

25 FREE Things To Do In Vancouver!

We love this city, and we love free stuff, so it seemed logical to combine the two and compile this list of 25 free things to do in Vancouver. Think of it as the ultimate checklist for year-round activities - all free of charge. Some are indoor, some outdoor. Some are exciting, others relaxing. Take your pick. We know you have plenty to choose from, and at \$0, you can do them over and over again.



1. Visit Granville Island

Once home to some serious industry (hence its former name, Industrial Island), Granville Island is now one of the best places for families to experience Vancouver.

Early in the morning, the first Aquabus of the day putters across False Creek, heading towards Granville Island. The morning sun might just have barely risen, still blinking sleepily down through the clouds. The sounds of the island, too, are likely beginning to stir. Fruit-filled crates destined for the Public Market clap against the ground and the cries of resident seagulls echo against the water. Somewhere in all of this is the mysterious secret of Granville Island, which draws some 10.5 million people each year. Rumours have it that there's some magic recipe that makes visitors long to return to the island.



2. Hang out in Stanley Park

Stroll along the sea wall, picnic on the greens, smell the roses...it doesn't get much better than Vancouver's pride and joy.

Picnicking here is obviously a no-brainer for Vancouver visitors or locals, but actually narrowing down the exact site is another matter. You could have a memorable picnic practically anywhere in Stanley Park: a secluded spot on the seawall, a bench at Prospect Point, a patch of grass in the rose garden. That said, we like Ferguson Point for its views of English Bay. Previously a military lookout, the area sits right by the water. The large grassy area is an inviting space to plop down on a blanket, or you can chill on one of the benches overlooking the water.



3. People-watch in Vancouver neighbourhoods

How do visitors really get to know the city? By hanging out in neighbourhoods and soaking in the vibes.

It would take weeks, if not months, to see all there is to see in each neighbourhood, so you can focus on just a few in great detail or hit the highlights of them all. To help you narrow down the choices, we've provided this guide to Vancouver neighborhoods.

- > Chinatown
- > Gastown
- > Granville Island
- > Granville Street
- > Robson Street
- > West End
- > Yaletown
- > Commercial Drive
- > Kitsilano
- > Punjabi Market



4. Hike the Grouse Grind

The famous Grouse Grind hike is a must-do for outdoor enthusiasts. Your legs might hate you afterward, but the views at the top are incredible. Walking is free, though many hikers like to pay the \$10 for the gondola ride down.

From sophisticated entertainment to unspoiled nature, Grouse Mountain is the pre-eminent all-in-one, four season destination with something for everyone. The wilderness paradise is located 15-minutes from downtown Vancouver, and the famous Grouse Mountain Skyride (North America's largest aerial tram system) takes visitors on a one-mile aerial journey to the Alpine Station, 3,700 feet above sea level. Breathtaking panoramic views of the city, sea and surrounding mountains unfold, culminating with a summit altitude of 4,100 feet. Grouse Mountain was named by a visiting hiking party in 1894, after they encountered a blue grouse bird on the alpine slopes. Today, Grouse Mountain enjoys the status of Vancouver's most visited attraction receiving over 1.2 million visitors each year.



5. Go Celeb-spotting

Where, oh where do the stars hang out? Playing celeb-spotting is totally free and surprisingly easy.



6. Visit the Christ Church Cathedral

Designed in Gothic Revival style, the church features ceiling beams of Douglas fir, intricately designed interior arches and a number of stained glass windows - no wonder it's declared a Class A Heritage site.



7. Mountain biking in the North Shore

Nothing like getting air and getting dirty to experience the best of Vancouver's North Shore.



8. Walk around Canada Place

This is simply a great place to relax and watch the cruise ships glide into the city. Plus, the photo-ops are fantastic.



Photo: flickr / iwona kellie

9. Tour Vancouver's Art

Vancouver's art galleries never cease showcasing some of the most cutting-edge art in the country. Cost of perusing: free.



10. Visit the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver

Staying here might cost a pretty penny, but it doesn't cost a cent to check out "the Grand Lady," which has become a verifiable tourist destination for its distinctive history and architecture.



11. Window shop at Vancouver's best shopping areas

Robson Street, Yaletown, Commercial Drive...the city's shopping neighbourhoods give new meaning to "shop 'til you drop."

As a cosmopolitan, coastal city, Vancouver's style ranges from haute couture to cozy flannels and fleece. Shopping in Vancouver offers this same diverse range with high fashion boutiques, designer label, accessory and jewelry stores, to extensive shop-til-you-drop malls offering something for everyone. There are unique areas all around Vancouver for clothing, art, ceramics, furniture and much more waiting for you to discover.



- **12. Hang out at UBC**

Is someone in the family getting ready to apply to college? Take a tour of the University of British Columbia - it's one of the most beautiful campuses in the country.



- **13. Gaze at the stars at MacMillan Observatory**

Right next to the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre, the observatory is admission by donation and offers public viewings on Friday and Saturday evenings (July 1 to Labour Day), and Saturday evenings (Labour Day to July 1).



- **14. Take a Scenic Drive**

There's no cost for admission to enjoy gorgeous Vancouver scenery. Take the legendary Sea-to-Sky Highway to get to Whistler and experience glimmering turquoise inlets, old-growth rainforests and craggy cliffs.



- **15. Explore Athletes Village**

Vancouver's newest neighbourhood is at the Southeast corner of False Creek, just steps from Science World. Grab a snack, explore the nearby habitat island, and check out some interesting public art installations.



- **16. Richmond Night Market**

During the summer, this Chinese night market is free and definitely worth the trip to scope out (and dig into) fried squid, fish balls and Chinese knick-knacks.



- **17. Play disc golf at Queen Elizabeth Park**

Get some friends together and play a round of disc golf, free at Queen Elizabeth Park, one of Vancouver's most popular recreation areas. The course is located near the Pitch & Putt Golf Course. If Frisbees aren't your thing, pick up a tennis racquet and smack the ball around at any of the 18 free courts.



- **18. Visit Capilano Salmon Hatchery**

It may sound strange, but viewing the salmon runs at the free Capilano Salmon Hatchery taps you into the majesty of nature and pulls you into the wonderful life cycle of the salmon that come through here.



- **19. Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Park**

Not to be confused with the adjacent Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Gardens, which charges \$10 admission, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Park provides the public with an opportunity to experience elements of a traditional Chinese garden — all free of charge.

The differences between the park and garden are mostly in the materials that were used to make the park - most of the park's originated in Vancouver, while the garden's materials were imported from China. Have your picnic underneath a weeping willow tree or on the rocks that line the meandering path through the park. If you want to walk off your lunch, take a complimentary tour while enjoying some Chinese tea at the authentic Chinese Garden.



20. Visit Vancouver's free museums

The city's handful of free museums (BC Golf Museum) and learning centres (Lynn Canyon Ecology Centre) offer a great way to spend the day without spending money.



21. Watch the water at Lonsdale Quay

Perfect for those that want a relaxing afternoon, the quay offers seaside breezes that make this a perfect picnic spot.



22. Wander around Lynn Canyon

This is one of Vancouver's most popular free activities. Hit the hiking trail, and be sure to brave the Lynn Canyon Suspension Bridge for epic views.



23. Visit the beach (and go skinny-dipping at Wreck Beach)

Vancouver's quintessential beach experience presents views of the mountain, water, downtown core and forest - all absolutely free of charge. If you're up for it, don your birthday suit and lounge at Wreck Beach, the city's official nude beach.



24. Watch the cruise ships go by at Dundarave Pier

Located in West Vancouver, Dundarave Pier is a prime spot to take in iconic views - Lion's Gate and Stanley Park.



25. Tour Vancouver's Olympic venues

For future Olympians and Olympic fans alike, a look at Vancouver's venues from the 2010 Winter Games is a fun way to commemorate these incredible events.