

Very Cool Vancouver



By Ray Collins

Why Vancouver? We had never been anywhere near there, heard good things—and decided it was more important to see than another European city—which was becoming our default.

Within minutes after landing, and for the duration of our trip, we were reminded that Canadians are generally friendlier, softer, and more willing to engage than Americans. Hate to say it, but there's both more sophistication and approachability north of the border.

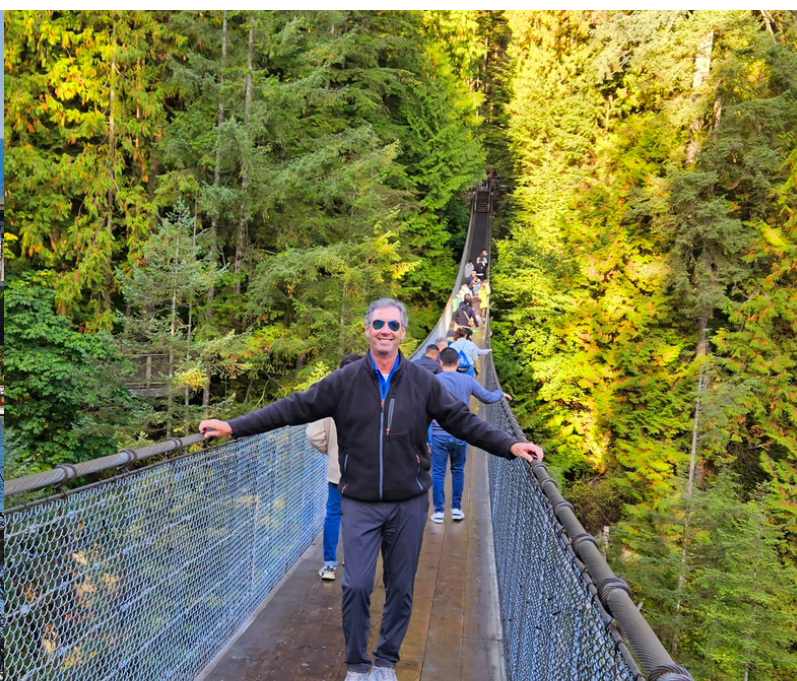
Nice airport, seamless immigration process--and easy access to a subway which took us nearly to our hotel, the Residence Inn on Hornby Street. We didn't know what we'd see from our ninth-story suite when daylight broke: We were fascinated to see the water was just a few blocks away in each direction.

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We began at an interesting exhibit called "FlyOver Canada." It's an 8-minute slick video that gives viewers the sensation they are strapped to a drone camera as it crosses Canada's greatest hits. Fascinating, we gripped the armrests on our seats and double-checked the seatbelts as we "flew" over mountain tops and then dipped down over the shoulder of farmers in the field-- across the country. My only suggestion--and it's a small point--would be to superimpose the name of each region we were seeing. There's no narration, just appropriate music that swells at all the right moments. (\$21/FlyOverCanada.com)

From there we took a water taxi across the False Creek Inlet. (\$4 each way.) The City of Sarasota has repeatedly spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to study the viability of water taxis, and each time concluded they wouldn't be in high demand. Probably true.

Granville Island is a charming shopping and eating district just south of downtown. We got a tip from a native to check out The Sandbar Seafood Restaurant for lunch. Good call. Waterfront views, fresh seafood, and a classy atmosphere. Erin had crab legs and I had salmon. Both were excellent.



While on the island, we walked over to a storefront called Vancouver Water Adventures where we suited up for a 3-hour boat tour. Ryan Pantaleo was a young personable captain who was interesting, professional, and fun. It was called the Granite Falls Zodiac Tour, and we saw a LOT of sights on land and the water. They gave us a wetsuit, which was more helpful for warmth than the occasional mist that came on our boat. (\$103 per ticket/VancouverWaterAdventures.com.) Ryan asked us to introduce ourselves before the ride—and the ten of us sounded more like a United Nations roll call. Our fellow passengers were from all over the world. We have a new friend from Switzerland!

The next day was even more ambitious than our first: We took the SeaBus across the Burrard Inlet to North Vancouver. Thousands of commuters use this ferry service each business day to come downtown for work. After the 12-minute ride, we used our same ticket to take a public bus to one of the top tourist destinations in the region.

The Capilano Suspension Bridge is one of the longest in the world—and it's not for everybody. I've talked to people who were frightened of crossing the wobbly pedestrian bridge. It's nearly 500 feet long and 229 feet above the Capilano River. I didn't mind it, but Erin did. (\$105/CapBridge.com)

We got back on the public bus and went to the base of Grouse (pronounced "gross") Mountain, also known as the peak of Vancouver. After a 10-minute "Skyride" (tram ride), we then took a 10-minute chairlift to the top. I tried not to look down during that ride, but Erin didn't mind the long drop. It was 10 degrees chillier at the mountaintop than at the base. Beautiful views of Vancouver. (\$75/GrouseMountain.com)

Our final event of the day was our favorite of the entire trip: We hired a private tour guide from Toonie Tours and took a 3-hour bike tour of Vancouver. Andrew McManaman was a young guy from Ottawa who—like our boat captain the day before—was fun, personable, and professional. Vancouver is an easy city in which to bike—thanks to the 1000-acre Stanley Park along the waterfront. It is bigger—and maybe even prettier—than New York's Central Park which is 842 acres. They have a variety of biking and walking tours from which to choose. (ToonieTours.ca)

We stopped at a grocery store near our hotel and Erin prepared a nice dinner in our room's full kitchen. Due to the time change and the non-stop activities, we were asleep early each night.

Bottom line—loved Vancouver. Nice people, beautiful city, and very user-friendly.

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