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Bike Victoria: British Columbia's Cycling Destination

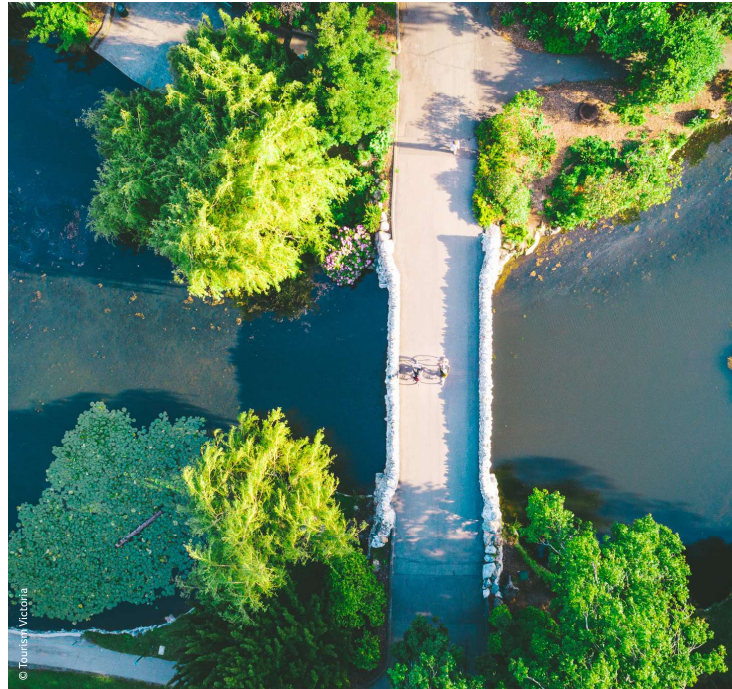
BY DAN SHRYOCK



Victoria may be the most bicycle-friendly destination in the Pacific Northwest. Bike riders are as ubiquitous as sailboats and famous landmarks along the Inner Harbour. Protected bicycle lanes that pass in front of The Fairmont Empress and Parliament Building are avenues to safe, comfortable cycling excursions across British Columbia's capital city.

There also are upwards of 50 miles of converted rail trails extending from the downtown area into the countryside, making bicycles a viable vehicle for exploration. These trails are among several ways to explore Victoria and the southern end of Vancouver Island by bike.

"Bicycles are a huge part of our culture," says Seamus McGrath, director of the city's annual Tour de Victoria cycling event. So, when in Victoria, ride a bike.



Rent Wheels and Take a Tour

Choose between a guided, narrated excursion or perhaps a map-your-own tour to destinations that interest you. There are several bike rental shops throughout Victoria with staffs ready to help. Ask for maps and destination ideas.

"People find a bike tour the best way to get intimate with the city and see places you wouldn't otherwise see if you're in a vehicle," says Jordan Varga, owner of The Pedaler Cycling Tours & Rentals. "Victoria is so condensed, and people are here for such a short time so they want to see as much as they can."

The Pedaler's popular, guided "Castles, Hoods and Legends" tour, for example, blends historical anecdotes, a little architecture, ocean vistas, and the city's lush Beacon Hill Park in two hours.

Going alone? The Seaside Tour route follows city streets from the Inner Harbour, past the cruise ship dock on Dallas Road, and along the southern shoreline using a paved, car-free path. Coast down to Clover Point Park where you may find local cyclists pausing to look for orcas. Continue to Beach Drive and more coastal scenery or reverse course and detour through Beacon Hill Park.

Follow the Trails

The network of regional trails—former rail lines—serve as bicycle expressways in town during commuting hours. Ride a little farther and the same paths provide easy access into the quiet, rural side of Vancouver Island.

The Lochside Regional Trail heads north about 18 miles to rural Saanich, Sidney and Swartz Bay. The trail is paved in most places with light gravel in others, and occasionally uses residential streets. It's easy to pit stop at Mattick's Farm for deli-counter picnic fixings and then detour a half mile later into Island View Beach Regional Park for lunch.

The more extensive 34-mile Galloping Goose Regional Trail wanders west to Langford, Metchosin and Sooke before turning deep into the back country. Gravel bikes are advised beyond urban areas. The Galloping Goose also intersects with the E&N Rail Trail, another convenient regional access trail from the city.

Go Extreme

Experienced road cyclists looking for a challenge can follow one of the regional trails north or west of the city center and discover some exceptional, testy hills. Look for Munn, Millstream



Lake and Lake Prospect roads.

“For me, it’s the Munn Road section in the area known as the Highlands,” McGrath says. “There’s about 10 miles there where the road goes high up in the rainforest, high up in cedar trees and by the lakes. If you’re an avid cyclist, it’s a dream.”

Celebrate Cycling

The annual Tour de Victoria bicycle ride, scheduled on Aug. 17, 2024, celebrates the city’s cycling culture with accessible bike rides for all ages and abilities. The tour offers seven routes ranging from 9.3 miles along the coast to 100 miles through the rainforest and back. Register at tourdevictoria.com.

Local tourism information is available at tourismvictoria.com. 📍

