Updated in 2012 with new recommendations and images not to be missed!

**Special Spaces & Places Make Canada’s VANCOUVER a City that Soars**

A spectacular winter view from the top of destination Grouse Mountain reveals Vancouver's enviable coastal location. Rarely does the snow venture down to sea level! Grouse Mountain Resort

Travel with a Challenge editor, Alison Gardner, shares her "Editor's Choice" personal picks for readers with a yen for culture, history and adventure. Just follow the yellow check mark

In a hurry? Start your search with Special Things to Do or Special Places to Sleep or Special Places to Eat or Tours to Try.

**In Context:** In 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009 and 2010 Conde Nast Traveler magazine announced Vancouver as the "Best City in the Americas" in their annual Readers' Choice Awards. Cities are scored for ambience, friendliness, culture and sites, restaurants, lodging and shopping.

Multi-cultural, cosmopolitan Greater Vancouver is one of the most popular cities on the planet for visiting and living. One unusual recognition of its special status is the respected British Economist Intelligence Unit assessment which rated Vancouver in 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 as one of the top three places in the world to live out of 132 major cities. The research is completed every two years. Health and safety, culture, environment and well-maintained infrastructure, public facilities and transportation have all helped to place Vancouver in this enviable top tier.
The City of Vancouver, population 603,500, is just one of 18 municipalities that make up Metro Vancouver's total population of 2.3 million. That's more than 50% of the province of British Columbia's 4.5 million residents but still a small, manageable city by the world's standards. The percentage of Metro Vancouver residents whose first language is English is 49.1% and Chinese is 25.3%.

For complete information about visiting the city, including a list of world-class festivals and theme events throughout the year, contact Tourism Vancouver, www.tourismvancouver.com. In equally close proximity to land, sea, accessible mountains and wilderness, Vancouver mixes and matches educational, cultural, and natural vacationing opportunities with ease.

**Special Places to Sleep**

✔ Located on a quiet residential street in Vancouver's West End, the apartment-style Sunset Inn & Suites is a sleeper... not only because it is just beyond the hustle and bustle of the major hotel district, but also because it offers well-designed, spacious self-catering suites for very attractive prices. With its central location, restaurants and coffee houses abounding, Granville Island and downtown just a stone's throw, there is no call for an in-inn restaurant. The free continental breakfast is laid out in the lobby with guests selecting their options and taking a tray of food to serve in their own well-equipped dining area.

Sunset Inn is a 10-minute walk along peaceful tree-lined residential streets that emerge at Vancouver’s picturesque English Bay waterfront. Or stroll deeper into the West End for an eclectic variety of eateries and live music most days a week [see Rain City Grill and Central Bistro reviewed below]. Gated parking at the Inn is free as is high speed internet. The helpful staff is knowledgeable about what to see and do in city and offers a concierge service to make arrangements with ease. Essentially, this property provides services of a hotel with a home-like atmosphere that is hard to experience in a conventional hotel.

During my stay there, I met many senior couples who have regularly called the Sunset Inn home for one-to-two months each year in order to enjoy what the city has to offer in the way of annual festivals and attractions, or to spend time with family and friends while still maintaining their privacy and independence at a price they can afford. It is not often that you witness guests bringing presents to hotel staff when they arrive for a visit, but the sense of family sharing here is pleasurable whether the stay is long or short.

✔ The Listel Vancouver Hotel has actively cultivated a well-deserved reputation as Vancouver’s “most artful hotel” and “a cultural tourist’s dream”. In addition to public areas amply decorated with paintings, ceramics and sculptures of local professional artists, there are several floors where hallways and rooms carry on the art patron theme. The Gallery Floors are

**All recently renovated, Sunset self-catering suites are bright and comfortable. Sunset Inn**
curated by the prestigious Buschlen Mowatt Gallery, featuring original and limited edition works by 30 artists, each room showcasing the work of a particular artist. The hotel's **Museum Floor** whose hallway and 54 rooms feature Northwest Coast art by Northwest Coast native contemporary artists is curated by the Museum of Anthropology [see museum spotlight under "Special Things to Do"].

But art is not all that makes this hotel very unusual. It has played a leading role in the Vancouver International Jazz Festival for ten years both in terms of its hotel facilities and as a patron venue for the hottest jazz in town during the festival and all year round [see O'Doul's Restaurant profile under "Special Places to Eat"]'). And the Listel is a veritable green giant when it comes to incorporating environmenta initiatives into the hotel's everyday operation, having been named Tourism Ambassador for Conservation by Tourism Vancouver. It has undertaken a mind-boggling Zero Waste program turning all organic waste into compost, reusing all recyclables and converting all non-recyclables into electric Though most of these green initiatives are invisible to hotel guests, they prove that the Listel admirably walks the wall when it comes to sustainability.

The hotel dining room exudes Old World elegance. Wedgewood Hotel and Spa

✔️ The Word is out! A David among a forest of Goliath-like downtown hotels is proving that small is exquisitely beautiful, graciously efficient, and warmly welcoming. Yes, Vancouver **Wedgewood Hotel and Spa** has all but the swimming pool.

Already the object of a Santa Claus-sized sack of awards in every category of hospitality delivery, this 83-room boutique jewel has just tucked another one into the bag for 2011. As was being awarded the "Most Excellent Spa Hotel in Canada & the U.S." at the latest Condé Nast Johansens 2011 Awards for Excellence, the Wedgewood Hotel also made Condé Nast Traveler's Gold List for the eighth year in a row and was awarded Trip Advisor's "Travelers choice Winning – Luxury Category" 2011.

In business since 1984, under the creative vision of two Greek-Canadian sisters with a powerful design flare and a natural gift for hospitality, the Wedgewood Hotel continues to enjoy very high occupancy round under the managing directorship of one of their daughters who shares the family commitment to style and exemplary service. It is hardly surprising that many guests are repeat clients, and many more are mature travelers, especially those lingering in Vancouver before or after a cruiseship holiday. When
are mature travelers, especially those lingering in Vancouver before or after a cruise ship holiday. While it is the “Old World” flavor of public spaces and guest rooms, the fresh-baked cookies on pillows when beds are turned down at night, the elegant live piano music or the crackling fire in the French-influenced dining room, these hoteliers have written their own rulebook on prize-winning hospitality.

Special Things to Do

✔ Under the management of the Bill Reid Foundation, a stunning Aboriginal art gallery in the heart of downtown Vancouver opened its doors in May 2008. Essentially a museum in celebration of the work of Bill Reid, Canada’s most revered native artist, it collects together works by this prolific, creative man that range in size from mammoth to miniature, from tree-sized wooden totem poles to world-recognized bronze sculptures and exquisite gold and silver jewellery.

Haida artist, Bill Reid (1920 to 1998), was pivotal in reviving and introducing to the world the rich art traditions of the indigenous people of Northwest North America. The Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art, is an exciting addition to Vancouver’s cultural attractions. Located off Hornby Street not visible from the street, go up a set of stairs into an enclosed grassy quadrangle. The distinctive building and courtyard is ideal for a relaxed contemplation of the unique beauty of the collection, indoors and outdoors. The gallery also showcases pieces by other Canadian Aboriginal talents, both established and emerging artists.

✔ The Museum of Anthropology (MOA), overlooking mountains and sea on the grounds of the University of British Columbia, is a visual treat from entry through the massive carved front doors into the Great Hall featuring full size totem poles, feast dishes and canoes on through every gallery of this world leader in museum design and presentation. Focusing mainly on Northwest Coast of British Colur First Nation [native] themes, it also owns an impressive collection of South Pacific objects and artefacts and representative collections from other regions, more than half a million ethnographic and archaeological objects ranging in size from enormous to delicately

Exhibitions focus on Aboriginal art.
Bill Reid Foundation

The Bill Reid Gallery opened in May 2008.
Bill Reid Foundation
in gold, silver, argillite, wood, ceramic and fabric.

As Canada's largest teaching museum, MOA pioneered the concept of Visible Storage whereby a much higher percentage than usual of any museum collection may be viewed for comparison and study, as well as for community-based research by artists, elders, students and visitors. The content of this museum is truly dazzling. There is also a constant enrichment of public programming ranging from films and expert lectures to workshops and native performance. Recognized native artists and artisans may also be found working in the Great Hall, creating their next commission and sharing stories with visitors.

Open year-round, the Greenheart Canopy Walkway is located within the extensive Botanical Gardens of the University of British Columbia [UBC], about 30 minutes by taxi or bus from downtown Vancouver. The Walkway is a 21st century-design treat for people of all ages to learn about Pacific Coast rainforests while having a lot of fun. The only one of its kind in Canada, this 308-meter/1010-ft aerial system offers a rare perspective on the natural beauty of the forest canopy ecosystem. Using its patent pending 'tree hugger' technology, Greenheart provides access to the upper canopy with minimal impact on the trees or habitat.

Fully guided and offered hourly, tours of the Canopy Walkway touch on many topics including sustainable eco-tourism, First Nations' uses of local forest materials, and identifying tree species of the coastal temperate rainforest. The area is also home to some spectacular wildlife, such as bald eagles, woodpeckers and coyotes.

"Guests traverse bridges suspended around 50 ft in trees that are over a century old. This experience is an exciting and adventurous way to interact with nature and the forest," says Brian McCarthy, Greenheart Operations Manager.

UBC is a stimulating destination in itself with many major attractions in addition to the Greenheart Canopy Walkway and Museum of Anthropology [above]. Make a full day of it, and enjoy lunch at one of the many cafes on the campus! More attractions include the Botanical Gardens, Nitobe Memorial Gardens, art galleries and the recently opened Beaty Biodiversity Museum, a 20,000 sq ft state-of-the-art teaching museum.
Just a 20-minute drive from downtown Vancouver plus an eight-minute cable car ride from the base of Grouse Mountain to the top, opens up an exciting multi-interest destination for all ages to experience at their own pace. Click on www.grousemountain.com, to discover why the view is just the beginning ...

Amid towering Douglas fir trees, many larger-than-life cedar carvings along a well-maintained trail network add their own magic to the mountain top setting. Alison Gardner

Open 365 days a year, Grouse Mountain attracts a million visitors whose reasons for spending time in this spectacular piece of accessible wilderness range from guided and self-guided nature walks and hills in summer to cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and downhill skiing in winter. For those indoor retreat times and for evening visitors, there is the Theatre in the Sky and a fine dining restaurant as well as casual cafés and gift shops stocked with original west coasty temptations from specialty foods and souvenirs to designer jewelry and clothing.

Be sure to visit Grouse Mountain’s educational Refuge for Endangered Wildlife, a sprawling natural reserve where grizzly bear cubs, orphaned too young to survive on their own, are brought from all over British Columbia for initial rearing and to hone their survival skills. This leading-edge rescue and rehabilitation facility is attempting to prepare these increasingly rare and always-fascinating creatures for a life in the wilderness.

Have you discovered Granville Island under the bridge of the same name? Clearly, it is an intriguing multi-theme destination in a realm all its own, just five minutes’ drive from the city’s downtown core. This phoenix risen from a hundred years of industrial ashes deserves to be singled out not only for its award-winning Public Market, humming artistic community in the broadest brush imaginable, and world-class theme festivals. It also deserves high praise for its eateries
Granville Island's bustling markets and waterfront attractions draw 10 million people year round.
Tourism Vancouver/John Sinal

Alison Gardner's Vancouver: history, culture, nature, restaurants, accommodation.

7/11
www.travelwithachallenge.com/Vancouver-Highlights.htm#SpecialThings

Granville Island Hotel

Don't miss our companion article that introduces readers to this uniquely Vancouver experience!

Special Places to Eat

When I first saw the Campagnolo Restaurant address pretty much on the wrong side of the tracks in a part of Vancouver still flirting with gentrification, my interest was cautious, even though the three owners are among the most savvy and highly-awarded restauranteurs in the city. However, while I do recommend that visitors go by taxi, this comfortable and affordable eatery is definitely one to experience for both its flavorful northern Italian menu and its friendly service. And hats off to Campagnolo for boldly playing a part in revitalizing its adopted neighborhood.

Campagnolo is primarily a "walk-in" restaurant, with only groups of eight or more able to secure reservations. Lunch [11:30 to 2:30 p.m.] and dinner [5 p.m. until late] are served daily. Simply-designed with wood beam ceilings, concrete block walls, and rustic butcher-block tables, the large open restaurant space and adjacent bar, where clients may choose to wait for a table or eat there as well, give no hint that the country dishes focusing on the Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna regions of northern Italy are distinctive and bursting with flavor.

A fine wine is always a complement to a good meal, and Campagnolo's cellar is certainly well-stocked with wines direct from the Langhe/Piedmont region in northwest Italy to turn that thought into reality. On recommendation of the Bar Director, I sampled the most important white grape of the region, Arneis, which is told translates as "little rascal" because it is difficult to grow. Little rascal and I struck up a fine friendship that saw out a most pleasant evening.

A West End culinary icon overlooking English Bay, Raincity Grill led the pack in defining Pacific Northwest cuisine back in 1992 by showcasing the unique ingredients of Vancouver's local waters and small-lot farms. Home of Canada's premiere restaurant 100-Mile Menu and an award-winning Pacific Northwest wine list, Raincity Grill is small and modestly attired for a restaurant with such a fine dining reputation. Designed for a bit of a pocketbook splurge. If you can't make up your mind what to order.

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Left: Crispy Ceci is a flavorful antipasti made with chickpeas, chilies, mint and citrus. Robert Belcham

Right: Salsiccia Pizza tastes more exotic than it looks, consisting of fennel sausage, arugula, parmigiano reggiano, and chilies. Hamid Attie

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hard to go wrong with the 100-Mile Tasting Menu and wine pairings over a relaxed evening watching sun go down and the city lights come on. For those who appreciate a little education with their meal, server is happy to share information about each dish and even describe for you which organic farm it comes from.

From appetizer to dessert, Raincity's dishes combine taste excellence with visual artistry. Alison Gardner

The front-line magicians who make a meal here something of a culinary journey are Chef du Cuisine Jennifer Peters who is a committed force in the local, sustainable food movement and Restaurant Manager Terry Hayashi who lives and breathes hospitality with a passion. Raincity is open for brunch, lunch and dinner.

If visitors can figure out where the locals gather to eat, meet and have fun, the experience of any city just gets more rewarding. Only two blocks from spectacular English Bay, Central Bistro on Denman Street in Vancouver’s West End is one of those focal points. West End residents are a big part of Central Bistro’s family, but don’t expect to receive the cold shoulder if you are from elsewhere in Vancouver or from half way around the world. The owner likes to "hold special events whenever he has an excuse", so check the website for musical evenings, theme menus, wine or micro-brew tastings with imbibing experts, and any other excuse he can think up. Brunch starts at 8 a.m. and runs to 3 p.m. for those who like to sleep in, and the menu just keeps shifting from there until the food runs out, as the boss likes to say.

Central Bistro’s owner (right) and the head create culinary magic and a relaxed atmosphere in this cozy local establishment. Alison Gardner

The name C Restaurant seems altogether too plain for a Vancouver waterfront eatery that has earned a solid reputation as one of Canada’s finest fish and seafood culinary ambassadors. Innovation the watchword with each menu choice, whether in the combination of flavors and products, in the presentation that makes every plate a piece of art placed in front of the guest, or in the wine pairing suggestions that are made with equal expertise by a resident sommelier.

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While the wine cellar is selectively international, the fish and other seafood are proudly local and utterly fresh. C works in partnership with Pacific area harvesters to conserve wild seafood resources and to be a leader in introducing new products to its menu lineup. Oysters marinated in Japanese sake, wild salmon fresh from the Pacific Ocean, sea urchin, spot prawns and Dungeness crab, abalone and lobster soup, scallops and octopus all showcase adventurous options in a cheerful, attentive atmosphere.

It will be undeniably challenging to retreat to plain old fish and chips after a C lunch on the garden patio looking out at Vancouver’s always-active harbor, or an evening meal amidst the magical lights that decorate the outlook as darkness gradually overtakes the city.

Visually hinting at its long-established presence on the Vancouver restaurant scene, Le Gavroche, a modest historic property of Victorian vintage, with a sweeping view of Vancouver’s Coast Mountains. Though the restaurant name translates as a "Parisian street urchin", its neat exterior façade projects greater dignity and lingering good taste than the surrounding generic buildings of a more recent unimaginative architectural era. Bravo the little guy!

From the small front entry hall, up the narrow staircase to the second floor dining room and friendly elbow-height bar where owner Manuel Ferreira usually presides, the atmosphere is intimate and welcoming. Classic French cuisine is the foundation of its very diverse menu, with sauce accompaniments and those illusive herbs that make French cooking so timelessly appealing. Guaranteed Le Gavroche will be full any evening with connoisseurs of good food well into the wee hours. The restaurant is internationally famous for its inspired selection of French and American vintage wines, some substantially older than the near-thirty year history of the restaurant itself! Clearly the cellar is Manuel’s greatest pride.

Being Vancouver, there are plenty of expertly prepared seafood specialties on the Le Gavroche menu – how about seafood turin with lobster champagne sauce and seaweed caviar? – but there is also a wide range of walking and flying options, from tender local lamb and buffalo to duck and venison. Predictably, the dessert collection too reflects classic French cuisine – rich, smooth and utterly delicious. I’ll walk across town any evening for the dessert chef’s heavenly honey custard crème brulée!
A strong anchor point in the city's musical patron category is the Listel Vancouver Hotel's popular O'Doul's Restaurant & Bar where outstanding food, wine, and jazz have been creating a pleasantly lethal mix for years. With a ten-year track record as a venue in the Vancouver International Jazz Festival [late June/early July], and an eighth-year-in-a-row winner of Wine Spectator Magazine's "Award of Excellence", this restaurant in the heart of Vancouver on Robson Street offers multiple reasons to pay a visit. From a sports fan hangout in the '70's to Vancouver's premiere spot for fine dining and cool jazz, O'Doul's has come a long way and it's never been better. It is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner or a simple, perfect glass of wine every day of the week, including a scrumptious brunch on weekends.

Apart from fine jazz performances in the restaurant and bar each Thursday, Friday and Saturday, O'Doul's takes its cue from parent Listel Hotel's commitment to the environment by being an active member of both the Green Table Network and the Vancouver Aquarium's Ocean Wise seafood program.

With local sustainable food and wine on its menu, and you can't go wrong for taste and ethical eating!

**Tours to Try**

I'm not new to Vancouver, having lived in the city for six years in the 1970s and travelled there for short visits every couple of years since that time. However, on a recent trip I was surprised to find how much fresh information I gleaned from taking two very entertaining and informative tours. Year round, each tour company also offers a menu of thematic tours throughout Greater Vancouver as well as farther afield to the Whistler Mountain region and by ferry to Victoria.

**Urban Adventures**, an affiliate of West Coast Sightseeing, introduces walking-minded visitors to Vancouver's oldest neighborhoods, **Gastown and Chinatown**, located in the downtown core. With a value-priced two-hour tour for CAD$25, visitors discover the city's 19th century history and hear inspiring tales of gentrification which started in the 1970s as an alternative to the wrecking ball fate of many buildings. As a favorite focal point of locals and visitors alike, this area of Vancouver continues to develop impressive new shops and restaurants each year as more authentic heritage conversions are added to these history-rich streets. Two hours fairly flashed
Two hours fairly flashed by with my story-telling guide, Blaise Sack, who clearly knew his way around the neighborhoods which he views with considerable affection. Landsea Tours' 24-passenger busses are easy to access, with large picture windows for sightseeing. Landsea Tours

**Landsea Tours & Adventures** offers a generously-long **Vancouver City Highlights Tour** (CAD$69 for well over four hours) and many significant stops throughout the city covering major parks, viewpoints from the hilltops to the seashore, aboriginal history, museums and Granville Island among them. With 27 years of success under his belt, four and owner, Scott Mason, still identifies himself as Chief B Washer. Starting with one small bus in 1985, he is now washing 11 comfortable, picture-window sightseeing busses, 24 passengers apiece, annually introducing 40,000 visitors to the highlights of the city and region.