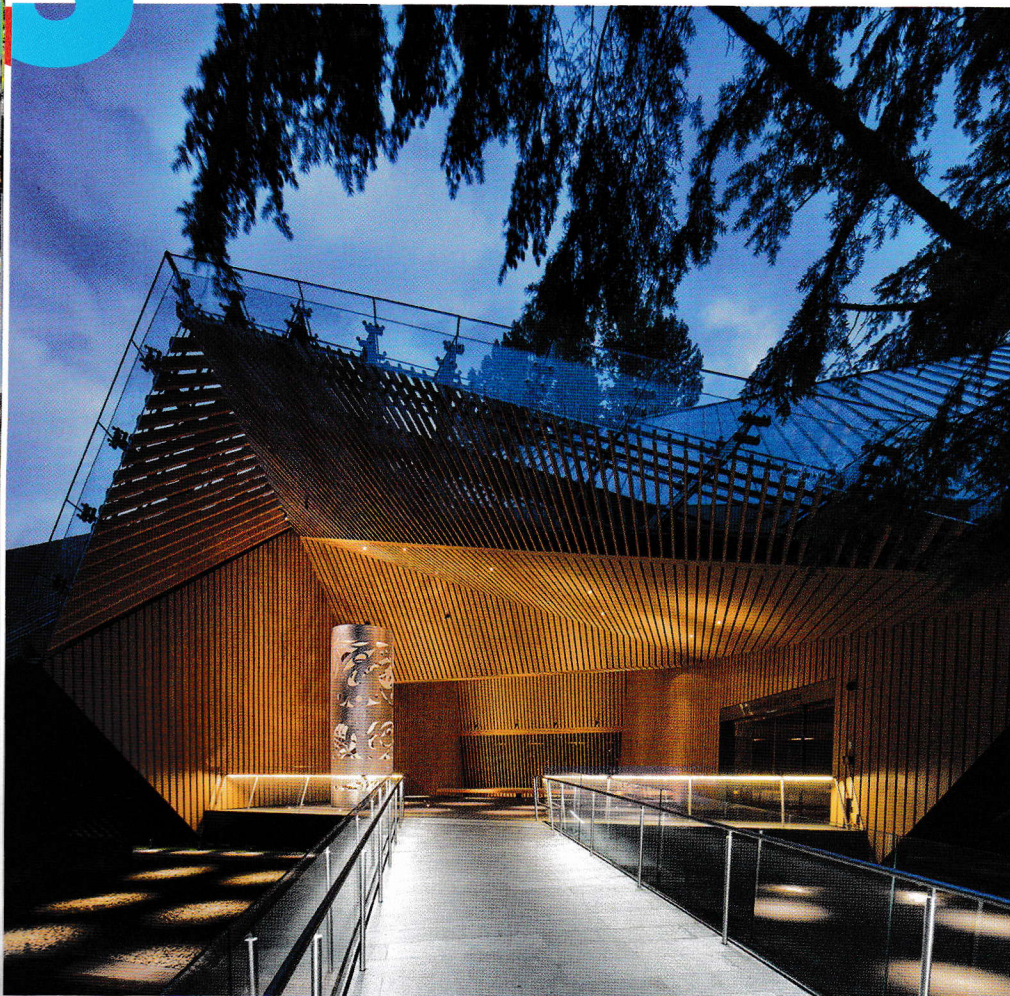
A stay at **Nita Lake Lodge** will make

Enjoy pancakes and a variety of seasonal fare at **The Den** at Nita Lake Lodge.

you nostalgic for family lakeside vacations past. The calm and serenity of the view make it an ideal respite. Borrow a bike from the front desk to explore the **Valley Trail** system or take a kayak or SUP on the glacier-fed lake. Then relax at the hotel spa or enjoy a cocktail and fine meal at **The Den**, Nita's waterfront restaurant, while the sky turns bright pink, rose, and orange.

'Silence' by Delerium featuring Sarah McLachlan

Leave your phone in the locker and put your voice on hold: **Scandinave** is the ultimate in relaxation. The stunning outdoor backdrop only hints at the pleasures that await. Warm pools, multiple hot and dry saunas, and a cold plunge from chilly



to icy will improve circulation, soothe what ails, and slowly put you into a deep trance of well-being. Cap each session with 15 to 20 minutes peacefully reclined in hammocks, daybeds, or Adirondacks, then repeat. Expect to spend two to three hours minimum, and with an on-site café, you could happily stay all day.

Before the first snowflakes fall, go on a bear viewing tour with **Whistler Blackcomb**. A sleek black van will pick you up and whisk you up the same hills that others ski down. The local mountains are home to a robust population of 60 black bears, and the expert guides know just where to look to spot these docile, furry omnivores. After communing with wild animals, step into the **Audain Art Museum**. The architecture presents the works masterfully. Don't miss this tiny but mighty gem.

The Audain Art Museum in Whistler showcases historical works and art by contemporary British Columbia artists.

Food boxes from **Picnic Whistler** are a work of art. Dine al fresco or on your balcony with one of the cheese, fruit, and charcuterie-filled gifts. Or get dressed to impress. **Wild Blue** is the call for a special night out, with gorgeous flavors on the palate and perfect wine pairings. The Miami vibe somehow works, and the service is impeccable. Sip a nightcap (or two) from the creative cocktail program from Zack Lavoie.

VANCOUVER ISLAND

Side B: 'Baby Ran' by 54/40

Vancouver Island looms on the western horizon like an emerald monolith, inviting yet mysterious. **The island's**

vast wilderness makes it home to teeming animal life, as portrayed in the nature documentary series *Island of the Sea Wolves*. Easy roads and a marine highway give it a small-town coastal feel, with one charming village leading to the next, culminating in the cosmopolitan charms of **Victoria**.

Take the car ferry from either **Horseshoe Bay** or **Tsawwassen** for the two-hour crossing of the **Strait of Georgia**. Safely landed in **Nanaimo**, drive north along the east coast of the island, enjoying the views of sandy beaches and offshore islands. For a pit stop, **Rusted Rake Brewing** is an eye-opening find along the way, with refreshing beers in a farm setting and possibly the best brewery sushi ever.

COMOX

'Wave Babies' by Honeymoon Suite

An hour north of Nanaimo, check into **Kingfisher Oceanside Resort and Spa**. The property augments the already excellent views with a picture-perfect garden between the hotel and the sea. Wander the property, sitting at different fire pits, or cozy up on lounge chairs perfectly situated down by the water. Refuel at restaurant **Ocean7** and recharge at **Pacific Mist Spa**. The spa alone is worth the trip; the Hydropath experience is unique to Kingfisher, a guided journey through hot and cold treatments, mixed with icy waterfalls and mud exfoliation. There's no reason to leave, but Comox has a charming fishing marina, and the **Blackfin Pub** is a slice of Canadian goodness. Take a walk down the pier among the boats and seaplanes. An orca might swim by to wave hello.

CAMPBELL RIVER

'Starwalker' by Buffy Sainte-Marie

Drive north to Campbell River to learn more about the local indigenous culture and visit the **Homalco First Nation**. Displaced from their ancestral homeland at the end of the last century, the Homalco are making pathways and plans for a new chapter. Book the **People Water**

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Land tour through **Homalco Wildlife & Cultural Tours** and set out on a five-hour adventure by boat. You can't help but slow down to notice the small moments while traversing the water. You and your expert guides will drop anchor at **Church House** on the mainland to visit the ruins of a former village. Hike around to envision the past before taking an exhilarating boat ride back surrounded by seals, whales, and birds overhead. If you're lucky, you'll pass by **Jimmy Judd Island** as dozens of bald eagles repeatedly dive bomb around the boat into the water for fish. Truly magical.

CUMBERLAND

'Big Yellow Taxi' by Joni Mitchell

Nestled in the forest just a few miles inland, the former coal mining town of Cumberland, B.C., is an inspiring story of civic reinvention and one of the more interesting small towns in Canada. After years of decline, forest conservation led to public access to private lands, which led to trail building — culminating in a mecca for mountain biking. Today, the tiny main street is dotted with hipster shops like **West & Co.** thrift boutique and **Moon Records**, plus **Cumberland Brewing** and popular **Cumberland Village Bakery** (go early, as the bakery sells out). The friendly locals are justifiably proud of their village, so don't miss the chance to get insider recommendations over beers.

COWICHAN BAY

Heading south to **Victoria**, small Cowichan Bay makes a pleasant stop for a night or two. The area was the first settled after Victoria, with Europeans arriving in the 1860s. The historic waterfront boasts an excellent restaurant built in 1868 — **The Masthead** — with charming back patio seating, lovely lunch spot **True Grain**, and a few small hotels led by **Oceanfront Suites**. There are some niche



Grab a sirloin burger with bacon at the informal, waterfront **Blackfin Pub** in Comox.

boutiques, like **Wild Coast Perfumery** and **Beachology**, which point to a thriving vacation season. Whale watching tours go out from the bay, and the calm waters are perfect for kayaking and paddleboarding.

SOUTH ISLAND

'Lay It on the Line' by Triumph

If the Sea to Sky impressed, the **Malahat Skywalk** is the perfect bookend. No gondolas present. It really is a walk, however gentle. The skywalk ascends gradually to

800 feet in a perfect spiral, with views of the **Gulf and San Juan Islands, Olympic Mountains**, and on clear days, much farther. It's a way to get out in nature easily, perfect for multi-generational groups. After taking in the views, kids of all ages will love going down in the enclosed steel spiral slide — it packs a speedy punch near the bottom.

Take the short ferry from **Mill Bay** across to **Brentwood Bay Resort**, with one of the most scenic patios on the island. The extensive sushi menu pairs well with the marine view. After a beautiful lunch, flower lovers from around the world converge on historic **Butchart Gardens** to take in the dazzling, artfully arranged flora.

COURTESY OF BLACKFIN PUB

Discover your favorite “parfum de rose” from the garden’s exquisitely scented collection of 2,500 ramblers, climbers, and hybrids. For a seasonal show, enter the **Japanese Garden** through the torii gate — autumn brings glittering maples bursting with gold and red leaves. Butchart Gardens are still privately owned and represent the vision of Jennie Butchart and her grandson, who, between them, managed the gardens for more than 80 years. It is a spectacle, a curated work of art, and a treat for budding and dedicated botanists.

VICTORIA

Victoria certainly deserves its “more English than England” reputation as it keeps calm and carries on while residents garden ostentatiously and take high tea with regularity. But there is so much more to see and experience. Outdoor activities proliferate in Canada’s mildest climate, the farm-to-fork

and glass offerings are delectable, and quirky pubs abound, so meander and explore the capital of British Columbia.

‘Fantasy’ by Aldo Nova

The Fairmont Empress embodies its name — posh, elegant, a statement. The newly renovated Fairmont Gold experience offers the royal treatment. Gold guests receive a separate check-in floor with concierge, a lounge with balcony overlooking the harbor, DIY cocktail station with canapés, and lots more pampering. Walk through the majestic wooden halls with the glamorous décor that leads to restaurant **Q**. Order a cocktail fit for a queen with the trademark indigo Empress 1908 gin, or anything off the menu under the groupings “Attract” and “Engage.”

HAVN, on the edge of Victoria’s inner harbor, boasts a wellness experience that includes three saunas.

‘Blinding Lights’ by The Weeknd

Sometimes visitors want less fanfare. For a quaint and equally Victorian abode, check into **Abigail’s Hotel**, the platonic ideal of a 1930s Tudor bed and breakfast. Board games and ghost stories in the library are a must, followed by beds so comfortable, they’re heavenly.

Roll out of bed into **HAVN Saunas**, a floating spa and designer’s dream in a refurbished 1943, two-story World War II ship. Opened this June and situated in the Inner Harbour, locals and visitors get nautical views along with wet and dry saunas as well as cold and heated pools. With seaplanes buzzing and ships passing, the day room in the perfectly placed hot tub is at a premium, so get there early and stake your claim.

‘Dreams Tonite’ by Alvvays

Victoria has a bustling but easily traversable downtown. Rent an e-bike from **The Pedaler** and take one of its popular **Eat Drink Pedal** tours to see more of the city while filling your tummy with yummy treats. Mix and match this foodie trail: **Boomtown’s** excellent burritos, **Fernwood Pizza** for pies, **Zambri’s** for fine dining, and **Pendray Inn and Tea House** for high tea. Literary lovers should step into **Russell Books** or **Munro’s** to bring home a Canadian tome. Then it’s time to hurl some weaponry.

Axe and Grind is one of the best and latest places to engage in the suddenly popular sport of axe throwing. And knife throwing. And shovel throwing. Ragnar will show you all the tricks in true Viking style, underhanded, two-handed, or backward. He’s a pro.

‘Sunglasses at Night’ by Corey Hart

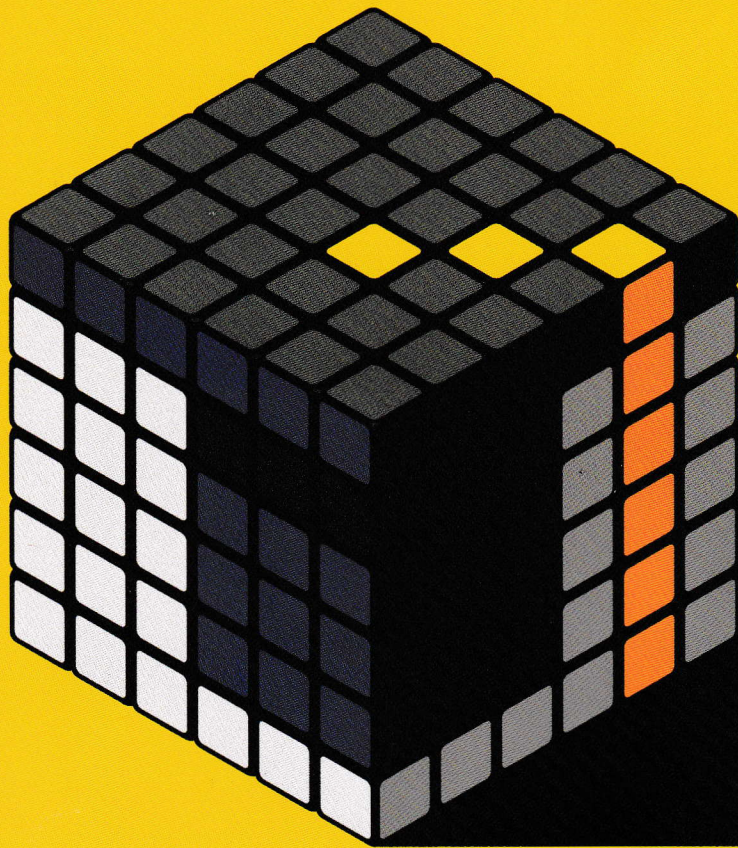
End this amazing adventure with the **Black Ball Ferry Line**, on the **M.V. Coho** bound for Port Angeles. After passing through customs in the parking lot, pop that Canadian mixed tape in one more time, and hit repeat. **3**



seattle

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THE PUZZLE OF COLLEGE ADMISSIONS *ADVISERS SPILL ALL*



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NATALIE COMPAGNO
2143 N. NORTHLAKE WAY APT 37
SEATTLE WA 98103-8100

5-DIGIT 98103

