

For dramatic natural beauty, amazing wildlife and top-class courses Canada is hard to beat

Wild at heart

Canada is vast. The mountains, the skies, the seas, the forests, the hospitality are all on a different scale from anything we're used to on this side of the Atlantic. Add an abundance of supremely scenic golf courses, whale watching and spectacular sea plane excursions into the equation and Canada makes for a truly captivating long-haul summer destination.

After the nine-hour flight into the cosmopolitan city of Vancouver in British Columbia on Canada's western edge, the visitor has a number of options. We chose to take the short ferry crossing to Vancouver Island, where you'll find Victoria, British Columbia's vibrant capital.

A fascinating city, Victoria is said to be more English than England – high tea is served at the Empress Hotel and restaurants battle to produce the city's finest fish and chips.

Despite this reputation, the city is not comparable to England's seaside resorts. It's a bustling, trendy place where sea planes buzz in and out of the harbour and speed boats take excited tourists to see groups of orca whales – if you can spare

a few hours from your golfing schedule this is an experience that shouldn't be missed.

Bear Mountain Golf Resort is just 20 minutes from downtown Victoria. This massive complex has a Jack and Steve Nicklaus-designed 18-hole course at its heart – a second layout is due to be ready for play in 2007.

At over 7,200 yards from the back (Golden) tees, Bear Mountain offers a stern test of your long game. The greens are undulating and nerve-shatteringly fast and, typical of many Nicklaus courses, there's a considerable amount of water to contend with.

Spotting a tongue-in-cheek commercial opportunity, the owners have placed a machine on the par-3 11th that vends golf balls at \$3 a pop. As the hole is a copy of the famous island-green 17th at Sawgrass it sees a good deal of custom.

Another feature is a real 19th hole – a 100-yard downhill teaser where it's green or bust. Anything that misses the target will disappear forever down the surrounding 200ft cliffs.

With 15 courses in the vicinity of Victoria the visiting golfer is spoiled for choice. You'd be hard pressed to find a track in British Columbia that doesn't have spectacular panoramas but, as vistas go, Olympic View is difficult to beat.

There is a ball machine on the par-3 11th at Bear Mountain.

A copy of the island-green 17th at Sawgrass, it sees a lot of custom

more interesting – attractive tree-lined fairways are set into the hillside on extremely testing holes. Effective course management is essential to negotiate well-placed water hazards and perplexing changes in elevation.

Returning to the mainland, head north of Vancouver on the famous Sea to Sky Highway that clings precariously to the mountainside and winds its way along the Howe Sound. Stop off at the curiously-named copper mining outpost of Furry Creek. The copper mine is a long-distant memory – the village is now best known for a wonder of golfing architecture. This 6,000-yard layout has been carved into the hillside and stretches some 600ft from its lowest to highest points. This massive change in elevation gives an idea of the type of holes you face.

From the high terraces on the front nine, where missing the fairway means a guaranteed lost ball, to the spectacular signature par-3 14th jutting out to sea, golf at Furry Creek is not the game as we know it. You can't expect to go out and play your normal game here and bank 36 Stableford points. However, get past the novelty and you will be thoroughly entertained. And be sure to take advantage of the stunning, Japanese-style clubhouse afterwards.

Drive further north and you'll come across the resort of Whistler. Best known as a ski destination, it is also a busy, activity-packed town in the summer. Having



Heading for a fall: it can be hard to keep your mind on your golf game at Olympic View

expanded rapidly over the past 20 years, it is now filled with luxurious hotels and lodges and has become a top holiday spot for Canadians and visitors alike. It also boasts a couple of cracking courses.

Nicklaus North, about a mile outside town, is a superb test, while at Chateau Whistler – a huge 550-bedroom complex with tennis courts and swimming pools – a Robert Trent Jones Junior design offers mesmerising views. It is an absolute pleasure to play and there's a good chance you'll spot a black bear or a bald eagle on the way round. Steady play will be rewarded and a number of holes offer a certain degree of forgiveness.

About 25 minutes' drive from Whistler is Pemberton – and Big Sky Golf & Country Club. Of all the layouts in British Columbia this is the one that Brits will associate with most readily. The fairways are immaculate – never will you have played off a

springier lie or achieved such a pleasing strike. Also appealing is the backdrop – the dark slopes of Mount Currie in the near distance serve to flatter even the most poorly struck shot.

With jaw-dropping scenery, wildlife you've only seen before on a David Attenborough nature programme on television and fine courses it is easy to see why visiting golfers are going wild for British Columbia as a summer destination.

It's a pleasure to play at Chateau Whistler and there's a good chance you'll spot a black bear or a bald eagle on the course

played host to the PGA Tour's Bell Canadian Open in 2005. Considered by many pros as the toughest test they faced all year.

Westwood Plateau Golf & Country Club

t: 001 800 580 0785
w: westwoodplateau.golf.com
Course details: par 72, 6,355 yards
GF: CAN\$99-CAN\$159

At 1,300ft above sea level, Westwood Plateau offers stunning panoramas over lower Vancouver and to Mount Baker on the horizon. Wide fairways are lined by dense forest and overlooked by sheer cliffs – so stray from the short grass at your peril!

OKANAGAN Predator Ridge

t: 001 250 542 9404

w: predatorridge.com
Course details: par 72, 6,000-plus yards
GF: CAN\$58-CAN\$105
Three loops of nine offer three 18-hole layouts all over 6,000 yards long. Host to the 2000 Canadian Skins Game, Predator Ridge is a test for even the most accomplished.

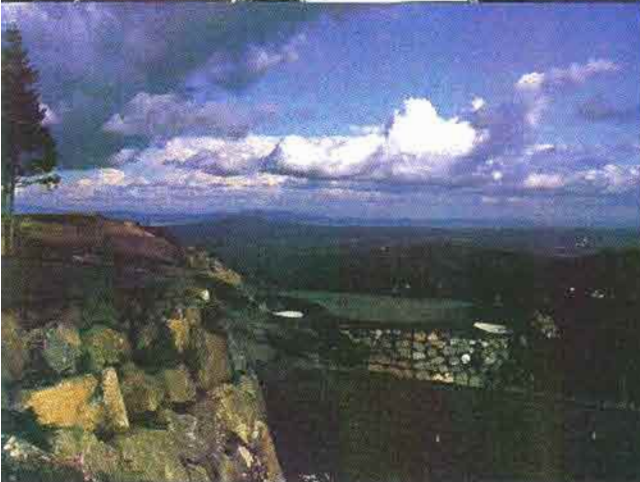
KOOTENAY ROCKIES Greywolf GC

t: 001 250 341 4100

w: greywolfgolf.com
Course details: par 72, 6,190 yards
GF: CAN\$79-CAN\$119
At 4,000ft above sea level Greywolf offers awesome panoramas and equally awesome holes. The Doug Carrick design will keep you on your toes from your opening tee shot to your last putt. Watch out for the 6th hole called Cliffhanger – the name says it all.



Above: the bustling harbour in Vancouver



Left: it's green or bust at Bear Mountain Golf Resort's 19th



Right: Canada's wildlife is something to behold

BRITISH COLUMBIA ESSENTIALS

Currency: Canadian Dollar.

£1 = CAN\$2.1 (approx)

Temperature:

April: average low 5°C, average high 13°C.

July: low 13°C, high 22°C.

October: low 6°C, high 14°C.

January: low 0°C, high 5°C.

Time difference:

British Columbia is eight hours behind GMT.

FIVE OTHER MUST PLAY COURSES

We have concentrated on the British Columbia region for this feature but Canada boasts many other classic golf courses. We've picked out five of the best – although each one offers a test to players of all abilities, the biggest challenge is to keep your mind on your game in light of the amazing views on offer.

VANCOUVER ISLAND

Victoria Golf & Country Club

t: 001 250 598 4321

w: victoriagolf.com

Course details: par 70, 6,015 yards

GF: CAN\$75–CAN\$180

Often described as the "Pebble Beach of the North", Victoria G&CC is the oldest club in Canada (it was founded way back in 1893). Play here and you may feel at home as the course has the

feel of a British links, especially when the wind starts to get up.

VANCOUVER

Shaughnessy Golf & Country Club

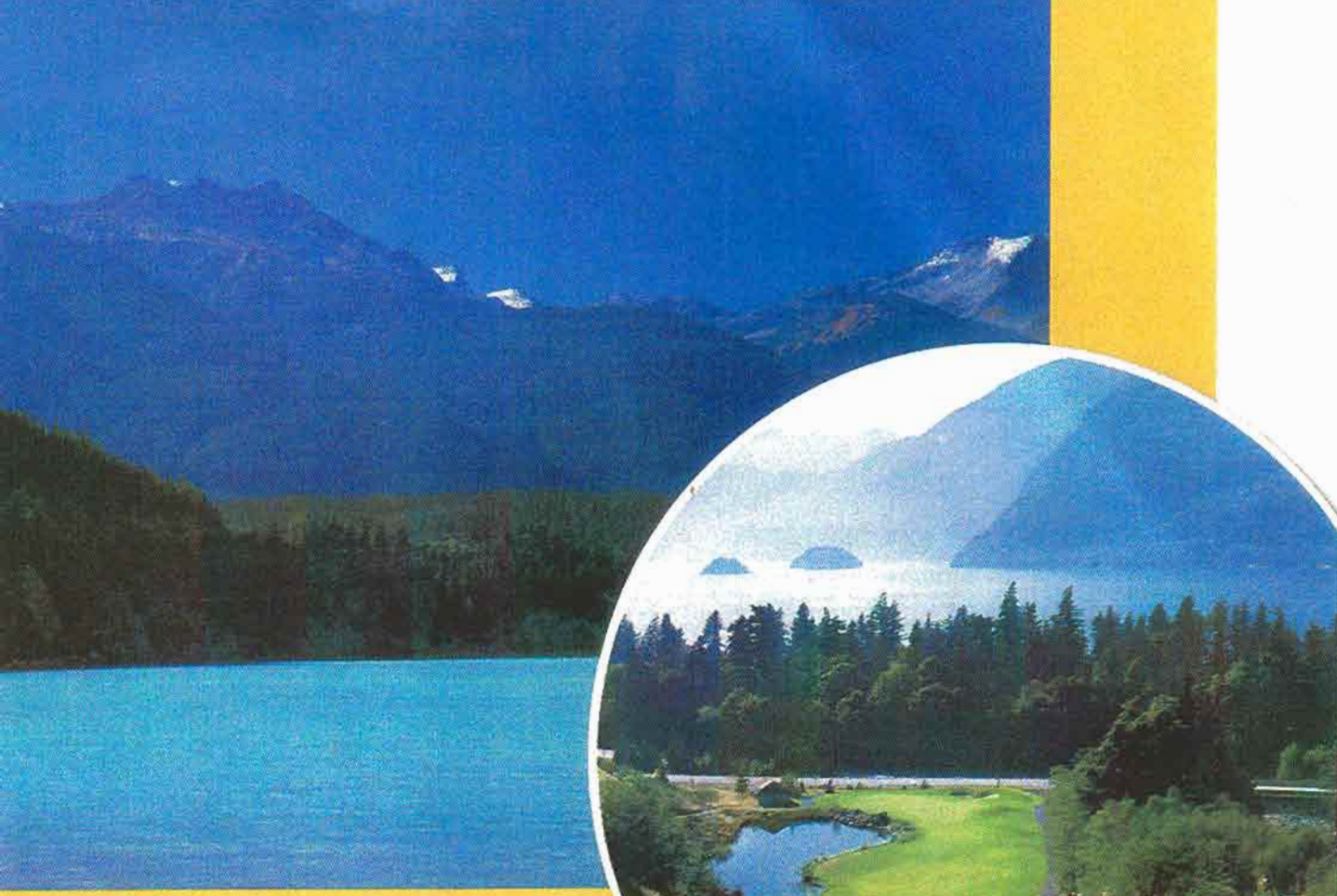
t: 001 604 266 4141

w: shaughnessy.org

Course details: par 73, 6,344 yards

GF: telephone for rates

Set right in the heart of Vancouver, Shaughnessy



Furry Creek features huge changes in elevation. Don't expect to play to handicap around this 6,000-yard visual spectacle

The Olympic mountains provide a dramatic skyline that can distract even the most focused golfer. That said, the course is a more forgiving one than Bear Mountain – it's a layout that players of all abilities will enjoy.

Excuse the use of a tired football cliché but Olympic View is a course of two halves. The outward stretch is rather flat parkland and not particularly memorable or challenging; the back nine is far

GETTING THERE

Air Canada (w: aircanada.com) and **British Airways** (w: ba.com) operate regular flights to Vancouver from London.

WHERE TO PLAY

Bear Mountain Golf Resort
t: 001 250 744 2327
w: bearmountaingolf.com
Course details: par 72, 7,212 yards
GF: CAN\$55-CAN\$125

Olympic View GC
t: 001 250 474 3673
w: golfbc.com
Course details: par 72,

6,534 yards
GF: CAN\$35-CAN\$75

Furry Creek G&CC
t: 001 888 922 9462
w: golfbc.com
Course details: par 72, 6,025 yards
GF: CAN\$59-CAN\$109

Big Sky G&CC
t: 001 604 894 6106
w: bigskygolf.com
Course details: par 72, 7,001 yards
GF: CAN\$49-CAN\$99

Nicklaus North Golf Club
t: 001 604 938 9898

w: golfbc.com
Course details: par 71, 6,908 yards
GF: CAN\$60-CAN\$210

Chateau Whistler
t: 001 877 938 2092
w: fairmont.com/whistler
Course details: par 72, 6,635 yards
GF: telephone for rates

WHERE TO STAY

Delta Victoria Ocean Pointe
t: 001 250 360 2999
w: deltahotels.com
Set on the edge of Victoria's bustling harbour, this hotel is ideal if you wish to explore

the city. Elegant rooms from CAN\$105pppn.

Tigh Na Mara
t: 001 800 663 7373
w: tigh-na-mara.com
This is a luxury seaside resort and spa. Accommodation is in large condominiums. Prices start from CAN\$149pppn.

Chateau Whistler
t: 001 604 938 8000
w: fairmont.com/whistler
A 550-bedroom complex, with a sumptuous restaurant, outdoor pool and lively piano bar. Rates start at around CAN\$250pppn.