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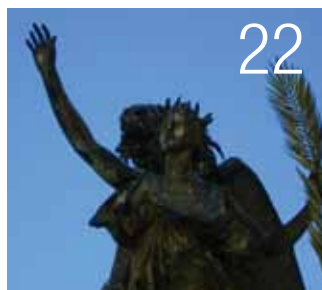
Enjoy a cool Yule at Germany's Christmas markets; sail to Corfu and Croatia on Star Clippers' five-masted Princess Clipper; indulge in the heavenly hamman ritual at exclusive Royal Palms Marrakesh's Clarins Spa; rent tree-house digs at the Chewton Glen country house hotel in the English countryside. By John Fitzgerald

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On the Cover

Blissful Bora Bora rates
as one of the editor's
top destinations.

Photo © Grégoire Le Bacon.



reductive vancouver

by Mark Sissons

Luxury-minded travellers head to Vancouver for its superb setting, eclectic restaurants and fine hotels. The shopping is awesome, too.

Among popular sobriquets like “Canada’s playground on the Pacific” and “Lotus Land,” Vancouver has been dubbed the Marilyn Monroe of North American cities – effortlessly seducing visitors with its gorgeous setting, dynamic multicultural mix and temperate climate.

Consistently ranked one of the world’s most liveable cities, Vancouver is also an increasingly popular destination for sophisticated travellers. Here on the West coast, a holiday can be as glamorous and decadent or as low key and laid back as you like. Factor in a vibrant culinary culture packed with award-winning, five-star restaurants, endless year-round urban outdoor recreational options, plenty of high-end shopping and a growing selection of luxury accommodations, and it’s easy to see why “Terminal City” receives more than 8.5 million visitors every year.

Vancouver’s luxury lodging scene has exploded over the past decade, and several of the top international brands now have outposts in the city. From sleek and chic to refined and traditional, a few among them stand out for their thoughtful attention to detail, personable staff and superior accommodations.

Opulence meets casual at the Fairmont Pacific Rim hotel. Offering great views over Coal Harbour toward the North Shore Mountains, this business-zone hotel feels more like a posh resort with its rooftop pool, private cabanas and shiny lobby piano bar. Situated adjacent to Vancouver’s sprawling, green-roofed Convention Centre, the “Pac Rim” quickly became one of Vancouver’s “see and be seen” hotspots after it opened amid the 2010 Winter Olympics fanfare. On a typical weekend, valets are busy parking Ferraris and Lamborghinis, while beautiful couples share bites of succulent sushi at the lobby lounge’s RawBar, recently designated Vancouver’s first 100 percent Ocean Wise sushi destination by the Vancouver Aquarium’s sustainable seafood programme.

Dominating Vancouver’s skyline, the Shangri-La Vancouver occupies part of British Columbia’s tallest building, a few blocks south of Coal Harbour. The Hong Kong-based luxury brand’s first foray into North America caters to successful business travellers due to its central location. Guestrooms feature rich chocolate-and-gold decor, thick carpeting and marble bathrooms. The hotel’s Chi spa offers luxury treatment suites, while its popular fine-dining restaurant, Market by Jean George, lays out a regionally inspired menu designed by celebrated chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

The Wedgewood Hotel & Spa is also an attractive choice. A Relais & Châteaux property, located a block from Robson Street’s shopping strip and kitty-corner to the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Wedgewood offers the intimate ambience and impeccable service of a classic European hotel. That feeling extends to its signature Bacchus restaurant, a darkly lit, romantic hideaway where richly upholstered furniture, warm,

dark cherry wood, and large oil paintings greet diners. Renowned for its extensive wine list, Bacchus serves up modern French cuisine that features ingredients indigenous to the West Coast.

With a compact, walkable downtown core not far from ski resorts, beaches and lush rainforests, Vancouver could be easily mistaken for an upscale wilderness resort masquerading as a city. Fresh-air fun is never far away here, with residents religiously taking to the city’s parks, pathways and beaches year-round to run, cycle, rollerblade and paddle. It’s no coincidence that iconic Canadian activewear brands Lululemon Athletica and Arcteryx are both headquartered in Vancouver. Stretchy yoga pants and Gore-tex jackets are the unofficial uniforms in this hyper-health conscious town, where thin is always in and many residents have recalibrated the work-life balance in favour of the latter.

A great place to get your stay off to an aerobic start is 400-hectare Stanley Park, the historic 120-year-old wooded peninsula, filled with duck ponds and forested trails, dominating the northwestern edge of downtown. One of the world’s great urban parks, this haven of bucolic tranquillity is home to lush gardens, pristine beaches, Canada’s largest aquarium and over half a million cedar, fir and hemlock trees.

Want a serious workout? Lace up your trainers and hit the 8.8 km Stanley Park seawall, which forms part of a continuous 22 km paved oceanside pathway from Canada Place to Kitsilano Beach. Further along the shoreline are the great swathes of sand at Jericho Beach and Spanish Banks, where you can rent kayaks, windsurfers and stand up paddleboards for an ocean adventure in English Bay within view of the city centre.

For even greater heart-pounding thrills, head to Vancouver’s North Shore mountains – Grouse, Cypress and Seymour – where, depending on the season, you can hike amid old-growth rainforests or ski, board or snowshoe at a 2010 Winter Olympics venue high above the twinkling lights of the city. You can even test your nerves on the historic Capilano Suspension Bridge’s new Cliffwalk, featuring a series of vertigo-inducing suspended walkways jutting out from the granite cliff face high above the Capilano River. In some sections, panes of ultra-strong glass are all that separate you from the canyon far below.

Join the Big Bus hop-on-hop-off city tour, which includes major attractions such as the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Chinese Garden, the Gastown Steam Clock, Granville Island and the Vancouver Art Gallery. Prefer to pedal? Cycle City Tours offers guided bike rides around Stanley Park, Chinatown, Gastown and Granville Island. On a Vancouver Foodie Tour of Granville Market or the city’s burgeoning food-truck scene, you can eat gourmet hot dogs that will leave you drooling for more, fresh seafood plucked from the Pacific Ocean, and sweet and



Fairmont Pacific Rim



Shangri-La



Bacchus in the Wedgewood Hotel & Spa

savory chocolate chili cookies, among many other tantalizing treats.

To enjoy a panoramic sense of the city, book a scenic tour with Harbour Air. Board a legendary de Havilland in Coal Harbour and soar over Burrard Inlet and Lions Gate Bridge, taking in the aerial views of Vancouver's glittering downtown. Celebrated local author and artist Douglas Coupland dubbed Vancouver "the City of Glass" for its dominant steel-and-glass architectural aesthetic.

Holt Renfrew in the Pacific Centre is perennially tops on many a monied visitor's list. New concept store Secret Location features an exquisitely curated collection of international designers and an attentive sales force. Alberni Street (aka Vancouver's "luxury row") is the place to go for Chanel, Tiffany, Louis Vuitton, Tory Burch and Burberry. And the gritty, yet trendy, cobbled streets of Gastown, Vancouver's birthplace, are home to a growing array of stylish, independent boutiques and up-and-trending designers. Here, you can browse hipster clothing stores such as the Block and Obakki, and then step inside the hallowed headquarters of Canada's master of creative footwear, John Fluevog.

Dining out in Vancouver is an exercise in choice management; there are just too many mouthwatering menus to be sampled. Famous for its delicious blending of Pacific Northwest and Asian cuisines, the city that introduced to the world the 100 Mile Diet (penned by local authors J.B. MacKinnon and Alisa Smith) justifiably prides itself on farm-to-table freshness. Here, the words organic, free-range and wild (as in wild sockeye salmon) appear on many a creative menu.

In a town that's serious about sensational seafood, Yaletown's elegant Blue Water Café is a standout for signature dishes like Dungeness crab, west-coast sablefish



Blue Water Café



The Bacchus bar



Raw/Bar at the Fairmont Pacific Rim



Wine cellar at the Blue Water Café

and white sturgeon. Another home-run hitter is Miku Waterfront, situated along Burrard Inlet next to Canada Place, where chef Matsuoka has taken the sushi experience to the next level by using his famous flame-seared technique with signature sauces.

At his eponymous fine-dining restaurant in the stately Georgia Hotel, award-winning chef David Hawksworth serves up a contemporary spin on classic Canadian cuisine with mains like yarrow-meadows duck breast, slow-cooked wild salmon and black olive-crusted halibut, while Asian culinary superstars like chef Angus An at Kitsilano's Thai sensation, Maenam, and Vikrim Vij, chef and co-owner of the Indian cuisine restaurants Vij's and Rangoli, are continually raising the Asian fusion bar.

And the best part of all this decadent noshing? No matter how much you overindulge, you'll likely still be up at dawn, ready to be seduced all over again by that irresistible dame with the curious name of Vancouver.

IF YOU GO

SMOOTH LANDINGS: First impressions count for a lot among seasoned travellers, and a city's airport often sets the tone for what's to come – think chaotic LAX or intimidating JFK. Luckily for Vancouver, YVR's international arrivals terminal is literally a breath of fresh cedar and sea breeze-scented air. Voted North America's top airport for the past five years, YVR offers an immersive west coast experience that includes an aquarium and a Green Wall featuring nearly 30,000 individual plants. It's also home to a major collection of Northwest Coast native art, including Bill Reid's iconic sculpture, Spirit of Haida Gwaii: The Jade Canoe. And getting downtown is a breeze: the Canada Line Skytrain departs YVR every 12 minutes for most of the day, and takes 25 minutes to reach downtown Vancouver's Waterfront Station. Taxis to downtown hotels run around \$35.

GO-TO GUIDES: Tourism Vancouver (tourismvancouver.com) is a great place to start planning your stay. It features up-to-date information on Vancouver hotels, attractions, things to do and more. Check out its Two Days in Vancouver guide, a packed, 48-hour itinerary highlighting some of the city's best sights, landmarks and neighbourhoods. For discretionary diners, Urban Spoon (urbanspoon.com) and Dine Here (dinehere.ca) feature current Vancouver restaurant listings and reviews from critics, food blogs and fellow diners. The city's urban weekly newspaper, the Georgia Straight (straight.com) also has entertainment and nightlife listings and reviews, while Vancouver Magazine (vanmag.com) offers insider takes on the best restaurants, shopping and entertainment in town.



Exploring one of Vancouver's many galleries



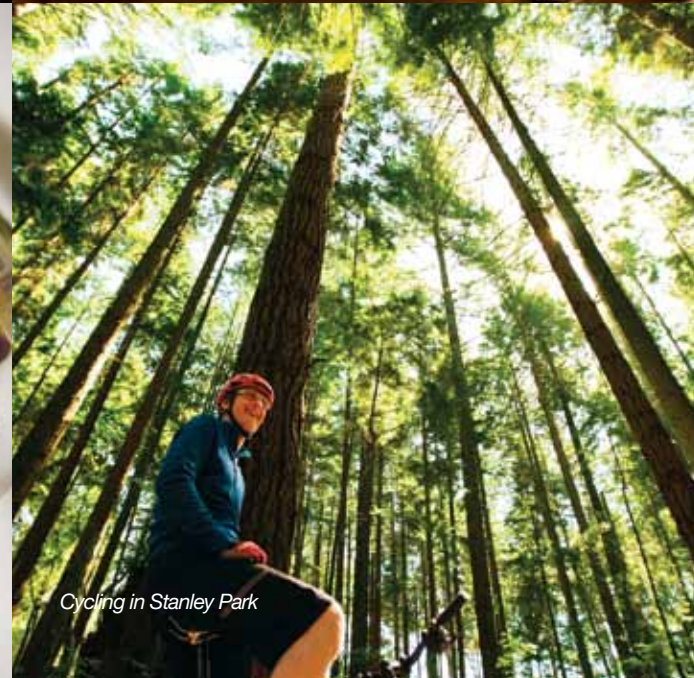
The bar at Shangri-La



Maenam Thai Restaurant



Bacchus in the Wedgewood Hotel & Spa



Cycling in Stanley Park