

Canada: Vancouver Island & the Gulf Islands

Bike Vacation Only

Island hop along Canada's west coast by bicycle and ferry on this new-for-2020 tour. Sea life from sand dollars to whales may spring into view as your gaze sweeps over coastal waters, and get a closer view on a guided sea kayaking excursion. By land, rides on country roads and rail trails lead to the spectacular Butchart Gardens and more. You'll also meet the locals in artists' studios and a family-owned orchard, and savor the farm-to-table freshness of Gulf Island cuisine. Overnights in fine boutique hotels complement your thrilling days of cycling.

Cultural Highlights

Island hop along Canada's west coast, admiring land and sea views by bicycle and ferry.

Go sea kayaking along the Gulf Islands on an included excursion.

Pop in on artists at work in studios around the town of Ganges.

Cycle popular bike trails on Vancouver Island.

Enjoy lunch and a tasting at the family-owned Sea Cider Farm & Ciderhouse.

Visit Victoria's spectacular Butchart Gardens—your admission is included.

Savor authentic farm-to-fork West Coast cuisine.

Relax in comfort each night in 3-, 4-, and 5-star hotels.

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills on the Gulf Islands and is ideal for beginning and experienced cyclists. Our VBT support shuttle is always available for those who would like assistance with the hills.

Tour Duration: 6 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 13 - 35

Average Cycling Time: 00:30 - 04:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 64°/46°, Jun 70°/50°, Jul 75°/54°, Aug 74°/54°, Sep 69°/52°, Oct 58°/46°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 1, Jun 0.8, Jul 0.5, Aug 0.9, Sep 1.1, Oct 2.0

DAY 1: Sidney / VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Ferry to Salt Spring Island

Meet your VBT trip leaders and the rest of the group at the Sidney Pier Hotel and Spa in Sidney, B.C., at 12:00 p.m. (Sidney Pier Hotel and Spa, 9805 Seaport Pl, Sidney, BC V8L 4X3, telephone +1 250-655-9445). Your trip leaders will be wearing VBT staff garments. Please buy lunch on your own before this meeting and come dressed for bicycling.

If your arrival at the Sidney Pier Hotel and Spa is scheduled later than 12:00 p.m. or if you are delayed, you must take a taxi at your own expense (approximately \$230 CAD plus approximately \$60 CAD for the ferry crossing for the taxi and two passengers) to the Swartz Bay ferry terminal. From here, take the ferry to Salt Spring Island's Fulford Harbour (this 35-minute ferry crossing cannot be reserved in advance), then taxi another 15 km (9.3 miles) to Ganges and The Harbour House Hotel (121 Upper Ganges Rd, Salt Spring Island, BC V8K 2S2, telephone +1 250-537-4700). Please consult the BC Ferries schedules here: <https://www.bcferries.com/schedules/southern/sssb-current.php>

Please contact Sidney Pier Hotel and Spa before 12:00 p.m. to advise of any travel delays or changes, and the staff will pass your message on to your VBT trip leaders.

Later, gather with the group for a welcome cocktail reception on the patio (weather permitting), followed by a farm-to-fork dinner at the hotel.

Hotel: Harbour House Hotel

Meals: Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 7 – 27 km (4 - 16 miles)

Afternoon

Sidney to ferry Warm Up: 7 km (4 miles) with a 35-minute ferry crossing

Fulford Harbour to Harbour House Warm Up: 20 km (12 miles)

What to Expect: Enjoy an easy ride from Sidney to the ferry terminal (7 km / 4 miles). After your ferry crossing, the ride follows a gently rolling route to Ganges (20 km / 12 miles).

DAY 2: Cycle to Fernwood Point / Explore Ganges

After breakfast, you'll cycle out from Ganges past Saint Mary Lake to Fernwood Point, one of the finest beaches on the island. Here, Government Wharf stretches far into the water. To one side of the wharf, off the sand bar, you'll find host of marine life, including kelp crabs, sea stars, clams, and more. In the tidal pools to the other side of the wharf, you might see sea anemones, hermit crabs, sand dollars, and other species. While here, you might pause at the café for a warm beverage and a Nanaimo Bar, a uniquely British Columbian pastry.

Salt Spring Island is a magnet for artists and musicians, and as your ride continues northward, you'll pass several studios where artists are hard at work in various media. You might consider stopping along the way to admire their skills.

Your loop ride culminates back in Ganges, where many fishermen make their home. A "must-see" here is the famous, marine-themed Landmark Mural painted on a retired buoy. As you gaze out over the waters surrounding Salt Spring Island, you might see orcas cruising around, and harbor seals are always present. Sea lions are occasional visitors, too.

Later, at your hotel, enjoy an aperitif on the patio before you head out for dinner on your own in Ganges.

Hotel: Harbour House Hotel

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 27 km (17 miles)

Morning

Ganges to Fernwood Point Loop: 27 km (17 miles)

What to Expect: Salt Spring Island is a great bicycling destination, but use caution on the island's main paved routes, which are in varying states of repair, with narrow or non-existent shoulders, loose gravel and bumpy patches, hills, blind corners, and some fast, impatient drivers. Our ride will offer more quiet secondary roads than main roads, but some stretches on the busier, winding, and sometimes hilly main roads are necessary.

DAY 3: Ferry to Pender Island / Sea Kayaking

Cycle from your hotel in Ganges to Long Harbour (5.3 km/3.3 miles), where you'll board a ferry to Pender Island, renowned for its beautiful parks and scenic vistas. Actually two islands connected by a one-lane bridge, Pender Island is a cyclist's delight with pasturelands, forest-clad hills, and several beaches. Here, you'll spin along winding roads and gentle rolling hills to Port Browning, where you'll enjoy lunch featuring tasty local specialties.

Mid-afternoon, embark on your sea kayaking adventure. Led by a skilled guide, you'll paddle through a protected harbor, keeping your eyes peeled for the rich marine life that thrives here.

Afterward, if time permits, you may cycle to Sea Star Vineyards, Pender Island's only winery—an ocean-facing vineyard that specializes in crafting wines from organically grown grapes. If you wish, you may enjoy a tasting on your own here.

Or return to the hotel, where you will have time at leisure. If you are interested in an appointment at Susurrus, the hotel spa, advance booking is highly recommended. Call 250-629-2113 or 250-629-2100 directly to reserve.

Please note: Due to seasonal ferry schedules between Salt Spring and Pender Islands, if you are traveling in the spring or fall, your sea kayaking adventure will occur during the morning, followed by lunch in Ganges. In the afternoon, you'll cycle from Ganges to Long Harbour, where you'll board the ferry to Pender Island and transfer to your hotel. If time allows, you may cycle to Sea Star Vineyards for a tasting on your own.

Hotel: Poets Cove Resort

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 5 - 30 km (3 - 18 miles)

Morning

Ganges to Long Harbour ferry: 5 km (3 miles)

Otter Bay to Port Browning: 6 km (4 miles)

Afternoon

Port Browning to Sea Star to Poets Cove Loop: 19.5 km (12 miles)

Port Browning to Brooks Point Regional Park and Poets Cove: 18 km (11 miles)

What to Expect: There is a paved shoulder from Ganges to Long Harbour ferry terminal on Salt Spring Island, and paved road from Otter Bay ferry terminal to Port Browning on Pender Island. The Pender Island route is winding with some gentle rolling hills and a maximum speed limit of 30 mph (50 km/hr).

The optional ride from Port Browning to Sea Star Vineyards ascends on a quiet secondary road and descends back, with some rolling hills, into Port Browning. The ride from Port Browning to Poets Cove Resort is along a paved, winding road with gently rolling hills. There is one steep and winding uphill for 0.6 km (0.3 miles) after leaving the marina in Port Browning. VBT highly recommends that you dismount your bicycle and walk up this hill.

DAY 4: Ferry to Vancouver Island / Cycle to Oak Bay Beach

This morning, you'll say goodbye to your hosts at Poets Cove Resort and board the ferry to Swartz Bay on Vancouver Island, renowned for its blend of cosmopolitan cities and breathtaking wilderness, a mild climate, and long history. Linking the Swartz Bay ferry terminal, where you will alight, with the capital of British Columbia, Victoria, is the Lochside Trail. Enjoy a tranquil spin along this rail trail to Sea Cider Farm & Ciderhouse. This family-owned, farm-based cidery produces award-winning, traditionally fermented ciders from organically grown heritage apples. Enjoy a tasting and copious lunch in this peaceful setting.

Afterward, follow Lochside Trail to the Galloping Goose Trail, a more rural route designed to link the country to the city and people to nature. As you spin along this trail, admire fields of golden corn and cathedral canopies of green leaves, including Garry Oaks—British Columbia's only native oak. You might pause along the way for a Nainamo Bar, a three-layered, no-bake treat named for a city on Vancouver Island. Many varieties exist for you to savor.

On arrival at your boutique hotel, settle into your room and perhaps relax in its heated seaside mineral pools (16 years of age minimum). If you would like an appointment at the spa, advance booking is highly recommended; call 250-940-0326 or email spa@oakbaybeachhotel.com to reserve.

Tonight's dinner is on your own at one of the hotel's dining venues or at the nearby marina.

Hotel: Oak Bay Beach Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 15 - 42 km (10 - 27 miles)

Morning

Swartz Bay to Sea Cider: 15 km (10 miles)

Afternoon

Sea Cider to Oak Bay Beach: 28 km (17 miles)

What to Expect: Enjoy easy rides today on quiet bike paths or secondary roads. The bike path/trail varies between paved and packed gravel surfaces. The morning ride gently ascends from the ferry terminal to Sea Cider Farm & Ciderhouse. The afternoon ride has some gentle hills and mostly descends to Oak Bay.

DAY 5: Victoria / Butchart Gardens / Celebration Dinner

After breakfast, cycle to the city of Victoria, capital of British Columbia, blending a First Nations heritage with influences of British colonialism. Continue riding around the harbor to Butchart Gardens, a magnificent oasis in the heart of the city and your destination for the day. Built atop a former limestone quarry over a century ago, this landscaping gem was the vision of Jennie Butchart, who dreamed of transforming the site into a grand sunken garden. Over time, the park was expanded with Japanese, Italian, and rose gardens and a children's pavilion, and it is now also a venue for outdoor concerts and other events. Most recently, the cultural heritage of the Indigenous People was recognized with the addition of two totem poles. Today, Butchart Gardens is a city treasure and a National Historic Site of Canada. Enjoy time to explore this tranquil haven and finish your day with a rewarding reel back to the hotel.

You'll have time to relax at the hotel this afternoon before gathering with your fellow travelers for a celebration dinner at the hotel featuring local favorites such as Dungeness crab bisque, Pacific chowder, and wild Pacific ling cod.

Hotel: Oak Bay Beach Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 32 – 64 km (20 – 40 miles)

Morning

Oak Bay Beach via Victoria to Butchart Gardens: 32 km (20 miles)

Afternoon

Butchart Gardens to Oak Bay Beach: 32 km (20 miles)

What to Expect: Ride from your hotel on paved roads to Victoria Harbour. There, you'll join the Galloping Goose Trail and cycle north toward Brentwood Bay and Butchart Gardens.

The afternoon's return ride follows the the Lochside Regional Trail back to the hotel. The ride is mostly flat with one hill (0.5 km) out of the gardens and a second hill (1 km) you enter the village of Brentwood Bay. There is another ascent as you join the Lochside Regional Trail and a small hill before your descent to the hotel.

DAY 6: Transfer to Victoria / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

After breakfast, transfer to Victoria International Airport at 8:45 a.m., arriving by 10:00 a.m.

Important: Flight departures from Victoria International Airport (YYJ) prior to 12:00 p.m. are not recommended. If you depart earlier, you must make transfer arrangements from the last hotel at your own expense. Taxi cost to the Victoria airport is approximately \$115 CAD for a private sedan for one to two passengers and luggage (travel time approximately 45 minutes).

Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Harbour House Hotel (Days: 1,2)

Admire stunning views over the Salish Sea from this sleek hotel in the heart of Salt Spring Island. Located at the head of Ganges harbor, steps away from Ganges village, the Harbour House Hotel offers a relaxed and airy ambiance, with furnished patios, a full-service restaurant featuring farm-to-table cuisine, and newly renovated rooms. Air conditioning and free WiFi are available throughout the hotel.

Oak Bay Beach Hotel (Days: 4,5)

The 5-star, oceanfront Oak Bay Beach Hotel is a landmark property that consistently ranks among the

best luxury hotels in Canada. Built in the style of an English manor house, it blends Old World charm with modern amenities, including three dining options, heated seaside mineral pools, and Victoria's only oceanfront spa. The hotel overlooks the Juan de Fuca Strait and the snow-capped Mount Baker, and is ideally located for taking the best advantage of Victoria, from Oak Bay Village to the Inner Harbour, as well as easy access to activities such as whale watching, kayaking, beachcombing—and, of course, cycling. Your spacious and elegantly decorated room has floor-to-ceiling windows and modern in-suite amenities. Enjoy air conditioning and free WiFi throughout.

Poets Cove Resort & Spa (Day: 3)

An idyllic escape on the shores of Bedwell Harbour, this Pender Island resort is the perfect place to relax and rejuvenate after an exciting day of cycling. While here, you may take advantage of the marina, the outdoor pool, and three onsite dining options that showcase the best of Gulf Islands cuisine, served up with spectacular views. The onsite Susurrus Spa offers a range of treatments in a tranquil setting (advance reservations recommended). The hotel is not air conditioned, but free WiFi is available throughout.