

Getting Around BC

BC is bigger than most countries; fortunately, it's easy to get around, with efficient (and, in some cases, quite romantic) road, rail, air and ferry networks.



By Road

All major roads and most secondary roads in BC are paved and well-engineered. Speeds and distances are posted in kilometres; the speed limit on BC highways is usually 80 to 100 kilometres (50 to 60 miles) per hour. In cities and towns, it's usually 50 kilometres (30 miles) per hour or less. Seat belt, motorcycle and bicycle helmets, and infant car seat use are all required by law.

Roads, most bridges, and even some inland ferries are free of charge. Some scenic drives are designated but, in reality, virtually every highway in BC is a scenic route; many, too, are storied, following routes hacked through the wilderness by early traders, prospectors and adventurers.

BC's Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure Web site, at www.drivebc.ca, has up-to-date road reports.

Major Highways

Highway 99 (an extension of the US Interstate-5) begins at the Canada/US border and travels through Vancouver and Whistler to join Hwy 97 near Cache Creek. Between Vancouver and Whistler it's known as the Sea-to-Sky Highway, one of BC's most beautiful drives.

Highway 1, the Trans-Canada Highway, connects the province from west to east and links Victoria to Vancouver and Vancouver to the Thompson Okanagan and the Kootenay Rockies.

Highway 5, the Coquihalla Highway, provides a fast, high altitude link between Hope and Kamloops, then continues to Valemount in the northern Rockies (the road can see snow at any time of year).

Highway 3, the Crowsnest Highway, travels east-west along BC's southern border, connecting Hope to the southern Rockies and Alberta.

Highway 16, the British Columbia section of the Yellowhead Highway, runs east-west across northern BC, from Jasper, Alberta to Prince Rupert on BC's north coast and across to Haida Gwaii.

Highway 97 runs from the US border south of Osoyoos to the Yukon Territory. From Cache Creek to Prince George it's known as the Cariboo Highway; North of Dawson Creek, it becomes the Alaska Highway.

Highway 37, the Stewart-Cassiar Highway, links Highway 16 with Highway 97 in the Yukon. The road is paved but services and towns are sparse.

Highway 20, a section of which is known as the Freedom Road, is a dramatically winding road across the remote Cariboo Chilcotin Coast from Bella Coola to Williams Lake.

Highways 93 and 95 travel north-south along the western slopes of the Rockies.

Ferry service from Horseshoe Bay, near Vancouver, connects to Highway 101 on the Sunshine Coast and which travels 140 kilometres (86 miles) from Langdale to Lund.

Back Roads and Logging Roads

Logging roads, also known as Forest Service Roads, are open to the public unless otherwise posted. There are no service stations on them, and some are not suitable for large RVs. Be aware that logging trucks and other working vehicles have the right-of-way on these roads. Weekend travel is advisable as most logging is done during the week.

It's advisable to check with local Visitor Centres or Forest Service offices before venturing onto any unpaved back road or logging road as these roads might be accessible for four-wheel drive vehicles only and many are only open seasonally. www.hellobc.com/british-columbia/about-bc/visitor-centres.aspx can provide more details.

Winter Driving

BC's mountain highways are ploughed, sanded, and salted when necessary throughout winter, though road closures are sometimes necessary. Some of the higher altitude highway passes are occasionally deemed avalanche-hazard zones. In such cases they will be closed to traffic while avalanche-control measures are taken. Avoid stopping in posted avalanche zones. If you plan to drive extensively in BC's interior between December and March, it is advisable to have snow tires and chains rather than all-season tires.

Car Rentals

Most major international car rental companies operate in BC, with outlets in airports and larger towns. RV rentals are also available through specialist agencies in larger towns.



Bus & Transit Travel

Excellent long distance bus service is available throughout the province, as well as to and from many U.S. cities.

Vancouver and Victoria both have excellent public transit systems; many smaller centres, including Whistler, Kamloops, and Sechelt, on the Sunshine Coast, also have public transit systems.

Travel Time

From:	To:	Distance: km (miles)	Hours Driving:	Hours Flying:
Vancouver	Whistler	123 (76)	2	45 mins
	Victoria	69 (43)*	3.5	30 mins
	Fort St. John	1237 (769)	16	1.75 hours
	Prince George	778 (483)	10	1 hour
	Cranbrook	845 (525)	11	1.5 hours
	Kelowna	395 (245)	4	1 hour
	Prince Rupert	1502 (933)	18	2 hours
	Whitehorse, Yukon	2417 (1502)	30	2.5 hours

*** Travel between Vancouver and Victoria (by ground) includes ferry transport. Ferry distance not included.**

By Air

Most places in British Columbia are air accessible, with airports in most towns and floatplanes serving coastal and island communities.

Regional carriers fly to more than 25 destinations around the province from Vancouver International Airport (YVR). Larger regional aircraft depart from the Domestic Terminal, while smaller aircraft and helicopters leave from YVR's South Terminal.

Floatplane service is available from YVR as well as from downtown Vancouver, downtown Victoria, the southern Gulf Island Islands, and many coastal communities.

Scheduled helicopter service is also available between Vancouver and Victoria.

By Sea

Ocean travel is an essential part of BC life; some communities have no road access and can only be reached by sea or air.

BC Ferries

BC Ferries (www.bcferrries.com) operates one of the largest and busiest ferry systems in the world, with 35 vessels serving almost 50 ports of call.

The 25 different routes include frequent (hourly in summer) 90-minute sailings between Tsawwassen, 40-minutes south of Vancouver, and Swartz Bay, 30 minutes north of Victoria. Ferries also sail every few hours between Horseshoe Bay, north of Vancouver and Nanaimo on Vancouver Island; between Horseshoe Bay and Langdale on the Sunshine Coast; between Earl's Cove and SALTERY Bay on the Sunshine Coast; and between Powell River, also on the Sunshine Coast and Comox on Vancouver Island. The Southern Gulf Islands have ferry service from both Tsawwassen and Swartz Bay, while the Northern Gulf Islands are served by several different Vancouver Island ports.

BC Ferries also make year-round journeys from Port Hardy, on Vancouver Island, through the Inside Passage to Prince Rupert with stops at Bella Bella and Klemmtu. . , A smaller vessel provides connecting service to several other communities on the Central Coast. . From Prince Rupert, year-round service is available to Haida Gwaii.

Vessels on the major routes, including the Vancouver to Victoria run, can carry as many as 470 cars and more than 2,000 passengers, and have restaurants, gift shops and play areas. Ferries on the Inside Passage and Haida Gwaii routes, including the *MV Northern Adventure*, launched in March, 2007, also have private cabins.

Vehicle reservations are available, for an extra fee, on Vancouver to Vancouver Island and Vancouver to Sunshine Coast routes. They are optional, and free, on sailings from Tsawwassen to the Southern Gulf Islands, and strongly recommended, but free, on the Port Hardy-Prince Rupert-Haida Gwaii runs. Other routes are served on a first-come first served basis.

Coastal Freighters

Coastal freighters take passengers and supplies to remote Vancouver Island out ports. The MV Uchuck III, a 100-passenger coastal packet freighter, sails from Gold River, 90 kilometres (55 miles) west of Campbell River, to a number of isolated west-coast settlements.

Lady Rose Marine Services takes passengers on packet freighters from Port Alberni to Bamfield and Ucluelet, and to kayaking bases in the Broken Group Islands.

Cruises and Boat Tours

Several companies operate harbour cruises in Vancouver and Victoria; others run longer boat tours along BC's coast. Popular destinations include the Southern Gulf Islands and Princess Louisa Inlet, a stunning fjord on the Sunshine Coast.

Inland Ferries

In the interior, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure operates several lake and river ferries, including the world's longest free ferry ride, a 35-minute crossing of Kootenay Lake between Balfour, north of Nelson, and Kootenay Bay.

Private Boats

The coastlines around Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast and the Gulf Islands are rich with marine parks and marinas providing safe moorage and facilities. Reservations are highly recommended for moorage in the late spring and summer.

Water Taxis and Foot Passenger Ferries

Ferries are also a fun way to tour the cities: Miniature foot passenger ferries prove plentiful in Vancouver's False Creek and Victoria's Inner Harbour, while the Seabus, a commuter catamaran, sails across Burrard Inlet to Vancouver's North Shore. Water taxis provide access to many remote islands and inlets along the coast.

By Train

Via Rail (www.viarail.ca), Canada's national passenger rail service, operates two routes in BC.

The Canadian is a three-and-a-half-day journey between Vancouver and Toronto, via Kamloops, Clearwater and Valemount, BC, and Jasper, Alberta.

The Jasper – Prince Rupert route is a two-day, 1,160-kilometre (721-mile), all-daylight journey across Northern BC connecting Jasper, in the Rockies, and Prince Rupert, on the Pacific Coast.

The Rocky Mountaineer (www.rockymountaineer.com), the largest privately-owned passenger rail service in North America, offers two-day, all daylight, fully catered rail tours across BC between Vancouver and the Canadian Rockies.

Passengers can travel in either direction on a number of different routes:

Journey through the Clouds, runs between Vancouver and Jasper, Alberta.

First Passage to the West, travels between Vancouver and either Lake Louise, Banff, or Calgary, Alberta.

Rainforest to Gold Rush, runs through the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast region between Whistler, BC and Jasper, Alberta.

The Whistler Sea to Sky Climb, also operated by Rocky Mountaineer, is a three-and-a-half-hour rail tour from Vancouver to Whistler via Howe Sound, and the Cheakamus Canyon.

Historic Train Journeys

Several historic trains, operated by, and for, railway enthusiasts, operate in BC.

From Summerland, in the Thompson Okanagan, you can take a 90-minute, 16-kilometre (10 mile) journey on the Kettle Valley Steam Railway (www.kettlevalleyrail.org). A 1912 locomotive pulls vintage passenger coaches and an open air cars past the orchards and vineyards of the south Okanagan.

In Port Alberni on Vancouver Island, the Alberni Pacific Railway steam train (www.alberniheritage.com), pulled by a 1929 Baldwin steam locomotive, makes the 35-minute jaunt between a 1912 CPR Station and the McLean Mill National Historic Site, home of Canada's only commercial steam-powered sawmill.