

Victoria, British Columbia

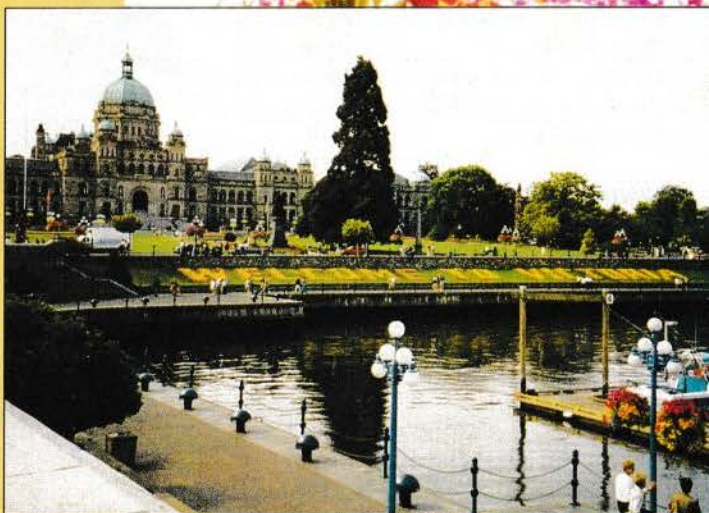
*A solo traveler recounts
the beauty and rich heritage
of this Canadian city.*

By Angela Hurley

WHEN I FIRST DECIDED TO GO ON A trip on my own, I was met with comments from friends and family. "Wow, you're going by yourself?" "Aren't you afraid you'll get lost, or mugged?" Still, there's something to be said about traveling solo—adhering to your own agenda, visiting the places YOU want to see. I chose to visit Victoria, British Columbia, because I'd never been farther west than Missouri, and it sounded like a beautiful place to visit. I wasn't disappointed.

I flew to Seattle and took the ferry from Seattle to Victoria. It's a two-hour trip by catamaran, and a scenic one at that. When the ferry glides into Victoria, the skyline of Inner Harbour comes into view with a breathtaking majesty—with the vision of the Empress Hotel and Parliament buildings behind bobbing sailboats. The "Welcome to Victoria" sign, spelled out in flowers on the promenade lawn, promises a warm reception in the city. Baskets of flowers hang from lampposts downtown, and the well cared for streets, show that Victorians are as proud of their city as they are friendly.

Capt. James Cook was the first known European to come to British Columbia; he came in 1778. Later, in 1843, James Douglas, of the Hudson's Bay Company, selected the site on Vancouver Island's southern tip as a trading post and fort, naming it after Britain's



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGELA HURLEY

Visitors delight in the sights and scents at the Italian Garden at Butchart. "Welcome to Victoria" (inset) greets visitors as they approach the Parliament buildings.

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queen Victoria. It wasn't until 1862 that the name Victoria was appropriated and the city laid out. That the British heritage and tradition are still held in esteem in Victoria is very apparent. Double decker buses, English-style pubs, and shops laden with woollens and tartans line its streets.

One of the nicer aspects about Victoria is that it's a compact and very walkable city. I easily walked to my daily destinations. Still, if you decide not to hoof it, there is abundant transportation available—from horse-drawn buggies to buses.

The first day I ventured out into town I lost myself for hours in the shops and restaurants of Victoria. Four-stories-high and full of stores of every kind, Eaton Centre is a shopaholic's paradise. Being of British heritage myself, I was only too pleased to eat at one of many English-style pubs in downtown Victoria. Restaurants such as the Sticky Wicket and Elephant and Castle offer everything from steak and kidney pies and Cornish pasties, to traditional fish and chips. Despite my best efforts, I couldn't stay away from the lures of thick cut, salted chips with loads of vinegar doused on top.

HISTORY FACTS

The incredible sights in Victoria are too numerous to tackle without an extended stay in the city, but during my week there I tried to see as many as I could. I'm a sucker for museums, and I knew two I had to see by week's end—the Royal British Columbia Museum and the Royal London Wax Museum. The RBCM is a four-story collection of Canadian history, both British and Indian. With no one else's schedule to worry about, I trotted around the museum all day to my heart's content. Just a few hours in the museum allowed me to see a stuffed woolly mammoth, a full-scale model of an original Canadian Pacific train station, and a creatively designed section of masks and totem poles from Canada's First People (the

Professional and amateur gardeners envy the Sunken Gardens at Butchart.



Henry VIII and his eight wives are waxen residents at the Royal London Wax Museum.

term given to Canada's native Indians). Victoria's pride in its heritage and the city itself is apparent in the exhibits. Recently, a Leonardo da Vinci exhibition brought more than 426,000 people to the museum, and nearly \$93 million to the local economy.

FIGURES OF WAX

The Royal London Wax Museum is an amazing display of people and characters so lifelike, it's hard to believe they're carved from wax. The museum is larger than it looks from the outside, too—a whole floor is contained below ground level. Sculptures of Henry VIII and all of his wives are exquisitely decorated with outfits made from velvet and lace, and detailed right down to the buttons and jewelry. More recent members of the royal family are featured, as well as Queen Victoria and Benjamin Disraeli. The most real-looking figure I saw was Napoleon—I kept thinking he was a museum staff member staked out in Napoleonic garb, ready to grab an unsuspecting patron. He never did though.

A visit to Victoria is not complete until you've visited the Butchart Gardens, located about 13 miles north of

Victoria. The estate houses several different gardens—English Rose, Japanese, and Italian—but my favorite was the Sunken Garden. Located 50 feet below in an old limestone quarry, it holds an array of sculptured shrubs and flowers intertwined with stairs that lead to lookouts and winding sidewalks.

As I stood along the immaculately manicured lawn beside the Rose Garden, I overheard a woman mention to her husband that she'd like their backyard to resemble this lawn. Good luck. It takes a year-round staff of at least 55 gardeners to maintain the 50-acre gardens.

Among all the flowers I saw—everything from fuschia and hydrangea to bougainvillea—the most intriguing flower to me was the *Calceolaria Intergrifolia*, otherwise known as Scotman's Purse. The blossoms looked to me like pieces of yellow popcorn on the foliage.

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

Wherever my travels took me during the day, I always made sure I was back at the Inner Harbour by nightfall. At dusk, the Parliament building's facade is outlined by many small light bulbs—3,333 to be exact. The lights go on every night without fail; the only time they did not was after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

The Upper and Lower causeways of Inner Harbour come alive at night with street artists and musicians. The causeways showcase the talents of fiddle and bagpipe players, sketch

artists and even enterprising, young comedians. Crowds of tourists line the causeways to view these acts and the artists draw them in by the hundreds every night. Just like the others, I was enraptured by the sights and sounds of Victoria and everything it has to offer. And I never got lost, or mugged, once. ■

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