

WELCOME TO VANCOUVER

Vancouver is a very different city today than it was thirty years ago. As late as the early 1970s over 85 percent of the residents of Greater Vancouver were of European origin, and more than 60 percent still identified with family ancestry in Britain. A provincial city of less than one million people tied historically to the resource economy of the surrounding hinterland, Vancouver was – in the oft-repeated words of journalist Allan Fotheringham – “a village on the edge of the rainforest.”

No more. Now numbering more than two million people, almost 40 percent of the residents of Greater Vancouver have neither English nor French as their mother tongue. Substantial migration from Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, and South Asia has done much to detach Vancouver from its predominantly eastern Canadian and European connections, and to redefine it as an Asian Pacific city. Indeed, Vancouver has emerged as a global city. In 2000-2001 the proportion of foreign-born in the metropolitan region (37 percent) exceeded that of Sydney, Los Angeles, and New York, and is surpassed in Canada only by Toronto.

Vancouver’s transition from “urban village” to “world city,” much of which has taken place since the Congress last met at UBC in 1983, is evident in the international acclaim for the city’s new urbanism. Now being implemented in cities as far off as Abu Dubai, where Vancouver’s former City Planner and almost a dozen of his former planning staff have been hired to design urban Dubai in Vancouver’s image, the new urbanism is characterized by high density, mixed income housing, and plenty of parks and facilities for families, all paid for by developers. Tall, thin towers that preserve mountain views abound, with each tower supported by a podium consisting of a minimum of three-storeys of townhouses or commercial space that aims to keep urban life at the street level “vibrant, detailed, and warm.” Indeed, the downtown population, which has doubled to 80,000 residents in twenty years, is now housed in a forest of glass towers that local writer Douglas Coupland has characterized as the *City of Glass*.

Yet, while feature story writers from journals such as *Time*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *Smithsonian* are much impressed by the new Vancouver, the reality is that the physical city outside of the central core does not look much different from that of the sprawling suburbs of major urban centres across Canada. Here what stands out is the cosmopolitan nature of the population rather than distinctive architecture or planning. In addition, recurring stories of homelessness, drug-related violence, and traffic congestion remind us that

the new cosmopolitanism, and the new urbanism, have not yet created for many Vancouverites the ideal city that some would characterize – to cite the title of a recent *Canadian Geographic* essay – as “Futureville.” The Downtown Eastside-area that centres on Hastings and Main, a short walk from the historic districts of Gastown and Chinatown, constitutes the poorest postal code in Canada.

Visitors to Vancouver, then, have before them an exciting array of possibilities for enjoyment and edification outside of the Canadian Historical Association’s 87th Annual Meeting at UBC. Some of these possibilities entail enjoying the natural beauty of the area, for others interacting with a vibrant and changing city. The obvious place to start is at UBC itself, where a visit to the Museum of Anthropology,



Photo : Andrew Waldron, 2004

the Arthur Erickson-designed masterpiece located along Marine Drive at the northwest corner of the campus, is a “must.” Housing some 535,000 ethnographic and archaeological objects, many of which originate from the Northwest Coast of British Columbia, the museum is open daily to 5 except on Tuesdays, when one can enter on a pay-as-you-can basis until 9 pm. Nearby is the Nitobe Memorial Garden, a traditional Japanese Tea and Stroll garden that is considered one of the most authentic Japanese gardens in North America. On the south side of the campus is Pacific Spirit Regional Park, which comprises 763 hectares of forest and foreshore, the latter of which wraps around tip of the Point Grey Peninsula on which UBC is located. The closeness of Pacific Spirit Park to the university entices visitors to explore its paths by bike or foot. As part of the foreshore, and immediately below UBC, is the clothing-optional Wreck Beach, which (if the weather cooperates) invites conference-goers to chuck off their stress and their clothes for a liberating dip in the sea. Spanish Banks and Jericho Beach

provide attractive sites for walks or picnics as you follow the shoreline eastward from UBC towards the city.

Farther away from UBC, the area centred on Waterfront Station, the intermodal public transportation facility on the waterfront at the north end of Granville Street, offers a variety of possible walking excursions in the heart of the city. The station is the Vancouver terminus for the Seabus, which for the equivalent of a bus ticket will take you on an insightful trip across Burrard Inlet and back. While on the north side, leave the terminal and, turning immediately to the left, walk the equivalent of a couple of city blocks to the west where you will enjoy a spectacular view of downtown Vancouver. A public market is immediately outside the terminal (to the right). Once back on the south shore, a walk to the east of Waterfront Station will take you into Gastown where “touristy” shops, a bogus but immensely popular steam clock, and some very historic architecture offer a feel for old Vancouver in a contemporary setting. As you return to the station you might go south a block or two and back via some of the city’s most luxurious shops (see especially Sinclair Centre, west of Granville) where each summer thousands of tourists spent scads of money before and after trips north to Alaska. The tour boats themselves tie up at the Canada Place wharf immediately west of the Waterfront Station. In the Pan Pacific Hotel at the entrance to Canada Place (the city’s Convention Centre building, marked by its distinctive white sails) visit the bar on the second floor for a drink and enjoy the spectacular view of the waterfront. Further west (and past the new convention centre now under construction) you can walk along the waterfront towards Stanley Park, one of the nicest walks in the city. You may want to begin this walk closer to the Stanley Park end, perhaps after spending time in the park itself. This 400 hectare green space is a symbol of Vancouver and one of the city’s major tourist attractions. The Vancouver Aquarium in Stanley Park is also popular, and a walk around part or all of the 8.8 km seawall offers some of the best urban viewing anywhere in Canada. If, after all of this walking you are keen to travel sitting down, why not hustle back to the Waterfront Station and take the Expo Skytrain line across the city to New Westminster, where with not much effort you should be able to track down the Royal Café and enjoy a BLT with fries for \$3.99. Can’t beat that anywhere!

There are, of course, so many other places to go and things to see in Vancouver that one must, in the last instance, resort to a list. So here goes. For a close engagement with the city’s new urbanism, start with a bus or car trip to

Granville Island, located at the entrance to False Creek. If you are hungry, the Go Fish eatery, just to the west of the entrance to Granville Island, offers extraordinary fish and chips at fishermen’s prices. A walk around Granville Island and a visit to its many craft shops can easily fill a morning or afternoon. A small water taxi will take you across False Creek, and from here you can walk eastward to the upper end of False Creek along the margin of the former Expo 86 site and in front of the forest of glass towers that are the defining symbol of the new Vancouver. Once in the Yaletown area be certain to stop in at Urban Fare, the upscale grocery store and café that anchors the neighbourhood centered by the refurbished CPR Roundhouse, now a community centre. Very trendy! A terrific way to spend a couple of hours is to visit the Vancouver Art Gallery, located on Georgia Street in the downtown core, where admission on Tuesday evenings is free (with a donation). On the south side of the Art Gallery is Robson Street, which, heading west past Burrard, has become the hottest commercial stretch in the city. Excellent for a walk if you want to be part of the tourist scene. At two very different sites it is nature rather than commerce that attracts. The first is the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, to the south of the city at the mouth of the south arm of the Fraser River. A veritable “heaven-on-earth” for bird watchers, the sanctuary is covered by migrating snow geese in the fall, and features sand pipers, hawks, eagles, cormorants, and ospreys in the spring. In the other direction, on the north shore of Burrard Inlet in West Vancouver, directly across the inlet from UBC, is Lighthouse Park, where one can sit on the rocks looking down at starfish in tidal pools and up beyond Vancouver at magnificent Mt. Baker, which ascends high above the city in the southeastern sky. Accessible by means of a forty minute ride on the 250 bus from Burrard Station for a \$3.25 ticket, Lighthouse Park is another one of the city’s “can’t-be-beat” tourist bargains. Perhaps with the money saved you might want to visit one of the city’s many fine restaurants such as Nu (on Granville), with its spectacular sunsets and upscale cuisine, or Feenie’s on West Broadway. **Have fun.**

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