

Daily Itinerary

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.

Meet your VBT local host at 1:00 p.m. for your Welcome orientation, along with any other VBT guests departing on the same day, in the lobby of the Hotel Grand Pacific (463 Belleville Street, Victoria, tel. +1 250 386 0450) (or for the September 20th date only, the The Magnolia Hotel & Spa, Victoria, 623 Courtney Street. tel. +1 250 381 0999).

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 for lunch, 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.

Today's Ride:

Victoria Seaside Cycling Trail: 39 km (24 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.

Meals: B (included for Self-Guided Ait+ guests only)

Hotel Grand Pacific

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. 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.

Today's Ride:

Vancouver Island Loop: 55.8 km (35 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.

Meals: B

Hotel Grand Pacific

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. After settling in, browse the inviting art galleries of Sooke.

Today's Ride:

Galloping Goose Trail from Victoria to Sooke: 44.2 km (27 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 8.5 km (5.2 miles), then becomes hard-packed gravel until about the 40 km point (25 miles). The last 5 km (3 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 17 km (10.2 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 into the town of Sooke and your waterside hotel.

Meals: B

Sooke Harbour House

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 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.

Today's Ride:

Sooke to Leechtown out-and-back ride: 47.2 km (29 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 Bridge is closed, so please join the road for a short detour. There is a steep descent at 20.1 km (12 miles) if you want to make that your turning point instead of going all the way to Leechtown at 23.6 km (14.7 miles). The trail is finely packed dense gravel.

Meals: B

Sooke Harbour House

DAY 5

Sooke / VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel in Sooke and an included transfer to downtown Victoria. Meet your driver at 10:00 a.m. in the hotel lobby for the approximate one-hour drive to Victoria's Capital City Station for your onward travels. 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.