

Hipsters, historians, and outdoorsy types alike dig this Canadian haven's international, recreational vibe.

By David Hanson | Photos by Kamil Bialous



VANCO

Gray rock walls capped by a forest of dark-green cedars, hemlocks, and spruce trees sweep past me on the right. A southwest wind white-capping Burrard Inlet propels me from the back.

I'm on a bike, over halfway around the seawall of Stanley Park, Canada's first and largest urban park and the natural land cap to downtown Vancouver, British Columbia.

It takes a while to bike around the seawall that hugs the peninsula's rim. I've had to swerve a bit to avoid oncoming bikers on the narrow, paved path, but there's little to distract from the natural beauty of a sunny late-spring day in a city where the sun is



UVERS'S *Sunny Side*

still a relative stranger, even by the middle of May.

An angry voice interrupts my mellow ride. “Oh, look at this guy!” exclaims a man as he passes me going the opposite direction. Suddenly I realize he’s referring to me, and I’m biking in the wrong direction. I feel like an idiot tourist — which I am. But I’m not a total yokel. I live in Seattle, only three hours south of here. Vancouver always seemed like a cross-border half brother to Seattle, with a few

more skyscrapers, mountains that are closer to the city, bigger bridges, and the metric system. I had missed the six or seven wrong-way signs a mile back because I was scanning the beach for photos — classic tourist move.

Despite the wrong-way episode (I turned around, joined the flow, and rode all the way back around Stanley Park), I’m not ready to relinquish my bike. Vancouver consistently ranks as one of





North America's most bike-friendly cities. As part of its mission to be the greenest city in the world by 2020, Vancouver has invested millions into a globally respected transit system. Buses, subways, the quick and cheap SeaBus ferry to North Vancouver, and the squeaky-clean SkyTrain connect mountains, city, and sea.

Plus, my cruiser bike is free from the OPUS Hotel Vancouver, which is independently owned and located in the heart of Yaletown, a former industrial zone that has quickly become the city's spendy shopping and entertainment district. Lady Gaga stayed in the hotel when she performed at nearby Rogers Arena, I'm told by a staffer, and it's refreshing to hear his genuine starstruck enthusiasm. It might be the coolest hotel in town, but there's a welcome lack of attitude in the place. And they offer tablets with each room so that Americans like me can navigate through the city without paying roaming fees.

I keep going, across the Burrard Bridge to Granville Island. Granville is a sort of frenetic artistic, but commercial village that somehow maintains a high degree of authenticity — despite the outward, neon-sign appearance of an urban amusement park.

From left: Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, and Clarence Mills. Previous page, from left: biking at English Bay, a SeaBus, and Bestie owners Dane Brown and Clinton McDougall.



It's Saturday and children are running around in yellow hard hats, eyeballs and grins bursting out of their heads. The island's concrete company has an open house, so the frantic kids climb into the cabs of cement mixers and bulldozers. It's like Willy Wonka took over Tonka for a day.

The rest of Granville is just as much a grownup

Things to Do



International Summer Night Market A kaleidoscope of Asian-style food and craft vendors, music and dance performers, and children's amusement zones. Take the SkyTrain to Bridgeport Station. From there, take the free shuttle to the market. summernightmarket.com

Grouse Mountain Do the Grind hike up or take the gondola — the Skyride — to the top for easier hikes, a zip line, coffee, and mountain pub dining. grousemountain.com

Lynn Canyon Ecology Centre A deep-dipping suspension bridge and easy trails weave through old-growth forests for short, lovely hikes. dncv.org/ecology

Aquabus It looks like a child's bath toy sputtering about in False Creek, but the Aquabus offers the best mini tour of Vancouver via False Creek. theaquabus.com

Beach Lounge in Stanley Park Try Third Beach for the fewest crowds, Kitsilano Beach Pool for supervised swimming, Pitch-n-Putt for golfers, and the mini train for cruisers. vancouver.ca/parks-recreation-culture/stanley-park.aspx

Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden Tour the garden, visit Chinatown, take a tai chi class, attend a tea ceremony, and try dragon boating. vancouverchinesegarden.com

MAP ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTTY REIFSWYDER



In an open-air wood shop, Clarence Mills, a renowned Haida First Nation wood carver, joins his apprentices in carving salmon, eagle, raven, frog, and human totems.



playland. Down Railspur Alley, studios of wood workers, sculptors, and silversmiths leave the doors open. In an open-air wood shop, Clarence Mills, an internationally renowned Haida First Nation wood carver, joins his apprentices in carving salmon, eagle, raven, frog, and human totems. The scent of cedar dust overpowers the saltwater air.

Further south from Granville Island, I bike into the more residential Mount Pleasant neighborhood. 33 Acres Brewing Co. does not look like a brewery at all: no dark, yeast-scented interior with giant cauldrons. Instead, its bright white interior, ordained with the occasional small potted plant on a rustic ladder, looks more like the lobby of a modern design firm. The predominate Vancouver urbanite, 20- and 30-somethings dressed like Mumford & Sons, drink IPAs and dark ambers out of 24-oz. jars, while noshing on late brunch from the Waffle Weekend food truck parked curbside. I would never actually say the word “nosh” out loud, but it seems most appropriate here. It’s all very West Coast, but somehow different, managing to be even more cultivated and immaculately rustic than the foodie scene in Seattle.



Where to Eat & Drink

Hawksworth 801 W. Georgia St.
hawksworthrestaurant.com

Bestie 105 E. Pender *bestie.ca*

The Keefer Bar 135 Keefer St.,
Chinatown *thekeefebar.com*

Long Table Distillery 1451 Hornby St.
longtabledistillery.com

33 Acres Brewing Co. 15 W. 8th Ave.
33acresbrewing.com

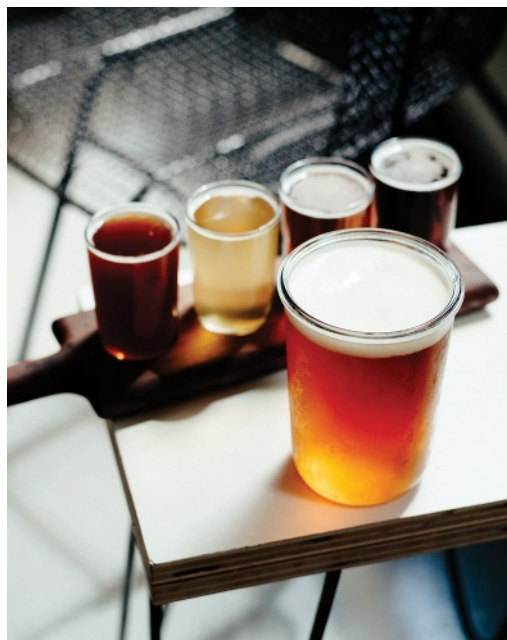
Finch's Tea and Coffee House
353 W. Pender St. *finchteahouse.com*



The Grouse Grind is a brutally steep 2.9-kilometer trail that ascends from a North Vancouver neighborhood to the top of Grouse Mountain.

My job is to introduce you to 3,000 years of Chinese architecture and history,” says docent Hayne Wai. “Does anyone here have an advanced degree in Chinese history? Is anyone here a botanist?” he asks our small tour group. No one answers. “Ok, I’m in the clear,” he says with a laugh.

We’re in the tea room of the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden. In a show of friendship between China and Canada and in an effort to revitalize a crumbling Chinatown, the two coun-



tries partnered to ship cedar and ginkgo beams, limestone rock, and flora from China's garden city, Suzhou, to Vancouver in the mid 1980s.

The garden is tiny, less than a square block, but dense layers and snaking paths give the sense of a spacious secret garden. Wai tells us of the classical gardener's attention to the yin and yang — rough stones beside smooth ones in the pathways, soft, bright magnolia, cherry, and azalea flowers against the sharp, dark-gray limestone rocks. It's a metaphor for this entire city: Above the flowering trees and red maples of the garden, Vancouver's straight-lined, shimmering glass towers make a bright yang against a backdrop yin of curved, jagged, dark-green

mountains.

I thank Wai, assure him I picked up most of the 3,000 years of history in our 45-minute tour, and re-enter the city streets. Chinatown essentially begins at the garden. Keefer Street acts as a sort of Chinese-style public market, and shop awnings shade fruit, vegetable, and medicinal root bins that extend onto the sidewalk. Shop owners seem to be perpetually sweeping their floors amidst the yellow-hued mosaic of roots, mushrooms, noodles, and produce.

At the bottom of the Keefer Street hill, an overtly Western storefront appears, and I see another group of Vancouver young professionals. Twenty-

Clockwise from left: Hawksworth shrimp salad, the Grouse Grind, beer at 33 Acres Brewing Co., and Danielle Tatarin at The Keefer Bar



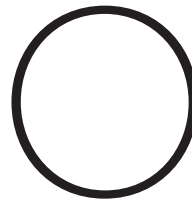
Where to Stay

OPUS Hotel Vancouver
322 Davie St. 866.642.6787
vancouver.opushotel.com



some things with unnecessary wool hats and rolled-up designer jeans sit street-side around a gas fire and sip enticingly colored cocktails. Inside, The Keefer Bar is black-walled and dimly lit, but soon Danielle Tatarin, manager of The Keefer Bar, appears with a genuine, reserved smile, and bright-red shoes. She pours me a Live You Long Time (gin, oolong tea syrup, lemon, and Japanese Sencha kombucha). My eyes adjust, and the bar reveals its subtle take on a Chinese herbal apothecary: Eastern medicine anatomy antiques, Chinese fans, and backlit silk screens in the walls. As I sip my Long Time, Danielle mixes a rosemary simple syrup, one of 20 syrups (and 25 bitters) they make in-house. The apothecary thing isn't all just a hipster ruse.

For dinner, I walk a block away to Pender Street. Bestie offers another youthful take on a classic old-timey item, the German sausage. Begun by two buddies with help from family, friends, and a crowd-sourcing campaign, Bestie doesn't embellish. They sell beer, pretzels, mustards, and sausage (bison, pork, and veggie), along with the German fast-food dish currywurst, which is made from sliced brats and served with curry ketchup and fries. Bestie has been open for over a year, and the owners are here tonight. Clearly, Vancouver has a strong dose of these craft merchants, people focused on doing one thing — cocktails or sausage — and doing it right: with their own hands and local ingredients.



On my second day, I ditch the bike and head for the hills. Locals see the wall of green

mountains looming over the city as mere hills relative to the snaggle-toothed behemoths that lie deeper into British Columbia's Coast Range. One London ex-pat put it this way: "In London, people meet you and ask what you do for a living. Here, people ask if you ski or snowboard, and then they ask what your time is on the Grind."

The Grouse Grind is a steep 2.9-kilometer trail that ascends from a North Vancouver residential neighborhood to the top of Grouse Mountain. A few local mountaineers cut the trail over three decades ago so they could train in their backyard. Today the obsession with the Grind is so intense that hikers have cards stamped at the bottom and then at the top to measure official times.

As I start out on the Grind, I get passed by fitness junkies, I pass older visitors, and I overhear gossip from a few Yaletown-types out for a morning mountain climb. I knew my thighs would feel the burn, but I didn't expect a sore neck from craning upward into the canopy of 150-ft. cedar and fir trees.

As challenging as the Grind is on the way up, it seems worse to hobble back down, so I take the gondola to the base. The views of the city and the water over the treetops I just walked beneath are worth every cent of the \$10 ticket.

I clean up for a late lunch at Hawksworth, a reservation-only reward after the Grind. My waiter brings me a salad that includes shrimp, watermelon, and thai basil, followed by house-made agnolotti and seared bass. Chef Hawksworth grew up in Vancouver, trained as a chef in London, and returned to his hometown because he noticed a lack of fine dining — and because he loves to hike and ski. His food is purely Vancouver: modern, closely connected to the surrounding sea and land, Asian influenced, and meticulously neat.

It doesn't take long for the Grind to come up in small talk with the waiter. He's glad I went up it. He knows his best time — 48 minutes — but that was years ago, he says modestly. He'd be at more like an hour now. He asks how I did. I say I'm a tourist, and then I lie, saying I didn't know about stamping my card. Maybe next time. ★

David Hanson is a contributing editor who writes about travel and culture.