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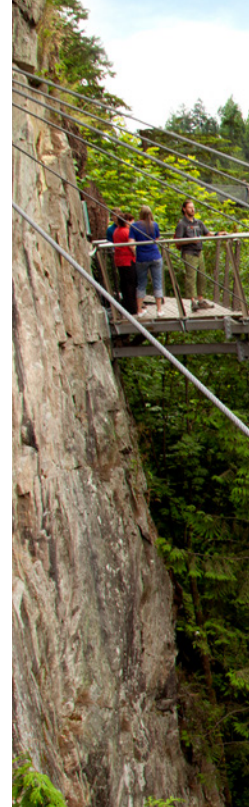
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Drop anchor in Vancouver

Before any Alaska cruise, enjoy an entrée of Vancouver, the perfect pre- or post-cruise stopover. *By Samantha Rowntree*

W

ITH ITS NATURAL BEAUTY AND vibrant cultural scene, Vancouver is the perfect basecamp prior to an Alaska cruise, with Canada's busiest cruise terminal smack-bang in Downtown Vancouver.

OUT AND ABOUT

From my convenient base at the EXchange Hotel – located just a 600 metre walk from the port – I join a street art and coffee tour with Toonie Tours to help get my bearings around the city. Our guide Fran strategically weaves a way around the Olympic Village where the athletes of the 2010 games stayed, showing us the hidden murals created by some of the best street artists from around the globe.

Back in Downtown Vancouver, we hire bikes to ride part of the Seawall – at 28 kilometres, the world's longest uninterrupted waterfront path. Starting from the Vancouver Convention Centre, it extends right through to the Spanish Banks Park, passing through attractions like Stanley Park, Granville Island and Science World. We follow the Seawall map and spend a perfect afternoon riding around lush Stanley Park, stopping to observe wildlife as well as the Totem Poles, the Lions Gate Bridge, the Vancouver Aquarium and two beaches.

Granville Island is also along the Seawall. Best known for its public market,



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The Seawall wraps around Stanley Park © Kyle Thacker/Unsplash; Cliffwalk at Capilano Suspension Bridge Park © Destination Vancouver/Capilano Suspension Bridge Park; Fish n' chips at Granville Island © Jessica Small; Housemade desserts by pastry chef Daria at Five Sails © Samantha Rowntree



TRAVEL FACTS

STAYING THERE

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FURTHER INFORMATION

destinationvancouver.com



the island is buzzing with boutique shops, food stalls and activities. We dive straight for the markets dotted with locally-sourced fruits, vegetables, flowers and souvenirs. Overwhelmed with choice, we settle for freshly-caught halibut with chips and some fresh fruit, and sit by the water listening to buskers singing.

To burn off lunch, we hire some kayaks and paddle around Granville Island to a sheltered bay where we're greeted by a seal friend who pops his head up and decides to follow us through the bay and back to shore. I wasn't leaving the island without trying Lee's Donuts which has been baking donuts since 1979. Each bite is better than the last.

The next day we cross the Lions Gate Bridge and visit the mountain side of Vancouver. Ten minutes is all it takes to be

immersed in sublime West Coast rainforest in Capilano Suspension Bridge Park. We carefully cross the 137-metre-high suspension bridge over the Capilano River, the waters rushing down below as we cross. Heading deeper into the mythical forest we tackle Treetops Adventures, its towering platforms made from reclaimed timber connecting seven suspension bridges.

Further up the mountain, Grouse Mountain, best known for skiing and snowboarding in winter, is brilliant for hikes, ziplines and panoramic views of Vancouver city in summer.

GASTRONOMIC DESTINATION

I travel to eat, and Vancouver has a diverse culinary scene with foodie hubs like Gastown, Chinatown and Granville Island. At Five Sails, located in the Canada Place

Convention Centre, we bask in the late summer sun, soaking up some of the best views of Vancouver as we enjoy the tasting menu beautifully curated by Executive Chef Robbie Robinson. It includes ahi tuna and a smorgasbord of the most incredible desserts I have laid eyes on.

The cobblestone streets of Gastown are dotted with trending bars, restaurants and cafes, including L'Abattoir – a restored brick and beam restaurant that was once a butchery in the meat packing district. It serves up fine French-influenced West Coast cuisine - the taste of the Pacific oysters drenched in truffle and garlic butter will live in my mind rent free.

And just like that, my four days in Vancouver are over, and I'm ready for the next leg of my journey – an Alaskan cruise. 🐻