

FAMILY TRAVEL

SPRING INTO VICTORIA WITH THE KIDS AND GRANDPARENTS

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

The grandparent-child relationship is unique and incredibly special. Living in a province away from my in-laws has been difficult during the pandemic, even with a backyard social distancing visit last summer. So, over spring break, we did our best to make up for all that was lost by vacationing together in Victoria to celebrate Grandpa's 80th birthday, although the man looks and acts at least a decade — or two — younger.

Located on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, Victoria is a cultural wonderland with a temperate coastal climate that allows for year-round outdoor exploration and fun-filled activities sure to please the kids, parents and grandparents. After three days of seeing the sights — on and off the water — the City of Gardens has earned our family's vote for a top urban playground in Canada. From bugs, boats and baby goats to princess teas and horse-drawn carriage rides, Victoria's adventures are infinite.

ROYAL BC MUSEUM

The Royal BC Museum, one of Victoria's most beloved attractions, is undergoing a colossal modernization project, resulting in a temporary closure of the Human History gallery. While it was disappointing to miss the towering poles in Totem Hall and cobblestone streets of turn-of-the-century Victoria, my 10-year old daughter Brooklyn and her grandpa made the most of the museum's mammoth experience. We spent about 90 minutes touring the eerily lifelike displays showcasing B.C.'s coastal forests, seashores and Fraser River Delta, and the show-stopping Ice Age

IF YOU GO..

Spring arrives early in Victoria, so it's our favourite time to visit. Also, crowds are much smaller, and the weather is usually a comfortable temperature — we were blessed with warm sunshine for most of our trip. In the inner harbour, the Fairmont Empress is where we typically stay for its indoor pool and ideal location for exploring the city on foot. Check Fairmont.com for special room savings, like Kids Rule the Castle, which includes daily breakfast for the family in Q, an Empress scavenger hunt, a Winston the Empress Dog stuffy and dining deals for the children. Or, for AAA/CAA members, receive rates of up to 15 per cent off and a \$50 dining credit.

exhibit's towering woolly beast. Luckily for us, the Royal BC Museum has adjusted its pricing to account for the closure. At just \$5 per person, it's a super affordable outing to enjoy with grandparents and extended family.

VICTORIA BUG ZOO

Upon entering the Victoria Bug Zoo, I tiptoed up to the first exhibit of elegant stick insects camouflaged by foliage, determined to quash my fears. Unfortunately, sighting a neigh-



Brooklyn and Maggie getting ready for Tally-Ho's enjoyable horse-drawn carriage tour through downtown Victoria. *CURT WOODHALL*

bouring tarantula was simply too much for my acute arachnophobia to handle. Thus, I sat at the entrance while my family gawked over the creepy-crawly residents. It's no surprise that kids love this place. The staff are highly knowledgeable and passionate about the zoo's 40-plus species of insects, including everything from tropical bugs and praying mantises to glow-in-the-dark scorpions. Adventurous visitors can even hold some of the friendlier creatures — more power to them.

PRINCESS TEA

After school, tea time with my parents has become a treasured tradition for Brooklyn. Embracing her love for afternoon tea, we booked Tea at the Empress, a time-honoured ritual for 114 years. The glamorous Princess Tea experience includes a tiara (or prince's crown for boys), a pot of fruit-infused herbal tea and a tiered tray of temptations.

While we enjoyed the traditional menu, Brooklyn indulged in a pint-sized picnic featuring

organic peanut butter and jelly finger sandwiches, a flaky mini raisin scone with clotted cream and house-made strawberry jam, and a decadent array of desserts.

HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE RIDE

Building on our royal tea afternoon, we surprised Brooklyn and her grandparents with a horse-drawn carriage ride through downtown Victoria. We met our guide, and sweet-natured workhorse Maggie, across the street from the Parliament Buildings. After introductions, we quickly set off, Maggie ever-eager for her day's final tour. Over about 45 minutes, we clipped and clopped along Victoria's blooming tree-lined streets, marvelling at the beautifully restored heritage homes and equally exquisite gardens. The tour loops through Beacon Hill Park, one of the city's crown jewels, past the petting zoo's peacocks and baby goats, then alongside Dallas Road's sweeping waterfront scenes on the way back.

VICTORIA HARBOUR FERRY TOUR

Another family-friendly, all-ages adventure is the Victoria Harbour Ferry's 45-minute tour that departs from the Empress Dock. The guiding narrative includes fascinating facts about the area's history and landmark sights. Dress warmly and pack activities for the kids to ensure all parties are aptly entertained.

While my in-laws, husband and I listened intently to wild stories about the Parliament Buildings' notorious architect, Brooklyn watched for inner harbour wildlife, including otters and harbour seals. The tour also allows guests to hop off at Fisherman's Wharf, a hidden gem famous for its ice cream and fish and chips shops.

DINING FOR ALL

Mealtime is magic with grandparents, and Victoria's inner harbour serves up excellent options to please every palate. Our favourites for dinner include Nautical Nellies, the city's seafood-steak house staple and 10 Acres Commons for its seasonal farm-to-plate dishes.

Top brunch choices are Benedicts and pancakes at Q in the Fairmont Empress and Don Mee's dim sum delights, followed by milk tea from The Bubble Tea Place in Chinatown. Curt and I also enjoyed an impromptu date night at Boom and Batten on the waterfront. It was phenomenal, and while Brooklyn would have happily dined on mussels, octopus, and chargrilled steak, she had much more fun swimming with her grandparents in the Fairmont indoor pool.

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