



Try Trickle Creek for glorious golf amid stunning landscapes

British Columbia

The secret's out about North America's latest up-and-coming golf destination. Peter Ellegard ventured to Canada's far west province and found a land of birdies and eagles ready to welcome visiting golfers

The sharp call of a bald eagle pierces the air as you fire a five iron towards the green. You look up to see it circling over the stately pine trees along-side. Ahead, in the distance, the snow-capped Olympic Mountains loom up in stark contrast to the rich blue sky and verdant fairways.

This is golf, British Columbia-style – where eagles dare and birdies beckon. Canada's western-most province may not immediately spring to mind as a golfing destination, but it is a golfing wonderland just waiting to be discovered by British golfers. Word is already out. BC was named Undiscovered Golf Destination of the Year by global golf tourism industry association IAGTO (the International Association of Golf Tour Operators) in its annual awards in 2004.

It isn't hard to see why, either. There are dozens of champion-

ship-standard courses in scenic settings from Vancouver Island and Vancouver on its west coast, where some courses stay open all year and even palm trees flourish, to the craggy mountains of BC's Kootenay Rockies, where dramatic views and heart-stopping carries will leave you on a natural high.

And in between there's golf on and around the slopes of lively summer and winter mountain resort Whistler, as well as among arid deserts, through orchards and vineyards, around lakes and on forest-clad hills in the central Thompson Okanagan region. Join us as on a tour through the mountains, rivers, lakes and palm trees of British Columbia's spectacular golf courses.

It might just surprise you. =>



PETER ELLEGARD



Nicklaus loved the view so much he added an extra hole at Bear Mountain



Vancouver Island

BEAR MOUNTAIN GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB

Bald eagles, killer whales and palm trees are just some of the natural distractions on British Columbia's western extremity

Canada is not all about Mounties and bears. Vancouver Island, on the western extreme of British Columbia, is the only place in Canada where palm trees grow. Warm ocean currents, a maritime climate and a rain shadow cast by the Olympic Mountains, in America's nearby Washington State, mean you can play all year in provincial capital Victoria.

OK, we're not talking the Med, but snow is rarer here than in London; winters are temperate and the summers lovely and warm.

An early-afternoon arrival via Vancouver allowed time to check out Victoria after checking in to the grand Fairmont Empress overlooking its bustling inner harbour.

I joined the weekend perambulators perusing native Indian (called First Nation in Canada) craft stalls in front of the stately Parliament building. Jugglers entertained crowds by the water's edge while occasional float planes revved up like crazed wasps to take off from

the harbour, others taxiing in sedately after landing on the clear water.

Next day I played two of Vancouver Island's best courses. Bear Mountain threads through wooded hills 20 minutes outside Victoria. Its name derives not so much from the wildlife common throughout this pristine island as to its co-designer – Jack Nicklaus, who created it with son Steve.

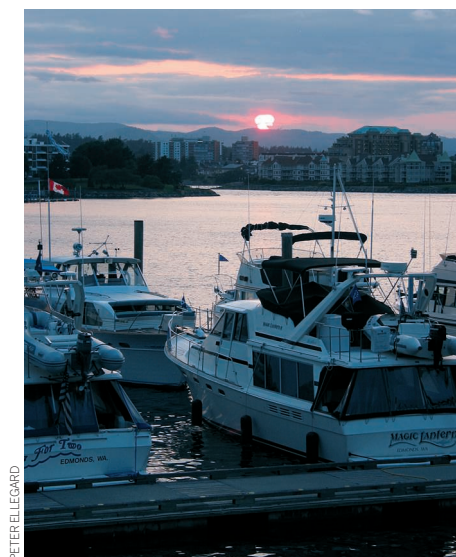
Bear Mountain bizarrely has 19 holes on its scorecard. Prior to its 2003 opening Jack added an extra par 3 hole on a ridge between the 14th green and 15th tee with glorious views of Victoria, reasoning that it would make a fun hole for a friendly gamble. It's certainly a respite after the uphill slog of the 14th. The extra hole doesn't count towards scores or form part of the 7,212-yard official length.

The 65-room Westin Bear Mountain Victoria Resort & Spa gains another 91 rooms as part of a six-storey clubhouse in May 2006,





The 17th at Arbutus Ridge, part of a classic British Columbia golf experience



Victoria's Inner Harbour is a fine sight by night

and a second Nicklaus course and golf academy follow in 2007.

The course is a beauty with bite. Tee shots are daunting, yet with deceptively-generous landing areas. The 11th has an island green, behind which a waterfall tumbles down a slope. A thoughtful touch for hapless hackers like me is a bubblegum machine by the tee dispensing extra balls for a "Toonie" each, as C\$2 coins are affectionately known.

Jetlag wrecked a good start and my card resembled a snowman convention by the turn. A snowman, as any Canadian golfer knows, is an

"A thoughtful touch for hapless hackers is a bubblegum machine by the tee dispensing extra balls for a Toonie coin each"

eight. And I had three in a row.

I fared better at nearby Olympic View. Part of the GolfBC chain of courses, it is just as visually stunning, if somewhat shorter and less intimidating. Tee off from the back on the 1st hole and you enjoy the vista which gave the club its moniker – the snow-clad peak of Mt Olympus rising majestically dead ahead.

Olympic View is no pushover. The 12th is a picturesque but lethal par 4 with a narrow fairway strip between a ribbon lake and trees, climaxing with an approach over the lake. The next, a monster 595-yard par 5, requires a drive over treetops from another elevated tee and precision to negotiate a tight, kinked fairway.

The signature 17th hole has silvery cascades of water streaming over a tree-festooned rock outcrop behind the green. The terraced clubhouse bar is great for taking in sunset beyond the Olympic mountains or the soaring bald eagles, whose shrill calls often stab the air. ⇒

WHERE TO PLAY

Bear Mountain Golf and Country Club

7,212 yards, par 72
C\$95-C\$125 (approx £45-£60)
Contact: 00-1-250-744-2327
bearmountain.ca
19 holes of Nicklaus-father-and-son mountain magic

Olympic View Golf Club

6,542 yards, par 72
C\$45-C\$75 (approx £21-£36)
Contact: 00-1-250-474-3673
golfbc.com/courses/olympic_view
Go for birdies while eagles soar overhead in this natural haven

Arbutus Ridge Golf and Country Club

6,168 yards, par 71
C\$40-C\$60 (approx £19-£29)
Contact: 00-1-250-743 5100
arbutusridgegolf.com
Rolling terrain, lakes and commanding views with a testing final hole

Morningstar International Golf Course

7,018 yards, par 71
C\$50-C\$66 (approx £24-£31)
Contact: 00-1-250-248-8161
morningstar.bc.ca
Links-style design in forest setting offering a challenge for all levels

WHERE TO STAY

Fairmont Empress

Contact: 00-1-250-384-8111
fairmont.com/empress

Westin Bear Mountain Victoria Resort and Spa

Contact: 00-1-250-391-7160
bearmountain.ca/resort



Vancouver Island has over a century of golfing history. The Victoria Golf Club on the shoreline at Oak Bay is Canada's oldest golf course still on its original site, opening in 1893. It's private, but Gold service guests at the Fairmont Empress can play there, as can Oak Bay Beach Hotel guests.

With more than 40 courses, you're spoiled for choice. Other clubs near Victoria include Arbutus Ridge, overlooking the Southern Gulf Islands. Like GolfBC sister Olympic View, it is by Bill Robinson.

Les Furber's highly-acclaimed Morningstar International is less than two hours from Victoria, on the central east coast. August 2006 sees the opening of Greg Norman's Cliffs Over Maple Bay in the Cowichan Valley, an hour north of Victoria.

Golf aside, beautiful Victoria is worth exploring by day and night. A blaze of floral colour in spring and summer, its gardens are a big attraction. At night, its harbour-side buildings dazzle.

The island has tremendous sea angling and freshwater lake and river fishing, plus hiking, cycling, kayaking, sailing and scuba diving, while its rich First Nation heritage is evident in museums, historic sites and local communities. You can take boat trips to view seals, sea lions, dolphins, grey whales and killer whales, take guided trips into wilderness areas to see bears and other wildlife, go bird watching or even snorkel with salmon.

And while you may not get an eagle on a golf course, a floatplane or helicopter flight from Victoria back to Vancouver to end your visit will give you a birds' eye view of this spectacular coastal region.

Vancouver Island Facts

GETTING THERE

Regular air services are operated from Vancouver by **Air Canada Jazz** (flyjazz.ca, 0871-220-1111) and from other Canadian cities by **Westjet** (westjet.com, 00-1-403-250-5839) as well as from Seattle by **Horizon Air** (alaskaair.com; 00-1-800-843-1338). **Harbour Air** (harbour-air.com; 00-1-604-274-1277) operates float plane services from Vancouver harbour and **Helijet** (helijet.com, 00-1-250-382-6222) runs helicopter flights from Vancouver. **BC Ferries** (bcferries.com, 00-1-250-386-3431) operates several ferry routes between the mainland and the island.

KEY ATTRACTIONS

- Victoria's Inner Harbour by night. British Columbia's grand **Parliament Buildings** are outlined by thousands of lights.
- **Butchart Gardens** - Victoria's mild climate makes this 55-acre floral wonderland in a disused quarry a horticulturalist's dream.
- Take a tour of the city's scenic waterfront and historic buildings in a **horse-drawn carriage**.
- Take afternoon tea in the Victoria's Grande Dame, the **Fairmont Empress Hotel**.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

- The kids will be fascinated by the totem poles and carvings at downtown Victoria's **Thunderbird Park**.



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At night, thousands of lights outline the Parliament buildings

- If it's raining, take the tribe next door to the **Royal BC Museum**. Its exhibits include the house of a First Nations chief and a replica Captain George Vancouver's HMS Discovery galleon.
- **Victoria Bug Zoo** is a hands-on adventure into the amazing world of insects and spiders. The kids will love it.
- Live diving shows and displays of undersea life including giant octopus and wolf eels will amaze all in the **Pacific Undersea Gardens** in Victoria's Inner Harbour.

GENERAL INFO

Time difference: GMT -8
Tourist Information: tourismvictoria.com; islands.bc.ca; www.hellobc.co.uk

Tel: 00-1-250-754-3500; 0906-871-5000 (60p per minute)

Climate: Southern Vancouver Island has the mildest climate in Canada with temperate winters and warm and sunny summers. Courses in the Victoria area open year-round.

VANCOUVER ISLAND FACTS

- **Vancouver Island** is the 10th largest island in Canada, and one of 6,000 islands in British Columbia - nine times larger than New York's Long Island.
- A pod of about **80 killer whales** lives off the island's southern coast, year-round, although the best time to view them is between May and October.
- About 22,000 **grey whales** migrate past the island's west coast between March and October. Public viewing stations are set up in the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve each March during the annual Pacific Rim Whale Festival, hosted by Tofino and Ucluelet villages.
- **Seymour Narrows**, near Campbell River, was the site of the largest non-nuclear explosion in history in 1958, when over 1,000 tons of dynamite were used to blast a treacherous marine hazard.
- **Strathcona Park**, a wilderness park established in 1911, was British Columbia's first provincial park. It includes the island's last remaining icefield, highest peak and Canada's highest waterfall.



BC GOLF

The stunning waterfall behind Olympic View's 17th



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Victoria's Grande Dame: The Fairmont Empress



BC GOLF

The 17th at Arbutus Ridge: pick the right club here