

Scenic West Coast Canada 7 day Tour Cathy Hewett

Flying on Air Canada for the first time to Vancouver & then over to Victoria certainly was the most direct service from Brisbane. The journey took 14 hours to Vancouver on their 787 departing at 10.40am and then a quick hop over to Victoria & we are settling into this beautiful country.

Tina Djuratic was our Scenic tour guide for our trip, and she was amazing. She met us all at luggage collection with her SCENIC sign and on the bus to wait for the late ones!! After a quick introduction, we were off to Butchart's Garden for an hour look around and an afternoon tea in their restaurant. There were a lot of flowers (especially bulbs) which were out despite the cold. This place is so well looked after that there are always beautiful flowers no matter what time of the year. You could easily spend a whole day during the summer months here exploring all the different gardens - it is very impressive. However, the paths were quite narrow throughout gardens so we can imagine that the place would be super busy in summer with a lot of people. There is also a beautiful stop in Victoria that everyone should experience, even if it is quite crowded.



Butchart's Gardens do put on summer concerts & fireworks through summer which would be lovely to see. There is also a carousel to enjoy for a couple of dollars in the centre of the park. Several restaurant, cafe options plus gift shop that is huge. During winter there is an ice rink but it was cleared away a couple of days before we got there!!

On most Scenic itineraries you don't go straight to Victoria after arrival into Canada. You would normally stay in Vancouver & you do arrive early so consider either arriving a full day earlier to explore a bit more or if you feel you might like a shower or a little nap arrange for an early check in so that you have access to your room as soon as you arrive.

Fairmont Empress Hotel in Victoria was our home for 2 nights. Even without the ivy it is still a beautiful hotel - impressive foyer area & lots & lots of restaurant & bar options inside. One of our free choice options was to have afternoon tea there which does have a dress standard so please let your clients know no shorts at all - the girls that did this option loved it & were very full so no need for lunch beforehand!!

Breakfast is included throughout but not all other meals so please beware of expenses on tour. Victoria has many restaurants & cafes in easy walking distance down the street from the hotel so it is not hard to find something to eat there. The Fairmont is on the continuation of the main street opposite the harbour.

I selected the Horse & Carriage free choice option which was a lovely hour long look around our little area & up into the park. It was raining but we managed to stay dry until our 10-minute walk back to

the hotel. No chance to get out to take photos though so all a little blurry - commentary by our fabulous guide was good & informative. Fascinating history as always.

Lots chose to do the Whale Watching by Zodiac - unfortunately no whales or orcas - wrong time of the year - but they had special floatation suits that they had to wear which not particularly waterproof but good to keep the wind out. It would have been all worth it if they did see some whales!!

The Hop-On/Hop-Off bus tour was great according to many that did this at their own cost. Chinatown has interesting with Fan Tan Alley known as the narrowest lane in Canada - built so that the horses couldn't chase the criminals down there, so they got away!! Easy grid pattern streets in Victoria so you can't really get lost. Head to the marina & you will find the hotel. Markets are set up throughout summer plus their beautiful hanging baskets of flowers throughout the warmer months too.

After what was two very easy days, we got onboard our bus & caught the ferry from Victoria to Vancouver (around 2 hours travel time). Our Scenic bus had the Scenic imagery on it but not all do as the seasons & number of groups start up in earnest. USB connection points & power points on board for everyone if needed - 2 per seat - toilet onboard but not recommended it use if possible - small & cramped apparently -loads of room above for backpacks etc.

On Scenic tours everyone has 1 larger suitcase that is portaged for free but if you have anymore you need to pay around CAD\$5 per bag everytime for portage in & out of the hotels so this could easily add up as you go along with only 1 or 2 night stays throughout. If you are happy to take the bag yourself then obviously no charge.

When we arrived in Vancouver we had a coach tour around the city itself & out to Stanley Park with a stop at the Totem Poles for toilets & gifts & then onto the Capilano Suspension Bridge which was a fantastic place to walk around plus the bridge, tree walk & cliff walk great if you aren't too scared of heights. This would normally be done on the day after you arrive into Vancouver & Scenic do get there 30 minutes before it opens to the public which would be awesome as it gets very busy trying to cross the bridge so the early entry allows for photos on the bridge without everyone getting in the way or frustrated for not moving on. Quick tour from their staff to explain about the area & why it was built in the first place & then the rest of the time is theirs to explore with many different walk options plus a cafe & gift shop as always!! A good degree of fitness is worth it here as there can be many steps on some of the walks but wonderful if you go and do them.



The night is ours to explore a little with loads of shops & restaurants again nearby the Fairmont Vancouver in the centre of the city. Straight down on of the roads is the Vancouver Cruise Terminal which is easy to spot. HOHO bus again a good option to get your bearings etc.

After a 5.30am wake-up call it is now time to head off to catch the Rocky Mountaineer & like all Scenic clients we also had the wonderful experience of the GoldLeaf service. So well organized, I have to say. With Scenic we were collected from our hotel & dropped to our carriage once we were allowed on. No waiting in the station itself - so easy!! The station was busy and had many clients who had booked direct with Rocky Mountaineer or other tour operators. It also had had cafes and other small shops inside for a quick coffee or breakfast.



We all had assigned seats and therefore assigned dining times too categorized as First or Second dining times. These changes alternatively each day, if you were on the first group on day 1, you will then be on the second on day 2, vice versa. If you are dining in second group you will get a small scone just after the first group goes down to tie you over and cheese & crackers plus wine at lunchtime.

Narrow spiral staircase to get to the seating level but there is a lift service you need it to get up & down. Toilets & dining plus outside viewing platform on the lower level. Amazing food as you would expect & drinks flowing all day. Beautiful scenery & interesting railway history.

The Goldleaf cabin itself is amazing but there is no shade from the sun really & I think though summer it could get quite hot sometimes up there. There are many long cargo trains that also use the same tracks so viewing from the dining cart or Silverleaf level would be interrupted on occasions on one side of the train.

Kamloops is a great little town 1/2 way along the tracks. We stayed at Doubletree by Hilton but there are around 6 hotels that can be used & those on your carriage could be staying in different hotels. Restaurants down the main street to choose from for dinner or a drink if you need it!!

Another early morning start with us all back onboard by 6.30am really to roll!!! Rolling onto Lake Louise or Banff for our train - others could go to Jasper as the season opens up more. This is the part of the trip that really has the better scenery. The Rockies are amazing & the higher you go more snow & animals came out. Altitude sickness does affect more than you think with one of our girls having a terrible episode on the 2nd day as we climbed even higher. She was taken medications which seemed to have had some influence, but the medical response team was outstanding - after the radio call there was a team of 6 there with all types of medical equipment plus oxygen. She found it very hard to breathe suddenly & clasped into one of the chairs. Around 45 minutes of medical treatment & a very easy rest of the day had her feeling much better thankfully. She was the only one that we knew about that had this type of medical need on our train.



We stopped at Lake Louise with just a few going on to Banff on our trip. Our Scenic bus met us here & took us all the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise for our 1-night stay. Not a long drive & arriving at the Chateau was wonderful. This is a destination all of its own. The Chateau is enormous with many different wings filled with shopping & restaurants & cafes. The Scenic rooms have the wonderful lake view which is a beautiful way to wake up I am sure. Evergreen are on the flip side of the hotel but again with lovely mountain views most of the time. These rooms are not huge I have to say compared to our twin rooms in a different wing of the hotel, but the view was amazing. Scenic guests get free choice dining here

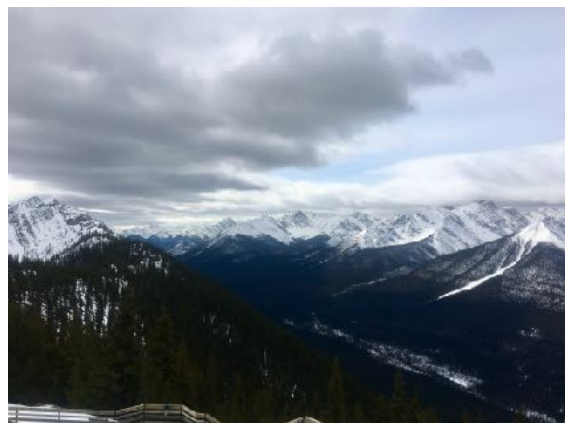
which quite a few options on offer. Reservations are recommended during the busier months, but it allows for new friends to dine together if you wish.

The lake was still frozen when we arrived, however we were advised that it would only be available to walk on for the next couple of weeks before the defrosting starts & makes it too dangerous. Avalanches & animals coming out from the winter hibernations are also something to keep in mind if out walking the trails at our time of the year. My roomie & I tried to walk to one of the lakes, but an avalanche had blocked the path, so we turned back. Summer-time has canoes & row boats plus lots of hiking trails open for use. If you are there in the winter-time though like us as Fairmont guest there are shoe chains that can be strapped to your normal shoes if you wanted to go out exploring to avoid slipping on the ice. They are CAD\$10 to rent for those not staying at the Fairmont. Christmas time has the Ice Castle & Ice rink to enjoy as well for everyone.

This is the opportunity for you to meet & have photos with a retired Canadian Mountie. Generally, the meeting is around 30 minutes with photos afterwards. Interesting to hear the history of the Mounties in Canada. Free choice dining options are here at the Chateau as there is nowhere nearby to eat so you have the choose of 4 different dining options for the evening.

After another wonderful night sleep, morning exploration & Mountie meeting it was off to Banff to have our last couple of nights stay before heading back to Australia. Another gorgeous property, the Fairmont Banff Springs is 5 minutes out of Banff town but only a 20 minutes walk & also on the town bus route so for CAD\$2 you can jump on the bus to get back to the hotel. Fairmont does offer transfer to anywhere in Banff town, but you need to make your own way back hence the walking, bus or a taxi.

Fairmont Banff Springs is another beautiful hotel which is similar to Lake Louise with many shopping & dining options onsite plus a beautiful spa with different temperature mineral pools to use with your spa pass.



Our Free choice options here were an afternoon spa treatment which was use of the pools not an actual massage, snow shoeing at Sunshine Village or a Canyon walk. Many chose the canyon walk but due to the ice melting this was a very wet/sloppy option although still beautiful to see the trip did require a lot of walking & a few stopped before actually reaching the end as they were too hot!! Snow shoeing was amazing with a 20 minute gondola ride to the mid level slopes at Sunshine Village. Strapping on our snow shoes & exploring the area off the ski runs for safety. Snowman making & nature talk while enjoy a hot chocolate & cookies. Loads of fun & laughter was had by our group.

In the morning before our Free choice we had a wonderful time on the Banff Gondola taking us to the top of the beautiful mountains for photos & an 8 minute movie if time permitted. It was quite windy in parts but the photos were amazing & the view of Banff extraordinary. Many many steps too due to the area so a decent level of fitness is needed if you want to go right to the weather station. Shopping & a coffee shop here is needed.

Banff town is gorgeous. Easy to get around with loads & loads of shopping available. Souvenir shops, restaurants & cafes, pubs & bakeries plus a few grocery shops for cheaper souvenirs if wanted. Skiing in Banff is from November until mid May depending on the level of snow on the mountains if clients are interested. We had a free morning before heading to Calgary to catch our flight home so a few hired a car & went off to a wolf sanctuary others took a horse trail ride up behind the Fairmont on a dedicated track & the rest of us were going to go on a helicopter ride (all at our own expense) but the weather on the last day was rainy & the clouds too low so this unfortunately was cancelled so the only thing left to do was to shop!!

If helicopters are able to run they leave from Canmore about 20 minutes coach ride away from Banff. There are several companies that offer this & they can be booked in Banff town at a couple of the visitor information shops. I was lucky enough to do this at Christmas time when we were there & it was absolutely amazing. Being high over the mountains & seeing the area from above is not to be missed if the weather & timing is working in your favour.

An awesome experience I will not forget & definitely one that you won't either.