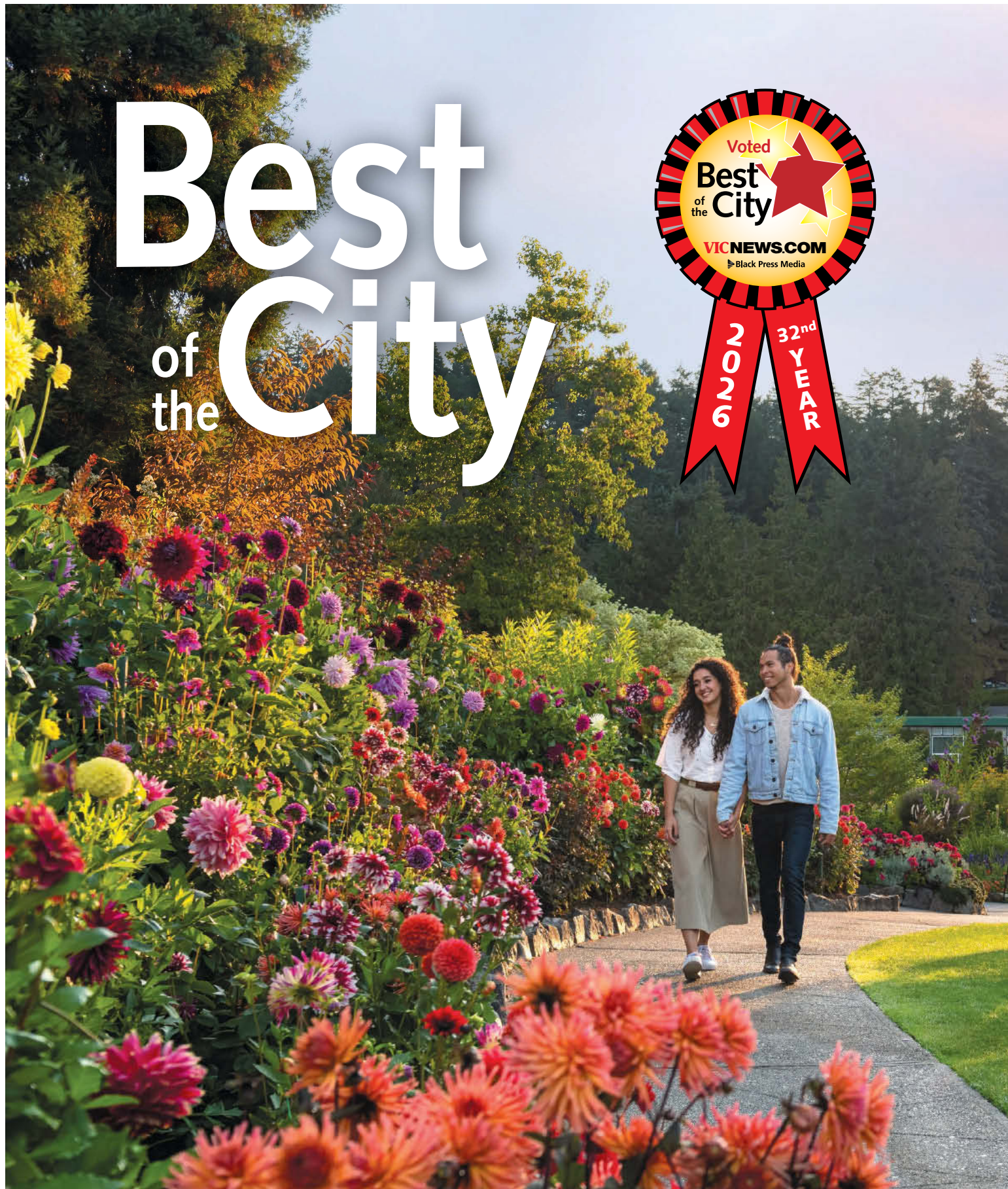


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Best of the City 2026

What makes Victoria such a special place to live, work, explore and call home? Our readers know - and this year, they made their voices heard in a big way.

More than 125,000 votes were cast in the annual Best of the City awards, shining a spotlight on the people, businesses, services and experiences that make Victoria such a remarkable community. With 136 categories spanning everything from dining and shopping to professional services, entertainment, health and wellness, local business and more, this year's results offer an impressive snapshot of what our community values most.

And behind every vote is a story. A favourite place for a morning coffee. A restaurant that has become a family tradition. A trusted service provider. A shop where the staff know your name. A local business that went above and beyond when it mattered most. These are the connections that turn a city into a community.

This year's extraordinary response is a testament to how passionate Victorians are about the places they love and the people behind them. It demonstrates the tremendous pride we have in supporting local.

Congratulations to all of this year's winners - and a heartfelt thank you to everyone who took the time to vote. These are your choices Victoria. Here are the best of the best.

*Janet Gairdner
and your team at Victoria News*

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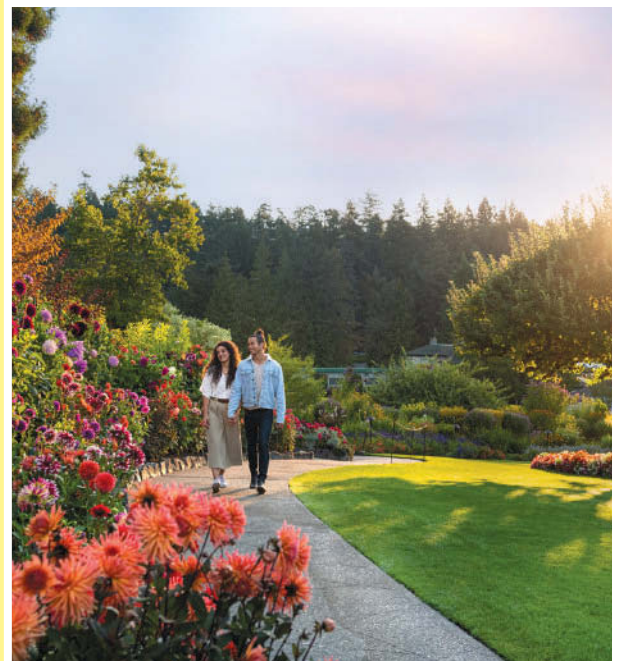
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2026

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ON OUR COVER



Matt Shannon Photography. Courtesy of Destination Greater Victoria.

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LOCAL BUSINESSES KEEP OUR COMMUNITY VIBRANT AND THRIVING

By Tim Collins

Matt Shannon Photography. Courtesy of Destination Greater Victoria.

Greater Victoria is home to creators, entrepreneurs, and people who care about keeping our communities vibrant and thriving.

Best of the City acknowledges the work and care put in by local businesses and people. It's not just a label; it's a way of saying "this is something we value and appreciate." Perhaps that's why our annual "Best of the City" feature is so great. It offers recognition where it is most deserved.

Make no mistake about it – Victoria is an amazing place to live, work and visit.

Start with Travel + Leisure Magazine's World's Best Awards. This year, Victoria ranked in the top two cities in Canada.

The city has also consistently topped Condé Nast Traveler's Readers' Choice Awards as the world's friendliest city, "brimming with small-town energy" despite it being the provincial capital.

The city's blend of city life and natural beauty is, they've said, unsurpassed.

Victoria has been lauded as Canada's most romantic city, and has also earned nods for its warmth, helpfulness and community spirit.

It's no wonder then that the region is experiencing its best tourism season in the past 10 years, with hotel occupancy rates reaching more than 85 per cent and international visits from around the globe showing steady growth.

Part of that success is founded on the people promoting our city on the world stage.

Destination Greater Victoria's CEO, Paul Nursey, has worked tirelessly to promote the city and his 28 years in tourism management have afforded him the insight to explain what is special about Victoria.

"What makes Victoria special is that we haven't had to choose between being a great place to visit and a great place to live," said Nursey.

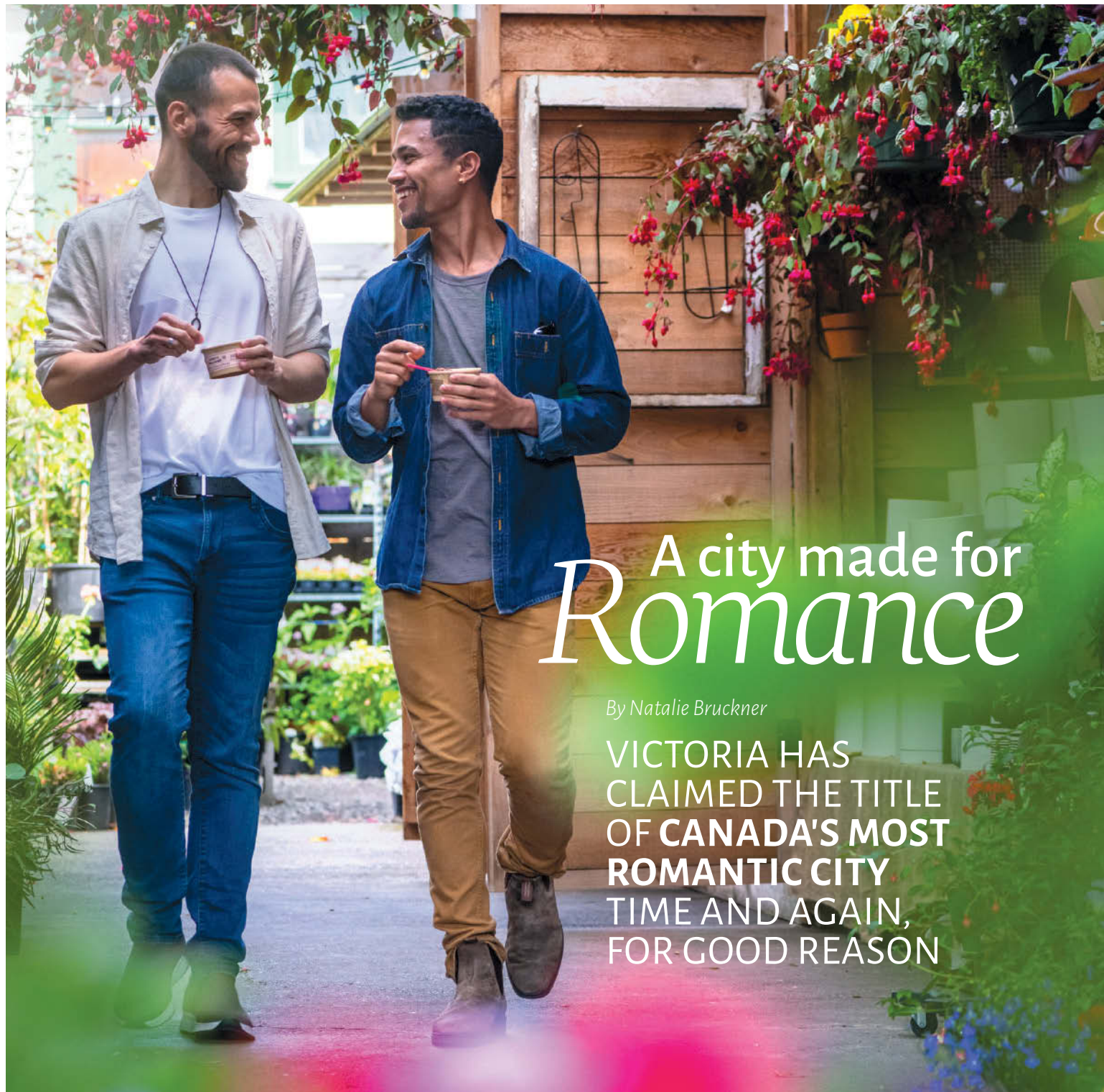
"The same things that attract visitors from around the world, including our oceanfront setting, vibrant neighbourhoods, cultural experiences, attractions, world-class culinary scene and year-round outdoor lifestyle, also contribute to an exceptional quality of life for residents and an environment where businesses can succeed."

John Wilson, the CEO of the Victoria Chamber of Commerce, offers a more personal note to the question of what makes Victoria so great.

"Growing up in Victoria, I have seen it evolve and grow into the city it is today," said Wilson. "Its beauty and charm continue to attract visitors from around the world, but one thing has always stayed the same: the relationships that connect our community. Recognizing familiar faces downtown and taking in all the experiences our city has to offer is what makes it feel like home."

"Great cities are defined by the people who give them purpose. Victoria is a place where everyone belongs, everyone participates, and where opportunity and community shape the character of our city. Being raised here, I've seen what makes our city the best in B.C., and it is the close connections and shared responsibility. It's the everyday actions of people who care about their neighbours and their future."

And perhaps that's the real story. While the Best of the City awards do a great job of recognizing the best in our city in a variety of categories, it's important to remember that it's the people who make Victoria a magical place.



A city made for *Romance*

By Natalie Bruckner

VICTORIA HAS
CLAIMED THE TITLE
OF **CANADA'S MOST
ROMANTIC CITY**.
TIME AND AGAIN,
FOR GOOD REASON

Matt Shannon Photography. Courtesy of Destination Greater Victoria.

Looking for someone who loves oceanfront strolls at golden hour, scenic old-world charm and 19th-century architecture. Bonus points if you have a taste for fresh West Coast seafood, afternoon tea, artisanal cheeses, and couples' massages followed by afternoons getting lost exploring.

If that sounds like you, go ahead and swipe right. Congratulations! You've just matched with Victoria, B.C.

It's almost as if the province's capital city was built for romance, with its cobbled streets, candlelit harbourfront dinners

and tucked-away sandy coves. It's pretty easy to see why Victoria has been voted Canada's most romantic city year after year.

MADE FOR THE BIG SCREEN

Victoria has the kind of scenery that makes filmmakers drool, so it's no surprise it's been used as a location for so many romantic movies.

From the grand halls of Craigdarroch Castle, which appeared in the 1994 film *Little Women* starring Winona Ryder and Susan Sarandon, to Canada's narrowest commercial street, Fan

Tan Alley in historic Chinatown, which featured in the romantic comedy *Bird on a Wire*, starring Mel Gibson and Goldie Hawn, the city offers no shortage of memorable backdrops. It's little wonder Hallmark location scouts keep coming back for more.

WHERE ROMANCE BLOOMS

Known as the "City of Gardens," Victoria makes every walk a little more romantic. Its mild climate keeps flowers and greenery flourishing year-round, with more than 30 billion blooms counted during the 2025 spring flower count, earning it the title of the region's "bloomiest" community.

No romantic escape to Victoria would be complete without a visit to The Butchart Gardens. More than 120 years after it was first created, this 55-acre National Historic Site is a showstopper.

But if one garden in Victoria truly has a love story at its roots, it's Abkhazi Garden, affectionately known as "the garden that love built." The story begins with Prince Nicolas and Princess Peggy Abkhazi, who reunited after years apart, married in 1946 and spent the next four decades creating their one-acre sanctuary together. They lovingly called it "their child," and today their legacy lives on, with the garden providing a beautiful setting for couples to celebrate their own love stories.

LET YOUR HEARTS WANDER

There's something wonderful about having nowhere to be, and with Victoria's reputation as one of Canada's most walkable cities,

it's the perfect place to follow a path and see where the afternoon leads.

A stroll along the Inner Harbour can easily turn into an afternoon wandering past historic buildings and dreamy architecture, stopping to listen to street performers or watch boats drift across the water.

Along Dallas Road and around Songhees Point Park (p'áləc'əs), the ocean becomes the perfect backdrop as waterfront paths trace the edge of the Salish Sea, with waves rolling in below, mountain views stretching across the horizon, ferries gliding by and sea-planes rising from the water. Somewhere along the way, you might find yourself at the Staircase to the Sea, a colourful, mural-covered landmark where steps lead down to the water.

Then there's that old-fashioned charm that goes beyond the cobbled streets. A horse-drawn carriage ride through James Bay feels like stepping into a Hugh Grant movie. Tally-Ho Carriage Tours, the city's oldest carriage company dating back to 1903, takes visitors through the historic neighbourhood, with seasonal routes that showcase the city's spring blossoms.

FEED YOUR SOUL

They say the way to the heart is through the stomach, and in Victoria that tends to happen without much planning. With one of the highest concentrations of restaurants per resident in Canada, Victoria's food scene is full of surprises.

One minute it's a coffee by the harbour, the next you've ducked

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into a small family-owned restaurant for fresh West Coast seafood, or experienced the artistry of Japanese omakase dining.

That love of good food hasn't gone unnoticed. Readers of Condé Nast Traveler named Greater Victoria one of the world's best food cities in 2023.

Then there's afternoon tea at the Fairmont Empress, where romance has been on the menu since 1908. In the grand Lobby Lounge overlooking the Inner Harbour, a gentleman plays the piano as three tiers of finger sandwiches, house-made scones, pastries and fine loose-leaf teas make their way to the table. Play it again, Sam.

LOVE ON THE WATER

Somehow the ocean just whispers romance, and in Victoria there are so many ways to soak that in. Heritage tall ships set sail from the harbour, where you can pack a picnic, grab a blanket and spend an afternoon watching the coastline drift by, with the chance of spotting dolphins and even whales along the way.

The sheltered waters of Saanich Inlet and Tod Inlet offer a more intimate side of the coast, with small boats slipping into quiet coves like Arbutus and Witty's Lagoon. Back in the harbour, the bright yellow water taxis whisk you across the city or turn dinner into an adventure with a waterfront pub crawl.



VILLAMAR

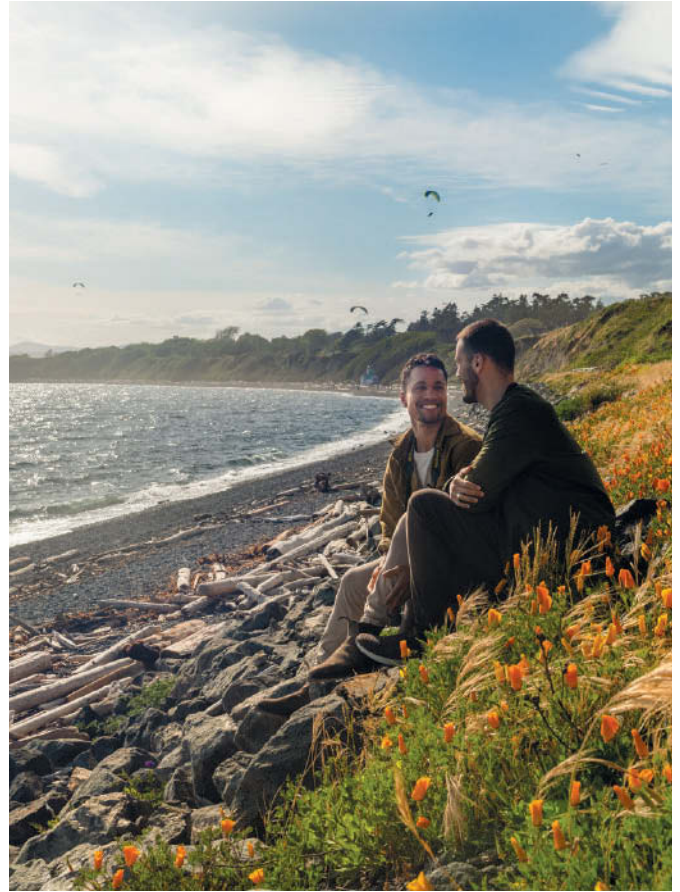
BUILD YOUR DREAM





Thank you Victoria

 **The Butchart Gardens**



Matt Shannon Photography. Courtesy of Destination Greater Victoria.

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THE BIG QUESTION

Victoria has a way of sweeping you off your feet and making a pretty convincing case for popping the question.

The city's independent jewelry studios with unique pieces add another layer to the moment. And when the time comes to find the right spot, Ogden Point Breakwater is hard to beat. The one-kilometre pier stretches into the Strait of Juan de Fuca, with a lighthouse at the end and electric pinks and golds reflecting across the water at sunset. It's the kind of setting that does the work before you ever get down on one knee.

ROMANCE YOURSELF

Romance doesn't always need a plus one.

Victoria is just as enjoyable when you're travelling solo, whether that means enjoying a beautiful meal, wandering through gardens, discovering a new favourite café tucked away on a side street or simply watching the world go by. Because sometimes the best date is the one you plan for yourself.



Matt Shannon Photography. Courtesy of Destination Greater Victoria.



Jon-Mark Photography. Courtesy of Destination Greater Victoria.

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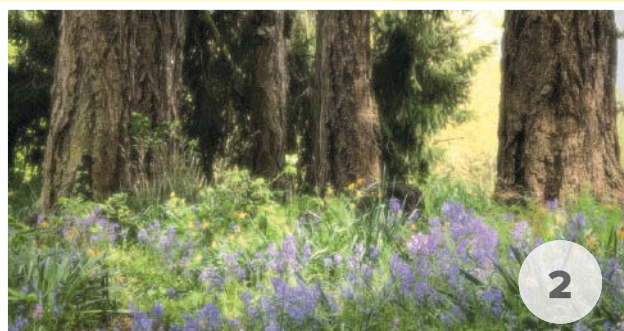
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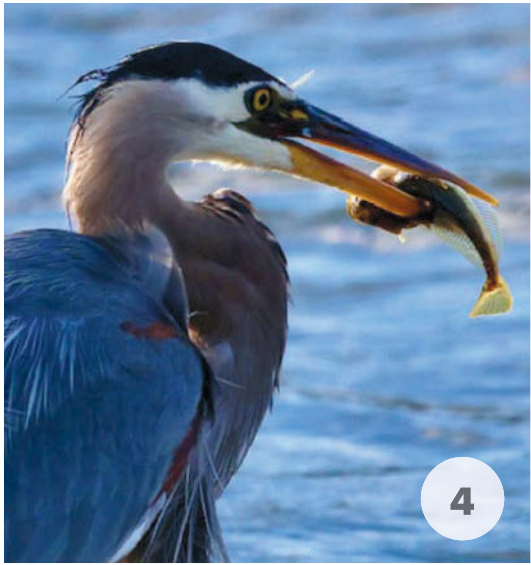


THE BEST FROM OUR READERS OF VICTORIA NEWS

1. Early morning sunrise at Ogden Point. - **Barry Watchorn**
2. Camas amidst the trees in Beacon Park. - **Bennett Guinn**
3. Cyclists on the bridge. - **Bohuslav Slahor**
4. Heron with a freshly caught fish at Esquimalt Lagoon. - **Bruce Nicol**
5. Sunrise on the Inner Harbour. - **June Pearson**
6. Victoria Harbour by Boom and Batten. - **Janet Baker**
7. Canadian Forces Snowbirds in the skies over Victoria. - **Rene Fournier**
8. Harbour seal sunning its flippers in Victoria's outer harbour. - **Ken Wong**
9. Kite surfers on a breezy day on Dallas Road. - **June Pearson**

We had readers from around the region submit photos from their own backyards, and neighbourhoods. Our readers submitted everything from beaches, parks, pets, gardens, protests and more. Watch inside the Victoria News every Thursday for our reader photo of the week.

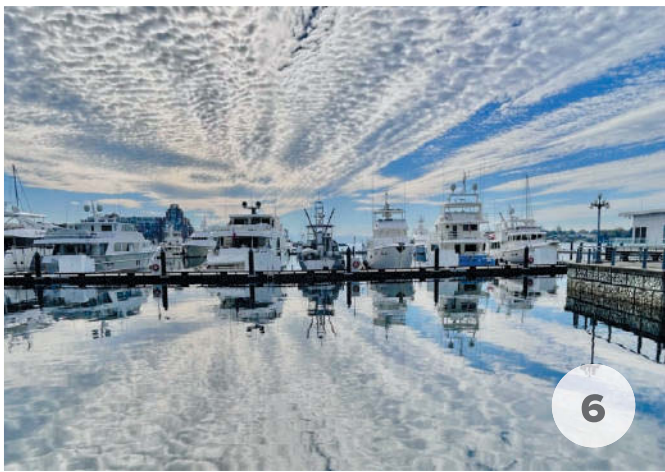




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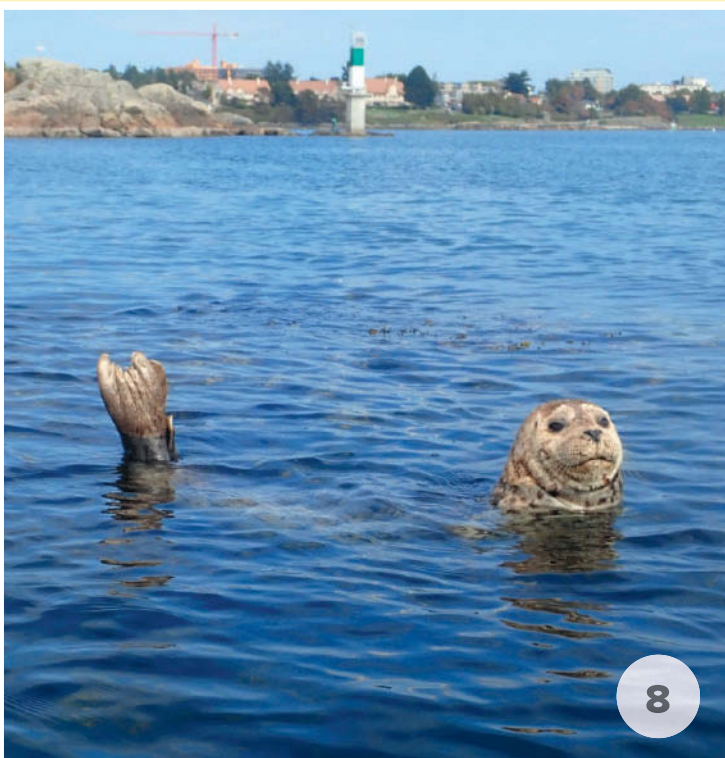
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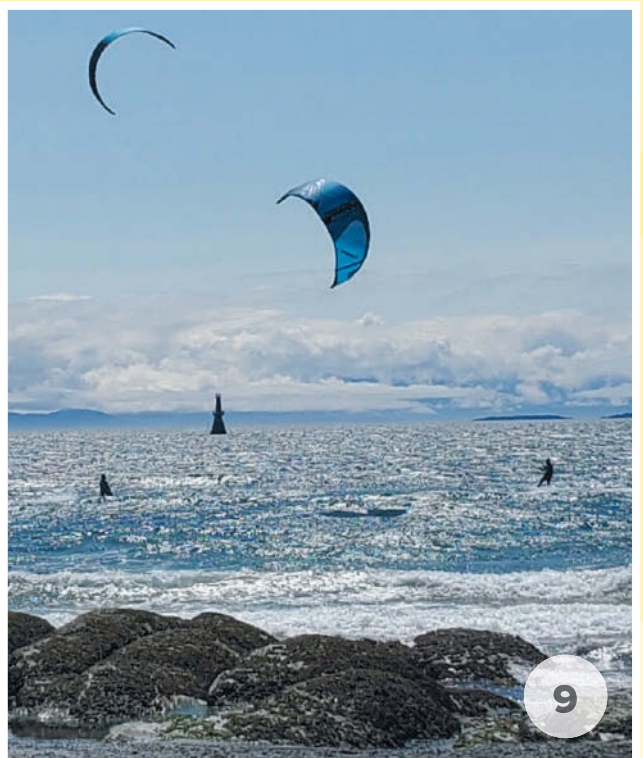
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IT'S PEOPLE THAT MAKE A BUSINESS GREAT

By Tim Collins

Cities thrive and are considered to be great, not because of their buildings or landmarks, but because of the people who shape the character of the community through their creativity, diversity and sense of social responsibility.

The same can be said of businesses within those cities.

There are other elements to making a great business as well. A clear vision and mission, for example. No business becomes the best without having goals and values that are reflected in their product, and in the ethical standards reflected in their business practices.

To put it simply, businesses are the best when they're run by good people.

Dave LeQuesne at Westshore Towing puts his customers first, and does what he does to make the community a better place.

Then there's Mother Computers, which has been around for more than 23 years. Their success starts with folks like Raj Desor, the owner of the company.

"I've always loved computers and electronics, and I love helping people with their computer needs," said Desor. "People have computers for all kinds of reasons, and it's our job not to just make a sale, but to help them to get the right machine for their needs and then to get the most out of the machines they have."



Raj Desor, owner Mother Computers

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Calen McNeil, owner Big Wheel Burger



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"Computers have changed a lot and keep changing, and people's interests and the way they use computers have changed as well. There are a lot more people using them for gaming, for example. Knowing what machine will best suit them is what we aim for, whether the customer is 13 or 90."

It's all about customer service and satisfaction, not profit margin, says Devos.

Big Wheel Burger is another example of how one person's vision can be at the heart of a great business.

Calen McNeil had years of experience in the restaurant business and had travelled extensively before coming to Victoria and establishing Big Wheel Burger.

"I'd travelled a lot, and I knew that there was a way to create better fast food in this community - to create something different," said McNeil.

"We came up with the idea of a completely carbon-neutral fast-food restaurant where the food was made from fresh, local ingredients. From the free-range farms to the customer's tray, the process is 100 per cent sustainable."

The approach was always more than a gimmick.

"We have a responsibility to the community, and we are respecting that while producing great food in a fun environment. It gives us a different story to tell, and we're proud of it."

Then there's Ruffel and Brown. It was established in 1987 by Debra Ruffell and Nigel Brown, and over the years the company has grown to be one of the largest independently owned window covering dealers in Canada.



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Peter & Lori Stofko, owners Ruffell and Brown. Credit: Don Denton

In 2022, the company was acquired by Peter and Lori Stofko, who have continued with the company's commitment to customer satisfaction.

"The only way we can continue to be successful is to make sure every one of our customers is fully satisfied and to earn your repeat business," they say.

"We want you to feel confident when recommending us to your friends, family and neighbours that they will receive the best possible service every time."

That commitment to the community extends to being part of the community in other ways as well, as the couple sponsors a multitude of charitable causes in Victoria. They also make a point of ensuring that they support other local businesses and have made a commitment that "every dollar you spend with us stays in our community supporting other businesses like ours."

Of course, there are a host of other great businesses in Greater Victoria that go the extra mile for their customers and for the community where they reside. But the story is most often the same.

Truly great businesses - the best of the city - are the ones operated by people who care. It's the individual integrity, compassion, and caring that combine with good product knowledge to lift those businesses to the highest level.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

BEST ART GALLERY

1. ART GALLERY OF GREATER VICTORIA
2. Little Fernwood Gallery
3. The Avenue Gallery

BEST FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

1. BEACON HILL CHILDREN'S FARM
2. Victoria Butterfly Gardens
3. Shaw Centre for the Salish Sea

BEST FESTIVAL

1. ESQUIMALT RIBFEST
2. Phillips Backyard Weekend
2. Victoria Highland Games & Celtic Festival
3. Victoria Folk Music Festival

BEST BAND / MUSICIAN (Local)

1. JESSE ROPER
2. Majesties Request
3. Michael Kaeshammer

BEST MORNING RADIO SHOW

1. 107.3 VIRGIN WITH BAILEY & JOHNNY
2. The Q! Morning Show
3. CBC On the Island with host Gregor Craigie

BEST MUSEUM

1. ROYAL BC MUSEUM
2. BC Aviation Museum
3. Wentworth Villa Architectural Heritage Museum

BEST PLACE TO LISTEN TO LIVE MUSIC

1. ROYAL & MCPHERSON THEATRES
2. Hermann's Jazz Club
3. Beacon Hill Park Bandshell

EATING & DRINKING

BEST BAKERY (Independent)

1. CRUST BAKERY
2. Dutch Bakery & Diner
3. Esquimalt Bake Shop

BEST BREAKFAST / BRUNCH

1. JOHN'S PLACE RESTAURANT
2. Floyd's Diner
3. The Village Restaurant

BEST BURGER

1. BIN 4 BURGER LOUNGE
2. Big Wheel Burger
3. Fatburger

BEST CHICKEN WINGS

1. FATBURGER
2. Chicken 649
3. Hecklers Bar & Grill

BEST CHINESE RESTAURANT

1. J & J WONTON NOODLE HOUSE
2. Don Mee Seafood Restaurant
3. Halibut House Chinese Restaurant

BEST COCKTAILS

1. WIND CRIES MARY
2. Clive's Classic Lounge
3. Glo Restaurant + Lounge

BEST COFFEEHOUSE

1. DISCOVERY COFFEE
2. Caffe Fantastico
3. Moka House

BEST DELI

1. RED BARN MARKET
2. Fig Mediterranean Deli
3. Italian Food Imports

BEST FAMILY RESTAURANT

1. MY-CHOSEN CAFÉ
2. John's Place Restaurant
3. Varsha Indian Kitchen

BEST FISH & CHIPS

1. FINEST AT SEA SEAFOOD MARKET & FOOD TRUCK
2. Red Fish Blue Fish
3. Barb's Fish & Chips

BEST FOOD TRUCK

1. FINEST AT SEA SEAFOOD MARKET & FOOD TRUCK
2. Deadbeetz Burgers
3. Greek n' Go



2026 Results

BEST GLUTEN FREE SELECTIONS

1. VARSHA INDIAN KITCHEN
2. Origin Gluten-Free Bakery
3. Be Love

BEST GREEK RESTAURANT

1. ITHAKA GREEK RESTAURANT
2. Gyrosa Fresh Greek
3. Maria's Souvlaki & Deli

BEST ICE CREAM

1. PARACHUTE ICE CREAM
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3. IL Covo Trattoria

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3. Sen Zushi - Japanese Restaurant & Sushi Victoria

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2026 RESULTS

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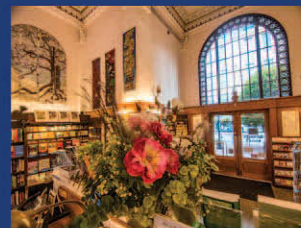
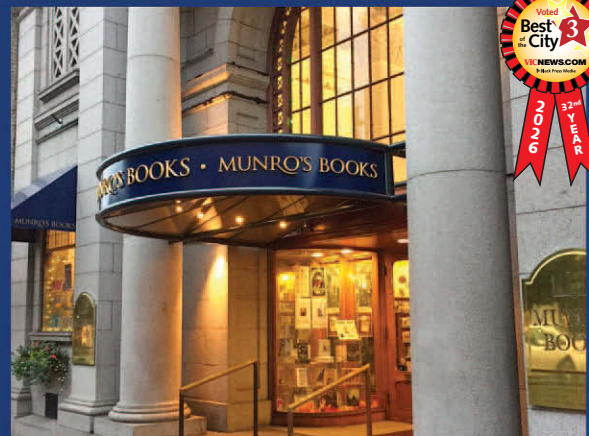
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Cream of the crop

Parachute's service and operations manager Didi Kahl offers up a fresh scoop of blueberry crumble ice cream in a waffle cone. Credit: Ben Fenlon/Victoria News

VICTORIA'S CRAFT ICE CREAM PARLOURS SERVE SCOOPS OF JOY

By Ben Fenlon



I scream, you scream, in Victoria we all scream for ice cream.

The days when a plain dollop of vanilla ice cream quickly served in a wafer cone are long gone.

Today's ice cream lovers are after bold flavours, quality ingredients and lashings of nostalgia by the scoop. And while summer may feel like it's racing towards fall, who says you need sunshine as an excuse to indulge?

With craft ice cream parlours dotted across the city, every day is a good day for a scoop.

49 BELOW - 420 Craigflower Rd.

With flavours such as Hawkins Cheezies, visitors at 49 Below should expect the unexpected.

"It was a hit," says team member Inari Minja. "It was as it sounds - Cheezies in ice cream. I remember trying it and thinking, 'This shouldn't be good,' but it really was."

Other Canadian cultural icons have also found themselves whipped up into unique whimsical scoops, including Vancouver Island's beloved Nanaimo bar.

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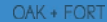
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"We try to really celebrate the culture of B.C. and the Island," says Minja. "We definitely have a lot of fun experimenting with flavours, and we are always trying to bring out the fun in a lot of the things we make."

Those after something more traditional won't be disappointed. Alongside its more playful creations, 49 Below serves classic flavours, including staples such as vanilla bean, mint chocolate chip, birthday cake and chocolate.

The birthday cake flavour, studded with rainbow sprinkles, delivers a healthy dose of childhood nostalgia, while the mint chocolate chip stays true to the classic, pairing a cool, refreshing mint with rich chunks of chocolate.

Among customers, however, two flavours consistently rise to the top: honeycomb and Vietnamese coffee.

Every batch of ice cream is made from scratch at the company's Oak Bay kitchen using a custom dairy base produced on Vancouver Island. The toppings and mix-ins are crafted in-house as well.

"We also make a lot of vegan options because we like to be inclusive," says Minja. "We have sorbets as well as coconut milk-based flavours."

Minja says it didn't take long to fall in love with the shop's strong sense of community.

"It's nice to make people happy and have the chance to just enlighten a four-year-old's day when they come in, and their face lights up when they see ice cream," she says.

Alongside its new location in Vic West, 49 Below also serves scoops in Oak Bay and Fernwood.



49 Below team member Inari Minja offers up a scoop of mint chocolate chip ice cream outside the Vic West branch. Credit: Ben Fenlon/Victoria News



A scoop of mint chocolate chip ice cream served in a waffle cone at the Vic West branch of 49 Below. Credit: Ben Fenlon/Victoria News

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Cold Comfort's operations manager Kate Lackey offers up a scoop of Rosemary's Baby – creamy rosemary ice cream with syrupy sour cherries. Credit: Ben Fenlon/Victoria News



A scoop of burnt sugar and salt ice cream is served up at Cold Comfort. Credit: Ben Fenlon/Victoria News

COLD COMFORT – 2716 Rock Bay Ave.

From humble beginnings in owner Autumn Maxwell's home kitchen in 2010, Cold Comfort has grown to become a Victoria institution.

Now serving customers from its Rock Bay and Cook Street locations, the craft ice cream company has spent more than 15 years building a reputation for inventive flavours and creative combinations.

"I think the flavour combinations are pretty original," says operations manager Kate Lackey. "Autumn was one of the first ice cream creators in Victoria, she's been doing it for a long time, so you could definitely call her a trailblazer."

One of Maxwell's earliest creations, ominously titled Rosemary's Baby, perfectly captures that spirit of experimentation.

A rich, creamy rosemary ice cream infused with syrupy sour cherries may sound like an unlikely match, but it's a combination that has stood the test of time, becoming one of the shop's signature offerings.

That willingness to push boundaries continues today with flavours such as dragonfruit swirl with lemon apricot, local honey and thyme, chai, toasted coconut and lime, and rooibos with dragonfruit.

For Lackey, the simple classics are her go-to comfort.

"I really just like the chocolate, it is so good," she says. "And the dairy Plain Jane is just a basic vanilla ice cream, but you can really taste the custard base, which is really cool."

The advertisement features a scenic view of the King Fisher Pacific Resort & Spa, a large resort complex nestled on a forested peninsula overlooking a calm body of water under a clear blue sky. The resort's logo, "KING FISHER PACIFIC RESORT & SPA", is prominently displayed in the upper center. Below the logo, the text "Thank you for your votes!" is written in a clean, sans-serif font. In the bottom left corner, a circular award ribbon from "VICNEWS.COM" is shown, featuring a star with the number "3" and the text "Voted Best of the City". A red ribbon banner at the bottom of the award reads "32nd YEAR". To the right of the award, the text "we were voted TOP 3 !" is written in a smaller font, followed by "BEST HOTEL ISLAND RESORT" in large, bold, white capital letters.



Parachute's service and operations manager Didi Kahl outside Parachute Ice Cream on Bridge Street. Credit: Ben Fenlon/Victoria News

Like Plain Jane, all dairy ice cream at Cold Comfort is crafted using a French custard base, which is made in-house using locally sourced ingredients.

The menu also features a wide range of vegan, dairy-free and gluten-free options, ensuring there's something for almost anyone with a yearning for a scoop or two.

PARACHUTE ICE CREAM – 105-2626 Bridge St.

Stepping into Parachute is like taking a trip back to your childhood.

From its warm mom-and-pop style welcome, through to the timeless ice cream flavours on offer, the shop serves up generous helpings of nostalgia alongside every scoop.

"Some of my fondest memories are going to the corner store with my family for ice cream, and I love being able to provide that experience in Victoria," says Didi Kahl, service and operations manager at the Bridge Street branch.

Classic flavours such as maple walnut, salted Skor and lemon cream all have the potential to unlock core memories. One scoop of fire-roasted s'mores is enough to immediately transport you to cosy evenings gathered around a crackling campfire.

Alongside its year-round favourites, Parachute rotates its menu monthly, introducing new creations while welcoming back popular seasonal flavours.

Some are inspired by sporting events or pop culture – last year, Parachute launched a limited-batch flavour inspired by the hit show *The Summer I Turned Pretty*. Others are dreamed up by customers.

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"We listen to what our customers want, we make new things, we lean into the seasons," says Kahl. "Believe it or not, in just over a month people are going to be talking about pumpkin spice again, so we'll do something fun like that."

One returning favourite that Kahl says will fly out of the freezer is lemon meringue pie.

"I know that August is going to be so crazy for us because it'll be in for the month, or until sold out," she says.

Like all of Parachute's ice cream, cookies and mix-ins, the flavour is made entirely in-house.

"It's a pretty labour-intensive flavour. We make the lemon curd in-house, which we do in our big pots - it takes a couple hours to make sure we're not burning it," says Kahl.

The hard work pays off. The nostalgic take on the classic dessert, with its custard-based ice cream, marshmallow, curd and buttery Graham crumb, will have you coming back for seconds, thirds, and ... you get the drift.

Alongside its commitment to quality and consistency, Kahl says community has always been at the heart of Parachute.

The support of loyal customers has helped the business weather challenges ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to the recent prolonged Bay Street Bridge closure - and even Victoria's rainy days - making this year's 10th anniversary all the more meaningful.

Alongside its Bridge Street store in Victoria, Parachute serves up its handcrafted ice cream in Langford and Oak Bay.



*A family enjoy time together with ice cream at Parachute's Bridge Street store.
Credit: Ben Fenlon/Victoria News*



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West Shore Towing

A history of service and caring *By Tim Collins*



Residents of don't have to be told that it's an amazing place to live, work and play. It's just something that we take as a given, without giving too much thought to what it is that makes our city the best.

Certainly, the scenic views, the climate and the friendly people play a part, but there's another component to life here that we sometimes take for granted – the amazing folks who run the businesses upon which we all depend.

Anyone living on the Westshore is likely to be familiar with

Westshore Towing.

It's one of those companies that has managed to become ingrained in the community.

Their trucks are out there when we need them, and the way that they approach their job is at the heart of what makes them such a great community business.

For owner Dave LeQuesne, the job isn't just about towing, it's about being there for people during incredibly stressful times.

"It's being there to say, 'Listen, we know this is a bad situation,

HERE, THERE



but don't worry, we'll take care of it," he explains. "Of course we're in the business to make money, but you have to have compassion for the people you're serving as well."

All my drivers live in the community, and we take our responsibility to help people very seriously. Let's face it, if we're being called, in the majority of cases, someone is already having a terrible day."

Westshore Towing has been a centerpiece of the community

since it was established in 2010.

LeQuesne says his family has been in the West Shore since the early 1920s, when his grandfather, Ernie, established the first tow truck in town in 1925. He also ran his own service station.

A photograph of that tow truck serves as a reminder of their roots today, as it's often included in the company truck's graphics.

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During the First World War, he was called up for duty, causing the family to sell the business in the early 1940s. Dave LeQuesne owned and operated West Shore Taxi from 1996-2007 before returning to the towing business in 2008.

"I could see that it was a service that people needed, and I got back into it for that reason... to help people," LeQuesne recalled.

Although the community they serve has undergone enor-

mous changes over the years, the reason they've stayed in the business has remained the same.

"Whether that's in the way we do our job to make someone's bad day better, or by helping out with local sports teams, or when we helped out at Western Speedway... it's all just a part of making our city a better place," LeQuesne says.

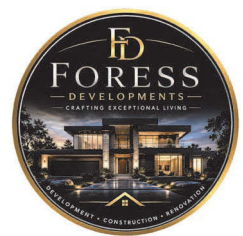
"We're a part of the community, and as part of the community it's our job to contribute - to make it better."



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BARBARA DESJARDINS
Mayor, Esquimalt

EAT SEE DO

LOCAL LEADERS' GUIDE TO SUMMER IN GREATER VICTORIA

By Nishadini Fonseka

MacAulay Point Park

Be it a stunning beach, breakfast or brunch with friends, or a search for hidden gems, the best options may be the ones close to home.

We asked three local leaders for their recommendations for their favourite restaurants, parks and activities across Greater Victoria.

Saanich Mayor Dean Murdock, Oak Bay Mayor Kevin Murdoch, and Esquimalt Mayor Barbara Desjardins shared their personal favourites and recommendations for scenic parks, beloved neighbourhood eateries, and the best ways to spend summer days in the region.

What are your favourite places to have a meal with family and friends?

DEAN MURDOCK

We've got a few favourite spots that we like to get to, or that are kind of family favourites. One of my favourite things to do with the kids, [my kids are both in high school now], but anytime they've been on a Pro D day, I like to take them for breakfast. My son is celiac, so we have to go to a place that has gluten-free options.

So one of our regular spots is Floyd's Diner. Floyd's has a location in Royal Oak that is one that we regularly get to on Pro D

days, but just about any time we're in the mood to go out and have breakfast together.

KEVIN MURDOCH

The first place that comes to my mind is Liv Café & Bistro [in Oak Bay], a fabulous little restaurant. Other favourites include Nohra Thai Kitchen. Penny Farthing Public House is always a favourite. And also, probably the Willows Galley Fish & Chips.

BARBARA DESJARDINS

Well, I stay local because I've got an incredible choice, and it depends on how I feel. If I want to eat around the world, I choose Syriana Restaurant & Catering, which is a local restaurant now almost opening their second location in Esquimalt, and their food is to die for.

If I want upscale and I want to dress up, I go to Janevca Kitchen & Lounge at Rosemead Manor.

And if I just want to be local, I go to La Belle Patate for some poutine. Or I might go to the Saxe Point Public House; great choices.

What are some must-visit places in Greater Victoria?

DEAN MURDOCK

We live in Gordon Head, and so, especially in the summertime, we love to get to the beaches in Gordon Head.

And one of the best spots on the South Island is Glencoe Cove-Kwatsech Park. It's just gorgeous, and you get a beautiful view of the Strait, or at least you get a beautiful view of the Gulf Islands and the San Juan Islands. And if you time it right, you get a nice, warm temperature to dip in.



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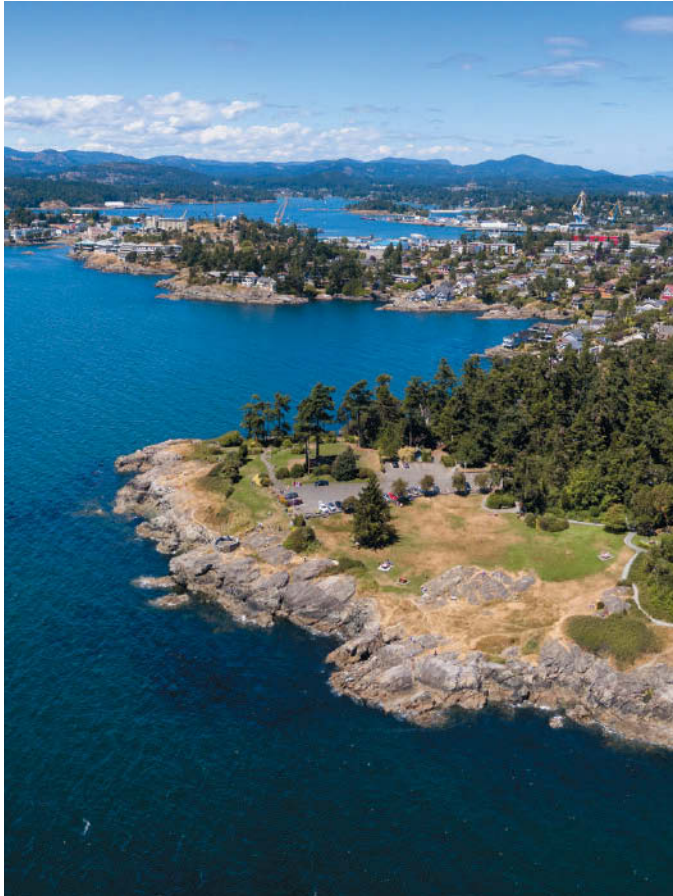
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Saxe Point Park

KEVIN MURDOCH

One is Uplands Park. I was just amazed at the beauty there. Same with Anderson Hill Park, which is lesser known—just fabulous views.

Also, just all of the public art that's out on display throughout Oak Bay... I thought it was a great way to walk around and see things.

And the other one on my list was Oak Bay Archives. Just a really cool place to go and do research and learn about history and see things.

BARBARA DESJARDINS

Well, I hope they'll come to Esquimalt because we're kind of a hidden gem.

But Saxe Point Park is an absolute must; Gorge Park is an absolute must, with the oldest Japanese garden on the West Coast and our Gorge Pavilion.

We've just recently been recognized by Maclean's Magazine for being one of Canada's coolest neighbourhoods, and that's because of the Songhees, also called West Bay, and Westsong Walkway.

What are the hidden gems everyone should experience?

DEAN MURDOCK

I think some of the beaches in Gordon Head are gorgeous.

Like I mentioned, Glencoe Cove, Hollydene Park and Arbutus Cove Park. Those are gorgeous spots. I think everybody knows Cadboro-Gyro Park, which is a beautiful spot. But if you head a

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little bit north of there along the coastline, you'll find some really beautiful beaches that are not quite as crowded.

And then on the other side, I think the Gorge is a beautiful spot to spend time, and it's swimmable too at certain times of the year. You can find a spot to hop in the Gorge to cool off.

KEVIN MURDOCH

I find our little pocket beaches that we have all around the shoreline are just amazing. I never seem to get tired of those. I do think a lot of the natural parks that are out there, the Garry Oak Meadows type parks, everything from Mount Douglas Park to, like I said, Uplands Park, and Anderson Hill Park, those places are all just very special. The other place that I love is Thetis Lake Regional Park.

BARBARA DESJARDINS

If you go to Saxe Point Park, you can see the most amazing sunrise, or you can see the most amazing sunset. And you can see orcas swimming across the frontage often.

Unique to Esquimalt is that we're at the entrance of Esquimalt Harbour. And so seeing the naval ships come and go is a pretty amazing view. For ice cream, if you come to Kid Sister Ice Cream, the atmosphere is amazing, and the ice cream is amazing.

We have a few events that, if you're here in September, you can come to Ribfest. If you're here in May, you can come to Buceaneer Days. They're incredible events where you will run into people, meet new friends, and just be able to enjoy the atmosphere of singing, dancing, music, food and friends.



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Little Free Library

at Ogden Point
builds community

Story and photo by Nishadini Fonseca

Tourists getting off cruise ships and thousands of visitors roaming around Victoria flock to a unique little free library at Ogden Point.

If the creator, Jeff Apolinario, is around, he will chat with the visitors and offer treats to the dogs who stop by.

Among thousands of little free libraries in Greater Victoria, this specific one has been turning heads, likely due to the attention to detail Apolinario has given to the model.

Not everyone suspects the model to be a little free library at first glance.

“Why is there an eight-foot model boat at the end of the guy’s driveway? And then as they get closer, they see the windows, and they see the books, and their faces just light up. I’ve got to admit, that’s the most delightful thing about it,” Apolinario said.

The eight-foot-long Queen Mary ship model holds 50 books when it is full.

“It was full the morning of the air show [Canadian Forces Snowbirds performance], and by the time 30,000 people were done on Dallas Road, it was about a quarter full. Books are reappearing now,” he said.

Apolinario said he always had an affinity for books. He took a step further when he met his late wife, Marge, whom he met over books and ran a bookshop together in Saudi Arabia during the first year of the Gulf War.

He then followed her home to Salt Spring, and since Marge had family in Victoria, they also settled in James Bay.

“I couldn’t have done better than James Bay. I love it here.”

Jeff always wanted to build a little free library and had the shape of a cruise ship in mind, but thought the modern designs were not as flattering as the Queen Mary, which is still floating in California as a hotel in Long Beach.

“They [modern cruise ships] look like floating hotels or greenhouses. So I decided to go old school. And I thought briefly about the Titanic, but... Not only is that a bit dark, especially with cruise ship passengers coming off,” he said.

He explained that the tiny details of the model, such as doors, windows, docks, lifeboats, and railings, were close to real life as he studied books, photos, and even models he found at a thrift store.

Apolinario does not like to take exclusive credit for building the ship. Anytime he talks about the model, he does not forget to talk about someone who played a significant part in helping with

the project, standing behind it like a shadow, Marge.

After she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, he had several good reasons to get her involved in using her hands, cutting, sanding, and varnishing tiny pieces for the little free library. The couple spent a lot of time at the workshop, and he believes it helped her because they had almost 10 years together from her diagnosis, while most people get six to eight years.

"It's easy to look around and still see some of the projects we worked on together," he added after a brief pause.

Although the work stopped after her passing, he finally decided to install the finished project for the public to see this year. He kept it in the garage for years, with time even wearing it down a little bit.

"People have been loving it. I mean, people have been enjoying it enormously. At least I'd like to say so."

It is, in fact, the case, because during the brief interview he had with Victoria News, at least half a dozen groups of people stopped by to explore the library and admire it.

Some of them even travelled from other parts of Victoria just to see it.

The summer rains have been treating the model with kindness so far, but Apolinario said he won't be taking a risk in the fall, so he will bring it inside in October.

While talking to the artist, it is crystal clear that he loves his community and likes to extend his creativity further into the neighbourhood. If someone watches closely at the tree at the sidewalk next to the little free library, it is not hard to notice that it is 'infested' with dragons he made.

He is also part of the community group that fixed masks on the hydro pole across the road.

"One of the things Marge and I did during COVID, and I still carry on, is I paint over taggings in the neighbourhood. In fact, about a month ago, I repainted the whole mailbox across the road because it was just completely covered with tags."

As much as he is excited about projects that involve and benefit the community, he is not ready to profit from them.

"I'm not hunting for the cash," he said.

"When you start getting bored with one, if you don't switch to another, it doesn't come out as well as you'd like. You need a fresh thing to work on, and then if you want, you get back to whatever it was."

He, however, is all for supporting community projects and suggests that the community circulates and reads more books about woodworking, stained glass, and recycling large objects, because the more of these, the better.

"And if folks want to put one [a little free library] up for their street, their block, their neighbourhood, I'm all for it."

When he is not focused on a project in his workshop, he likes to watch visitors checking out the little free library, the dragon-infested tree, and the mask pole, alongside the hopscotch he drew on the sidewalk in front of his house.

"And as long as people are enjoying them right now, I'm a happy man."

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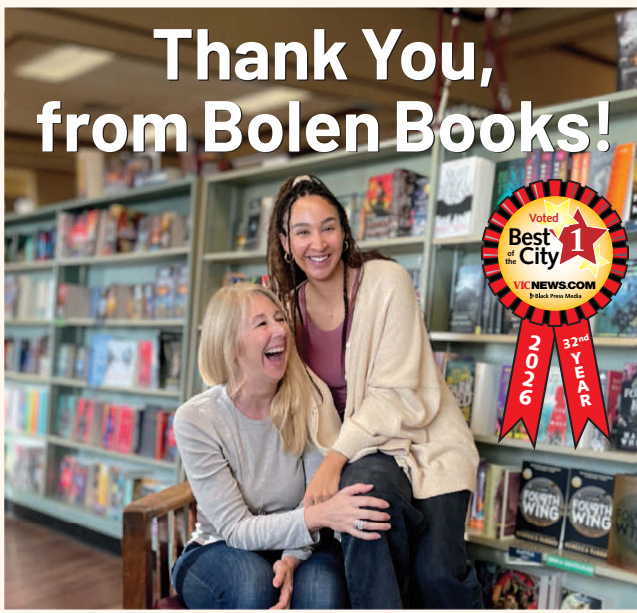
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