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## Victoria BC – A Constant Connection with the Sea

July 21, 2018 - by Melody Wren



Everywhere you turn in Victoria, there is a strong connection to nature, whether it's the ocean or the land, with activities, hotels and restaurants all paying homage in different ways.

You can't get much closer to nature than snorkeling with seals in the Pacific Ocean. Gearing up for snorkeling took us an hour to squeeze into our wetsuits in between giggling and being measured for boots, suits, gloves and hoods; it took me back to prom night preparation. Squeezing into wetsuits not dissimilar to gowns, replacing eyeshadow with snorkel masks, and the prep produced similar reactions from all six women. Prepping for the prom was just as long as we all chose hoods over hairdos, and boots over slingbacks. Zipping each other up held the same intimate moments as zipping up prom dresses. We all lined up for a group shot, minus the corsages and loaded into our zodiac replacing dad's car.

The family-owned business, [PJ's Island and Subsea Retreat](#) is run by Jack Madero and daughter Amanda who were our chaperones for our dance with the seals. Amanda also works at the Oceans Institute as a biologist so



shared a lot of valuable information to us.

Departing from Sydney Harbour, our Zodiac was soon skimming over Deep Cove heading to rocks so that we could slide silently into the water so as not to disturb the dozens of harbour seals waiting. Much like boys at the dance, they were skittish and too shy to approach but we persevered, keeping our heads down and focused on getting as close as possible without disturbing them.

Distracted by lavender-coloured jellyfish and large tangles of algae, we snorkeled on but had to call it quits after half an hour as the 12 degree water, like the spiked punch at the gym, was numbing our heads. All shivering with cold, we shared stories of seals poking their heads up once we were all in the boat, the boys, uhhm seals were crowding in groups to look at us, eager for a peek at the girls calling it quits.

Kayaking for a morning was a beautiful way to view Victoria from the water. We kayaked from Oak Bay harbour with helpful instructions from Ocean River owner Brian Henry. Brian was responsible for bringing kayaking to the West Coast, his passion evident in the sharing of his knowledge of the area. We kayaked past sea lion covered rocks, through small bays and inlets.

Locally owned and operated, Eagle Wing Whale Watching Tours is Canada's first carbon neutral eco whale watching company. After donning flotation suits, we departed from Fisherman's Wharf, the 1250 HP boat cruised at a comfortable 32 knots. The tour was several hours long, narrated by a very informative guide on the habits of whales. Victoria waters are home to three resident pods of Orca (killer) whales totalling over 80 whales. We were lucky enough to see two of them.



### Dine

The delightful [Roost Farm Bakery & Vineyard Bistro](#) is on ten acres of land where they grow grapes for their own white wine harvest. The café and bakery has a focus on local food, wine and sustainability; it serves pizza, sandwiches and salads including gluten-free choices. With an antique car collection, sheep, chickens and vintage tractors, it is a fascinating and delicious place to stop for a fill up.

Not far from the Fairmont Empress, this pork to fork restaurant was a favourite in Victoria. Offering a unique West Coast experience, the [10 Acres Kitchen](#) showcases the freshest food from Vancouver Island

including seafood and cheese along with seasonal produce, meats and eggs direct from their farm on the Saanich Peninsula. Their passion for local food comes through in every scrumptious morsel.

When I visited, the [Courtney Room](#) was newly opened. Attention to detail was impressive starting with Frette linens, serving staff orchestrating the entire table serving at once, to local seafood and fresh seasonal produce with a French twist. An extension of the adjacent Magnolia Hotel, authentic old world hospitality is evident from start to finish.

### Stay

The Oak Bay Beach Hotel is nestled on the Pacific Ocean near Victoria. Known for its luxury, it is a boutique hotel overlooking the Juan de Fuca Strait with incredible ocean views of snow-capped Mount Baker in the distance. Attention to detail was evident in every corner of the hotel. Wonderful food for breakfast lunch or dinner. The guest suites were comfortable, luxurious and no detail was overlooked in the planning. A deep bathtub had shuttered dividers to invite to enable ocean viewing while soaking.

[www.oakbaybeachhotel.com](http://www.oakbaybeachhotel.com)

The iconic hotel, Fairmont Empress Hotel overlooks the Inner harbor regally, its historic presence commanding attention of guests and passers by. Traditions flourish in every corner from the uniformed waiters in the restaurant to the bell boys. The 60 + million dollar renovation celebrates its history while moving the hotel in modern luxury. Rooms are spacious, elegant and comfortable, with a nod to everyday modern details. An enormous English style tea room is a must to visit for the three tiered traditional afternoon tea service with live piano music.



[www.fairmont.com/empress-victoria](http://www.fairmont.com/empress-victoria)



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