

British Columbia: Vancouver Island, Victoria & the Saanich Peninsula

Bike Vacation Only

You'll ride breathtaking routes and old railway lines into coastal forests that spill into the sea. Experience bike-friendly Victoria, nestled on serene waters surrounding the Saanich Peninsula. Follow the historic Galloping Goose trail past bucolic pastures, fertile farms, and a stunning canyon. Along the way, peruse the magnificent Butchart Gardens, take refreshing dips in pure crystalline lakes, and learn about the First Nations Salish people. Pace yourself. You'll want to savor every moment of this Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation.

Cultural Highlights

Get a true feel for Canada as you ride from world-class, cosmopolitan Victoria into a pristine natural world

Follow the breathtakingly scenic Pacific Marine Circle Route from Victoria to Sooke

Learn about the First Nations Salish people through the artwork you'll see in hotels and galleries

Experience the history, architecture, and British heritage of Victoria, British Columbia's splendid capital city

Experience Vancouver Island's raw rainforest beauty, stunning rocky coast, distinctive cuisine, and diverse culture and history

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills and is ideal for beginner and experienced cyclists. Rides are on relatively flat paved roads and bike lanes within the city and out into the suburbs of Victoria and into the countryside and along the coast, in places on extremely hard packed gravel. Please verify your bike selection for this tour as it is not always possible to change bikes once you arrive on tour. Travel with your friends and family—we can accommodate multiple guests on this self-guided vacation. Our 24/7 support system is available if needed.

Tour Duration: 5 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 15 - 32

Average Cycling Time: 01:00 - 03:30

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: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Victoria loop ride

We suggest arriving in Victoria (or Vancouver) at least one day prior to the tour start date as your tour begins at 1:00 p.m. Make your own way to Victoria, where you begin your Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation. Sheltered from the ocean, the British Columbian capital boasts a mild climate, lush vegetation, an endless array of cultural offerings, and a profusion of bicycles. Soon after your arrival, you will meet with your VBT local host to review your Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation.

Please be dressed and ready for cycling. Your local host will be carrying a VBT sign.

The welcome orientation with your VBT local host includes:

- An overview of the itinerary
- Bike fitting and equipment familiarization
- Review of the Ride with GPS navigation app
- Important contact information in case you need to reach your VBT local host
- Safety briefing
- Local suggestions (restaurants, things to do, etc.)

Get to know your bicycle—and ease into the relaxing, bicycle-friendly pace of Vancouver Island—on a fairly short ride past scenic points and sweeping bays that leaves time to explore Victoria later in the afternoon. You'll set out directly from your hotel, riding past Victoria's lovely Inner Harbor. Follow the shoreline, admiring views of the Trial Islands en route to James Bay and Ogden Point Breakwater. You may leave the saddle if you'd like to walk out to the lovely white lighthouses at the end of the breakwater's walkway. On the south coast, Dallas Road and Beacon Hill Park—home to spontaneous cricket matches—lead to picturesque Clover Point and the links of the Victoria Golf Club. Pause at Oak Bay or Willows Beach, then round out your loop with reels past Cadboro Bay and Mt. Douglas Park before joining the Lochside trail past Swan Lake and its marshy lowlands. Lochside connects you to the Galloping Goose bike path, your route back into Victoria.

This evening, enjoy the many gardens, parks and impressive Parliament buildings of the North America's most English city. Refer to your VBT Victoria City Information for dinner recommendations. Reservations are recommended if dining at your hotel, inquire upon check-in.

Hotel: Hotel Grand Pacific

Alternate Hotels: September 20th date only. The Magnolia Hotel & Spa

Today's Ride:

Victoria Seaside to Lochside loop: 38.9 km (24.1 miles)

What to Expect: Today's loop ride leaves city streets behind for suburban roads and coastal communities, leading to the eastern reaches of Victoria. The majority of the ride follows paved streets and roads. The Lochside and Galloping Goose bicycle paths lead back into the city. This is a popular bike route, so motorists are used to cyclists.

DAY 2: Saanich Peninsula loop (Stay Put Day)

During this Stay Put Day, explore laid-back Victoria as you wish. Head over to the Royal BC Museum to get a look at its gigantic woolly mammoth exhibit, see the mask gallery of the First Peoples exhibit, and stroll through a replica of an old colonial street. Or visit the Craigdarroch Castle to see how the upper-class lived during the Victorian era.

If you prefer to spend the day in the saddle, head north on the island's Saanich Peninsula to the famed Butchart Gardens, a National Historic Site of Canada (ticket can be purchased online or on site). These lush and vibrant gardens spread across 55 acres and feature 900 plant varieties and 26 greenhouses. To get there, you cycle along the Selkirk Water to the Selkirk Trestle on the Galloping Goose trail, retracing yesterday's ride, then connect to another bike route that leads you up the west side of the peninsula. Take your time exploring this botanical and cultural treasure of Vancouver Island. Stroll the Sunken Garden, Japanese Garden, Italian Garden, and more. This is the ideal spot for lunch, or you might continue to Brentwood Bay.

After, ride over to the island's east side to join the Lochside trail once again. This old rail bed once belonged to the Canadian Northern Pacific Railway, whose General Electric gas car transported up to 74 passengers between Victoria and a dock at Patricia Bay in the early 20th century. Today, it offers a picturesque cycling sojourn past weathered barns, fertile fields, and horse paddocks. During this tranquil reel, pass the sweeping expanse of Cordova Bay, Mt. Douglas Park and its 700-foot summit, and the marshy wetlands of Blenkinsop Lake—traversed by the Blenkinsop Trestle. This rural pathway is also frequented by horseback riders, so take care not to spook them! Bird lovers take note: the waters here are a haven for ducks and other waterfowl, wading marsh birds, hunting raptors in the trees, and others. The bike path loops you back to the Galloping Goose trail and your initial route.

Reservations recommended if dining at your hotel.

Hotel: Hotel Grand Pacific

Alternate Hotels: September 20th date only. The Magnolia Hotel & Spa

Included Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choices:

Victoria to Butchart Gardens loop: 55.6 km (34.5 miles)

What to Expect: Departing Victoria, you ride a mixture of bike lane, bike path, and city streets along Victoria's inner waterway, the Selkirk Water. Crossing the Trestle Bridge, continue on mixed purpose, fairly flat roads into the countryside to the town of Brentwood Bay and drop down to Butchart Gardens at around 21 km (12.6 miles). Make a short climb on roads back out of the gardens, then continue along the shore of Brentwood Bay and cross to the east side of the peninsula to join the Lochside Trail, mainly on dedicated bike path. Follow this flat to somewhat rolling route; after Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, descend back to the suburban and city streets to your hotel.

Leaving Victoria to Butchart Gardens out: 21.3 km (13 miles)

Leaving Butchart Gardens back: 21.4 km (13.5 miles)

Victoria to Butchart Gardens out-and-back: total 42.7 km (26.5 miles)

What to Expect: If you prefer a shorter ride in order to spend more time in the Butchart Gardens, this ride takes you from your hotel and back on the same route (just over 12 miles each way). Departing Victoria, you ride a mixture of bike lane, bike path, and city streets along Victoria's inner waterway, the Selkirk Water. Crossing the Trestle Bridge, continue on mixed purpose, fairly flat roads into the countryside to the town of Brentwood Bay and drop down to Butchart Gardens at around 21 km (12.6 miles). Make a short climb on roads back out of the gardens, and return the way you came to Victoria.

DAY 3: Victoria to Sooke

Depart Victoria for Sooke this morning on the Galloping Goose Rail Trail. Named for the gas-powered freight cars that served the communities of southern Vancouver Island during World War I, it is affectionately known as "the Goose." Today's thrilling ride leads you into some of the region's most scenic corners, from hidden lakes and canyons to rocky outcrops straddled by twisted Garry oak and towering Douglas fir.

You begin your ride in Victoria's urban environment, softened by lush poplars, willows, and maples. After crossing several trestles and bridges, you make your way into the island's Western Communities. You ride over the Colwood Delta, silted up by glacial deposits some 13,000 years ago. Pasture land, wetlands, and fern-cloaked rock point you to the National Historic Sites of Fort Rodd Hill and Fisgard Lighthouse. Stop here to learn about the island's coastal defense and marine navigation.

Ride next through one of Vancouver Island's first pioneering communities: Metchosin. This bucolic region of rural farms, gentle hills, and softly flowing creeks hosted one of Western Canada's first public schools. Farther on, ride into a wilder and greener region of red cedar and skunk cabbage swamp, admiring lush steep rainforest surrounding Matheson Lake and primordial shelter of Roche Cove. Later, cross the babbling waters of Veitch Creek, followed in a couple of miles by the Sooke River Valley and an ascent up a canyon with breathtaking views of the river below.

If you'd like to visit the scenic rock pools of Sooke Potholes Provincial Park, you can detour onto Sooke River Road. The deep crystalline pools here strewn with smooth rocks are ideal for a refreshing dip. After, return to the Goose for an invigorating and steady ascent to trail's end and the town of Sooke, where the rainforest meets the sea.

A two-mile spin through town delivers you to your resort hotel, with splendid views of the Juan de Fuca Strait and the Olympic Mountains of Washington State.

Reservations are required if dining at your hotel's fine-dining restaurant, Sooke Harbour House Dining Room. Enjoy casual dining with no reservations required at the hotel's Cooper Room.

Hotel: Sooke Harbour House

Included Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride:

Galloping Goose Trail from Victoria to Sooke: 49.2 km (30.3 miles)

What to Expect: An easy ride stays almost entirely along the Galloping Goose Rail Trail from Victoria to Sooke. The surface is paved until about 13.3 km (8.2 miles), then becomes hard-packed gravel until about the 41.5 km point (25.7 miles). The last 8 km (5 miles) are paved. You wind out of the paved city streets, then into the suburbs, gently ascending to the highest point of the day at around 18 km (11 miles), then descending as you head south and west toward the Matheson Lake area. The ride is somewhat more undulating as you approach the waters of the Sooke Basin. You leave the rail trail around Saseenos,

joining the paved Sooke Road with traffic, into the town of Sooke and your waterside hotel.

DAY 4: Sooke to Sooke Potholes Provincial Park out and back ride or self-designed multi-sport (Stay Put Day)

Explore as you wish during this Stay Put Day. Nestled between the towering rainforest and the drama of the Pacific, Sooke offers an abundance of active outdoor activities. In Sooke Harbor, explore myriad coves and bays by kayak or sail. Hike the ancient coastal forest. Or set out on a cruise to seek out whales, seals, dolphins and sea lions. If you prefer a slower tempo, be sure to reserve a massage at the hotel spa or a tour to a local winery, followed by a classic afternoon “tea by the sea” in the garden.

Enjoy a pleasant 3-mile walk to the end of the narrow Whiffin Spit, marking the entrance into the Sooke Basin from the Juan de Fuca Strait. Or cycle the short distance to the Sea to Sea Regional Park, where two short hikes offer long views. If a longer ride in the saddle calls to you, head back to the Galloping Goose Rail Trail to stop along the way in Sooke Potholes Provincial Park for a refreshing swim or follow it to its end at the “ghost town” of Leechtown. The town briefly prospered on the gold that was first discovered in the Leech River in 1864. Six general stores, 3 hotels, and 30 saloons supported a small community of gold diggers. But the boom only lasted a year or so. Today, a cairn marker and some ruinous foundations are all that remain.

Hotel: Sooke Harbour House

Included Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choices:

Sooke to Sooke Potholes out-and-back: 43.5 km (27.8 miles)

What to Expect: Cycle out and back as far as you'd like back to the Galloping Goose Rail Trail. The trail gently rises up the river valley to the Sooke Potholes Provincial Park. As of this writing, the Todd Creek Trestle is closed, so please join the road for a short detour. There is a steep descent at 20.6 km (12 miles) if you want to make that your turning point instead of continuing to Leechtown at 21.7 km (14.7 miles). The trail is finely packed dense gravel. Return to Sooke on the same route, enjoying the descent.

Sooke to Sea to Sea Regional Park out-and-back: 17.2 km (10.7 miles)

What to Expect: Cycle 9 km (5.5 miles) out of Sooke along paved road to the Sea to Sea Regional Park, with one sustained climb of 700 meters (just under a half mile) to the park's trail head where you can access a network of hiking and mountain biking trails. Return to Sooke on the same route, with the initial descent away from the parking lot.

DAY 5: Sooke / VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel in Sooke. Public transportation is available from Sooke to Victoria or a transfer can be arranged at your expense to either downtown Victoria (Hotel Grand Pacific, 463 Belleville Street, Victoria, tel. +1 250 386 0450) or the Victoria Airport based on your departure time. Please refer to your Handbook for options and exact rates and contact VBT prior to departure to reserve the private transfer. Depending upon your destination, it may not be possible to depart for the U.S. on the last day of the tour. Please check airline schedules carefully. If you plan to schedule return flights immediately following the tour's conclusion, please call your airline directly for specific check-in requirements.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel Grand Pacific (Days: 1,2)

Elegant and refined, the Hotel Grand Pacific—named a Top Ten City Hotel in Canada by Travel + Leisure—is one of the few hotels located on Victoria's picturesque Inner Harbor. Fisherman's Wharf, the city's downtown restaurant and shopping district, Chinatown, and the British Columbia Legislature and Parliament buildings are all nearby. Large rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows and soaker tubs offer views of the city while you enjoy complimentary bottled water and fresh fruit. Enjoy the many offerings of this air-conditioned lifestyle hotel, including a large swimming pool, athletic club, and walks to the sea wall. Linger over the creative fare at The Pacific Restaurant or take afternoon tea on the terrace.

Sooke Harbour House (Days: 3,4)

Beautifully set on the Juan de Fuca Strait and boasting panoramic views of Washington State's Olympic Mountains, the charming Sooke Harbour House is one of Vancouver Island's premier resorts. Its common areas and 28 rooms are graced with original artwork, antiques, and handcrafted furnishings that evoke the spirit of the Saanich Peninsula. This eco-friendly property is just steps away from the Whiffin Spit, the arc of land jutting into the Sooke Basin where sea lions have been known to bask. Savor seasonal, organic, and creative cuisine sourced from local farms and fishermen, flavored with rare herbs from the house's three-acre garden. Take "Tea by the Sea" in the afternoon and relax in comfort in your individually styled room.