

Offering a wealth of outdoor activities, Vancouver provides language students with a particularly lively experience in a safe environment. BETHAN NORRIS provides the lowdown on this student friendly city.

Vancouver is one of the greatest, most beautiful cities on earth,” enthuses Petra Schmidt from International Language Schools of Canada in the city. “We’ve got beaches and mountains, exciting city life and relaxing rural life starting at the outskirts of the city, a very pleasant climate, a reputation as a safe city and friendly people from all over the globe.”

Language students converge on Vancouver for a variety of reasons, but one of the most important, according to many language schools in the city, is its widespread reputation for safety. “Canada’s gun laws and people’s more pacifistic attitude make [Vancouver] a much safer city than its US counterparts,” says Virginia Christopher, General Manager of YMCA International College. “[This is] important for students.”

Robin Adams from KTC Language Centre agrees. “Most ESL students choose Vancouver because they feel that it is far safer than most American cities,” he says, while Bryan Cassidy from Century College adds, “Vancouver is safe and very welcoming. Our multicultural population makes Vancouver an ideal place for students to feel comfortable while learning English.”

With a population of two million, Vancouver achieves a happy balance

between offering all the attractions of city life yet being small enough to provide a safe and welcoming atmosphere for foreign visitors. The multicultural local population plays a key role in this, according to Jeremy Giles at Rainbow College. “Vancouver is first and foremost known as ‘Canada’s Gateway to the Pacific’,” he says. “With a population that is currently 54 per cent Asian... it stands to reason that a majority of the students coming to Vancouver are from Southeast Asia.”

However, Vancouver attracts a whole range of nationalities, not just those from Asia, and for many language students from around the world the city’s other big attraction is the lure of the great outdoors. “As the only city of significant size on this side of

the country, Vancouver is fundamentally a staging point for forays into the wilds of British Columbia,” confirms Giles at Rainbow College.

The city is located between mountains, forest and the Pacific Ocean, meaning that the number of outdoor activities available is almost unlimited.



English Bay

English Bay is a diverse neighbourhood in the city’s West End. Walking the seawall or canoeing are activities students can consider here while the area is also renowned for al fresco dining

“In the summer, the climate is warm and dry, making it an ideal spot for watersports such as swimming, kayaking and sailing,” says Terry Rogocki, Director of the Canadian College of English Language. “Hiking, roller-blading and cycling are also popular activities to do in and around the

city. [In winter] the city rarely sees snow, but Vancouverites wishing for the white stuff can ski and snowboard at one of the three local resorts, each located only 20 minutes from downtown Vancouver.”

Vancouver is close to some of the best sporting destinations in the world, such as the famous Whistler ski resort, which is ranked as the number-one ski destination in North America and co-host of the 2010 Winter Olympics. And, at the other end of the scale, Vancouver Island boasts some of the greatest scuba diving sites in the world, complete with artificial reefs created from sunken decommissioned navy battleships.

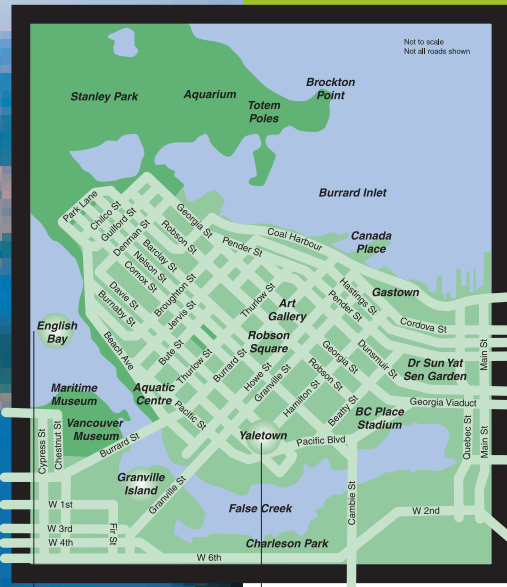
With so many opportunities for outdoor activities on their doorstep, local people are known for leading an active outdoors lifestyle, something which students often find easy to become absorbed in. “Many students tell me they actually feel compelled to start exercising after being here for only a few weeks,” says Giles.



Hamilton Street in Yaletown

Hamilton Street is one of the bustling streets in this district with many restaurants, bars and cafés. Yaletown itself was a warehouse district until the late 1980s and is now home to a trendy community

Out and about in Vancouver



For those wanting to explore some of Vancouver's more sedentary attractions, however, there are many opportunities to visit some of the city's "interesting and diverse neighbourhoods", says Janice Kent

from the Canadian Business English Institute (CBEI). "In one day, a student can visit historic Gastown, picture-perfect Kitsilano, trendy Yaletown, artistic Commercial Drive, see the world's narrowest building in Chinatown and see the totem poles in 400-hectare Stanley Park," she says.

Gastown is the site where the city of Vancouver was founded and contains some of the oldest buildings in the city. It is also home to the newly built Storyeum, which, according to Giles, is a "museum-meets-theatre attraction that recounts the history

not only of the city but most of the province as well".

Vancouver is very much a student city, attracting students from the rest of Canada too. Christopher points out that this can create many academic opportunities. "The wide variety of types of schools from short-term English and activity programmes to university studies at all levels make transferring between programmes easy if students change their minds and wish to study longer in Canada or even get a degree from a Canadian university," she says.

It also means that the nightlife in the city is inevitably busy and varied and there are numerous nightclubs, bars and restaurants to choose from. Granville Island and

Agent viewpoint

"Usually [students] say that they like the sea, mountains, parks and in general all the nature [in Vancouver]. Of course they [also] like the Vancouver nightlife, shopping and the fact that they are close to Whistler, Victoria and Seattle. During the summer, Vancouver is more for teenagers and younger [students] but during October and November, even if the weather is not that nice, Vancouver is still an attraction to young professionals."

Veronica Hernandez, Class Education, Mexico

"Generally, Canada has become very popular for all Saudis, especially after September 11. It is very hard now for a Saudi to think about going to the USA. Definitely Vancouver is a favourite destination for all Saudis as [it is a] pretty nice and safe city. Also, people know about the University of British Columbia. Young people who go for short periods in the summer, I expect them to enjoy the city's nightlife [while] the mature [students] enjoy the actual Canadian life and the city harbours."

Hatim Taha, Golden Travels Co, Saudi Arabia

"Vancouver is our most popular destination in Canada. To our students it's the most vibrant Canadian city, surrounded by beautiful mountains, lakes and the sea. Host families are always described as warm and friendly, they invite students for weekend trips and make them feel part of the family. Mainly internship students choose Vancouver because of the excellent reputation we have earned in this [Vancouver-based] programme in the last few years."

Milena Langer, GLS Sprachenzentrum, Germany

Denman Street are popular places for students to go in the evenings due to their wide selection of cafés and restaurants. Selene Gonzalez from Mexico, an ex-student of CBEI, reports being particularly impressed by the range of food available in Vancouver. "One day you can have breakfast in a French café, then have lunch in a Japanese restaurant and finally have dinner in a Greek place," she says.

With a large local Asian population, it is no wonder that the Asian food found in Vancouver is particularly prized by tourists and locals alike. "Vancouver has some of the best sushi outside of Japan," claims Israel Lopez from Pacific Language Institute, located in the city.

Vancouver also prides itself on its many annual events, which range from cultural events focusing on the arts to other celebrations that border on the surreal. Schmidt lists the Vancouver International Film festival, the Shakespeare Festival "Bard on the Beach" – where Shakespeare's plays are performed under a tent on the beach – the International Writer's festival and the Molson Indy car race as just some of the many events that students can enjoy during their stay. Christopher adds, "The Vancouver-Nanaimo annual Bathtub



Granville Island & False Creek

Granville Island, known as the playground of the inner city, is connected to the city by a causeway and located on the south shore of False Creek

Race is unique [and] the Polar Bear Swim – a New Year's Day swim in the ocean – is fun for students to join in or watch."

Rogocki is keen to highlight one of the city's lesser known attractions.

"One of the most beautiful areas of Vancouver is Lighthouse Park," he says.

"Located in West Vancou-

ver, it is on a peninsula with hiking trails leading into an old growth rainforest. There are amazing views of downtown Vancouver and seals are frequently seen sunbathing on the rocks below the park."

PHOTOGRAPHS: TOURISM BRITISH COLUMBIA