

British Columbia: Vancouver Island, Victoria & the Saanich Peninsula

Bike Vacation Only

Cycle into the soul of the Western Canadian coast during this scenic Vancouver Island sojourn. You'll ride breathtaking routes and old railway lines into coastal forests that spill into the sea. Experience bike-friendly Victoria nestled beside serene waters surrounding the Saanich Peninsula. Follow the historic Galloping Goose Trail past bucolic pastures, fertile farms, and rocky outcrops. Along the way, explore the magnificent 55-acre Butchart Gardens which has been impressing visitors for over a century, take refreshing dips in pure crystalline lakes, and learn about the First Nations Salish people, known for their weaving and creative use of western red cedar trees. Pace yourself. You'll want to savor every moment of this self-guided bike tour of Vancouver Island.



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 heritage of Victoria, British Columbia's splendid capital city
- Experience Vancouver Island's beautiful rainforests, 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: 8 - 34

Average Cycling Time: 01:15 - 04:00

Group size: 12 max

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 1.0, Jun 0.8, Jul 0.5, Aug 0.9, Sep 1.1, Oct 2.0

DAY 1: Welcome orientation / Victoria

We suggest arriving in Victoria at least one day prior to the tour start date as your tour begins at 1:00 p.m. For details, refer to your VBT Handbook. 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 the details of your self-guided bike tour of Vancouver Island.

Meet your VBT local host at 1:00 p.m. for your Welcome orientation, along with any other VBT guests arriving on the same day, in the lobby of the Hotel Grand Pacific (463 Belleville Street, Victoria, tel. +1 250 386 0450).

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 short ride past scenic points and sweeping bays that leaves you with 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 a ride 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 Trail, your route back into Victoria.

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

Today's Ride Choice

Victoria Seaside to Lochside — 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.

Accommodation: Hotel Grand Pacific, Victoria

DAY 2: Saanich Peninsula loop / Stay Put Day

During this Stay Put Day, explore laid-back Victoria however you wish. Head over to the Royal BC Museum to view its gigantic woolly mammoth exhibit, see the mask gallery of the First Peoples exhibit, and stroll through a replica of an old colonial street. Another option is a visit to 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 (tickets 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, cycle along the Selkirk Water to the Selkirk Trestle on the Galloping Goose Trail, retracing yesterday's ride, and then connecting 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, but you can also continue to Brentwood Bay.

Afterward, 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 ride, 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 the horses! Bird lovers take note: the waters here are a haven for ducks and other waterfowl, wading marsh birds, hunting raptors, and more. The bike path loops you back to the Galloping Goose Trail and your initial route. Reservations are recommended if you plan on dining at your hotel this evening.

Today's Ride Choices

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

What to Expect: Departing Victoria, you'll ride a mixture of bike lanes and paths, and city streets along Victoria's inner waterway, the Selkirk Water. Crossing the Trestle Bridge, continue on fairly flat, mixed

purpose roads into the countryside to the town of Brentwood Bay and drop down to Butchart Gardens at around 21 km (12.6 miles). After a short climb on roads out of the gardens, you will 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 paths. Follow this flat to somewhat rolling route and after Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, you will descend back to the suburban and city streets and your hotel.

Victoria to Butchart Gardens out-and-back – 42.6 km (26.5 miles)

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

Accommodation: Hotel Grand Pacific, Victoria

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Victoria to Sooke / Move on Day

Depart Victoria for Sooke this morning on the Galloping Goose Rail Trail. Named for the horn of 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 oaks and towering Douglas firs.

You will begin your ride in Victoria's urban environment, softened by lush poplars, willows, and maples. After crossing several trestles and bridges, you will make your way to the island's Western Communities. You'll ride over the Colwood Delta, silted up by glacial deposits some 13,000 years ago. Pastures, wetlands, and fern-cloaked rocks 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.

Next, you'll ride 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 the lush steep rainforest surrounding Matheson Lake and the primordial shelter of Roche Cove. Later, cross the babbling waters of Veitch Creek, followed 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, or return here tomorrow. The deep crystalline pools strewn with smooth rocks are ideal for a refreshing dip. Afterward, 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. Advanced reservations required at Le Sooke Spa. For more information visit lesookespa.com.

Reservations are required if dining at your hotel's fine-dining restaurant, West Coast Grill. Enjoy casual dining with no reservations required at the hotel's Vault Lounge.

Today's Ride Choice

Galloping Goose Trail from Victoria to Sooke — 47.4 km (29.4 miles)

What to Expect: An easy ride that 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 six km (3.7 miles) are paved. You wind out of the paved city streets 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.

Accommodation: Prestige Oceanfront Resort, Sooke

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Sooke to Leechtown out and back ride or self-designed multi-sport / Stay Put Day

Explore as you wish during this Stay Put Day. Nestled between the lush rainforest and the dramatic Pacific Ocean, Sooke offers an abundance of 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, reserve a massage at the hotel spa, followed by a classic afternoon tea in the garden.

Enjoy a pleasant three-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 spectacular views. If a longer ride in the saddle calls you, take the Galloping Goose Rail Trail to 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, three 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 stone foundations are all that remain.

Today's Ride Choices

Sooke to Sooke Potholes out-and-back – 40 km (24.8 miles)

What to Expect: Cycle out and back as far as you'd like on the Galloping Goose Rail Trail. The trail gently rises up the river valley to the Sooke Potholes Provincial Park. There is a steep ascent at 18.8 km (11.6 miles) if you want to make that your turning point instead of continuing to Leechtown at 20 km (12.4 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 – 13.6 km (8.4 miles)

What to Expect: Cycle 7 km (4.3 miles) out of Sooke along a paved road to the Sea to Sea Regional Park, with one sustained climb of 700 meters (just under half a 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.

Accommodation: Prestige Oceanfront Resort, Sooke

Included Meals: Breakfast

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

Enjoy an included breakfast at your hotel in Sooke. Public transportation is available from Sooke to Victoria or transportation 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 private transportation. 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