

Hollywood of the North

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DESTINATIONS FOR
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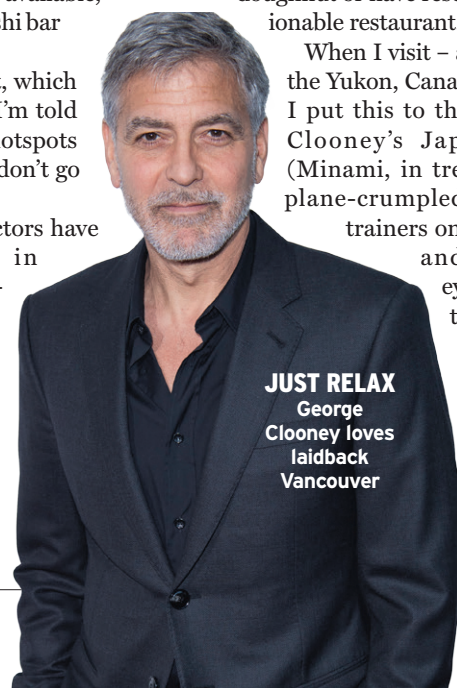
Vancouver rivals Los Angeles for film and TV locations – but that’s not the only reason to visit this sophisticated city

7 SPOT THE STARS IN VANCOUVER

When actor George Clooney (below) showed up unexpectedly at a Japanese restaurant in Vancouver’s Downtown area, he didn’t get special treatment. No tables were available, so he perched on a stool at the sushi bar with the other customers.

“Restaurants are very discreet, which is why celebrities love it here,” I’m told when I inquire about A-lister hotspots in the city. “And so are we – we don’t go all fangirl if we spot a celebrity.”

In the past decade, famous actors have become a common sight in Vancouver, thanks to its booming film and TV industry. More and more producers are being lured to “Hollywood North” by tax incentives, the pristine backdrops on its doorstep and its gentle climate. Thanks to its perch on the Pacific Coast, Vancouver enjoys mild, if wet, weather year-round.



JUST RELAX
George Clooney loves laidback Vancouver

In some ways, Vancouver has a lot in common with Los Angeles. It’s a city blessed with rugged good looks – mighty peaks dwarf the glittering skyscrapers – as well as a down-to-earth, outdoorsy disposition. At weekends, people like to run, bike, hike and ski. The dress code is strictly casual, whether you’re popping out for a doughnut or have reserved a table at a fashionable restaurant.

When I visit – a stopover en route to the Yukon, Canada’s wild northwest – I put this to the test. I show up at Clooney’s Japanese restaurant (Minami, in trendy Yaletown) in a plane-crumpled pair of jeans and trainers on a busy Friday night, and nobody bats an eyelid. In fact, I get star treatment: a friendly waitress finds me a spot at the sushi bar, so I, too, get to watch chefs blow-torching slivers of salmon and sculpting seaweed into edible works of art.

While the city’s food scene might not be as famous as LA’s, it’s quietly spectacular. Thanks to a diverse population – around a quarter are of East Asian descent – you’re particularly spoilt for choice when it comes to Asian restaurants. They say it has North America’s most authentic Chinese food, there are more than 650 sushi restaurants, and queues snake out of ramen

shops. The city’s culinary mecca is the Public Market, which I get to via a tugboat that bobs from Downtown – Vancouver’s Manhattan – to Granville Island. Originally an industrial area, Granville’s warehouses now also house artisan shops, a microbrewery and craft distilleries.

I’ve signed up for a gourmet walking tour and the first stop is a deli-bistro where I try

Vancouver-style fish and chips: battered Arctic char, apple and fennel slaw, fries with chilli salt, and a glass of pinot gris from Okanagan – British Columbia’s Napa Valley. “It has notes of ripe pear, apricot and apple. Exactly what you look for in a good breakfast wine,” says Nadia from Vancouver Foodie Tours. It’s 10.30am and she’s right – the wine slips down a treat.

ON MY FINAL morning, I decide to explore by bike, beginning in Gastown, the city’s oldest neighbourhood. Nowadays its Victorian brick buildings are home to boutiques, galleries, cocktail bars and restaurants. Next door is the sail-shaped cruise terminal Canada Place, where I join the Seaside Greenway – a 17-mile path that skirts the Downtown peninsula. Across the water, the North Shore’s hulking peaks are wrapped in a scarf of fluffy cloud and high-rises glitter in the sun. It’s a Sunday, so the greenway is awash with joggers, bikes and walkers savouring the bracing sea air and glorious vista.

Before long, I’m whizzing around Stanley Park, a thousand acres of thick forest that juts out from the Downtown peninsula. It’s one of North America’s biggest urban parks and the world’s best, according to TripAdvisor users. Cycling around this evergreen oasis – with centuries-old Douglas fir and Bigleaf maple trees and a weatherbeaten cliff on one side, and sparkling seascapes on the other – it’s hard to believe I’m only ten minutes from the city centre.

When Kate Winslet filmed the thriller *The Mountain between Us* in Vancouver, she fell in love. “I was so happy to be there and so sad to leave,” she gushed at the premiere. “Truly, I pine for it. I pine for Honey Doughnuts in Deep Cove. And the nature – its incredible, wild, wonderful nature.” By the time I leave, I know exactly how she feels.

For more information visit tourismvancouver.com



IT’S A GAS
A traditional trolley bus in Gastown



CANADA’S FINEST
Great food, mountains, water – Vancouver has something for everyone

MADE IN VANCOUVER

FIFTY SHADES OF GREY
Vancouver doubled for Seattle in all the films based on EL James’s popular erotic novels.



DEADPOOL
Vancouver native Ryan Reynolds played the character from the *X-Men* series who ended up in his own film and its sequel, both filmed all over the city.

alongside James Marsden and Jim Carrey in his first big-screen outing, which also sees the feisty creature driving across Vancouver Island – famous for its great surfing, whale-watching and thriving arts scene.



CHILLING ADVENTURES OF SABRINA
The city is home to teen dramas such as *Nancy Drew*, *Riverdale* and *Sabrina*, which returns to Netflix in February.

A BABYSITTER’S GUIDE TO MONSTER HUNTING
Harry Potter alumnus Tom Felton is filming the movie adaptation of the children’s book.

AWAY
Oscar-winner Hilary Swank is filming a series about an American astronaut.