

Fishing for family fun in Victoria

City easily charms kids and parents

JODY ROBBINS
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

My hands reek of fish as I pass them one at a time to my excitable daughter. She gleefully tosses the frozen treats into the Pacific Ocean for the seals to gobble up. As much as I'd like to, I can't complain. She's having a ball and I'm getting the family vacation I wanted.

If you're like me, when shopping for a family holiday you're looking for value; an inexpensive destination that's close by yet different enough from your hometown.

Most importantly, it needs to be tolerable with tots in tow. That's why we often choose Victoria.

You can, of course, visit the obvious tourist attractions along Victoria's picturesque Inner Harbour and make the requisite trip to Bchart Gardens, which is particularly popular when in need of a bit of green. Some sites are worth it, but with a family it can quickly add up. Here are two favourite, affordable spots in and around the City of Gardens.

Oak Bay

About a 15-minute drive away from downtown Victoria lies quaint Oak Bay. This collage of



Jody Robbins, for the Calgary Herald

Eve Pigat holds up a whale bone at the Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre.

villages offers family activities that are off the beaten tourist path, yet well loved by locals.

In Estevan Village, you'll discover that tea time isn't just for old ladies in outlandish hats. At Crumsby's, kids can partake of the Children's Tea Party that includes their beverage of choice in a teapot with mini cups and saucers and cupcakes served up on a tray for \$5. The cafe bursts with toys to occupy the younger set while grown-ups can sip their barista coffee and munch on raspberry spelt scones drizzled with agave while viewing the framed works of art on display by local children.

After tea, browse among the posh shops in the village including Buddies Toys, a lovely

independent toy store. If hunger strikes again, stroll over to Willows Galley for freshly fried seafood on the corner of Estevan and Dunlev. We took ours wrapped in newsprint to Willows beach — just three blocks away — for a picnic. With stunning views of the Olympic Mountains, including the dormant volcano, Mount Baker, families can while away the day along its shallow and protected waters or burn off energy in the shaded playground.

Then it's a quick walk or drive south on Beach Drive to the Oak Bay Marina. There, dads can gaze longingly at the sailboats and imagine life on the coast while moms and kids feed resident seals frozen fish from the marina

If You Go

- Oak Bay: www.oakbaytourism.com
- Crumsby's: www.crumbsys.com
- Oak Bay Marina: www.oakbay-marina.com
- Ottavio's: www.ottaviovictoria.com
- Sidney: http://www.sidney.ca/Visitors.htm
- Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre: www.oceandiscovery.ca
- Mineral World: www.mineral-world.ca
- Fish on Fifth: http://www.fishon5th.com/Welcome.html
- Cedarwood Motel: http://thecedarwood.ca/

go off until a moment later you've arrived at sea level.

The aquarium, devoted to discovering the recently renamed Salish Sea, offers more than the usual tanks and fish feeding frenzy. Kids interact with the ocean through a number of different stations including microscopes to watch minuscule marine life.

Across the street, pop into Mineral World and dig in their Scratch Patch for polished stones or wander down Beacon Avenue and discover why Sidney is known as Canada's Booktown.

Head in the opposite direction, towards the ocean, to find the Satellite Fish Co. The invigorating, pungent smell of sea air slaps your face as you walk along the pier and into this fish monger for daily fresh catches including crab at reasonable prices. These fishermen know how to pack for travel, so be sure to stock up here before flying home.

If you prefer your catch cooked, do as the local's do and eat at Fish on Fifth, a relaxed neighbourhood joint that welcomes families with high chairs and a kids menu. There are options for fried or grilled fish, including wild salmon and who doesn't love clam strips?

Stay at the family run Cedarwood Motel as our family has done for more than 30 years. Rates start at \$95 for a basic room in off-season, to \$229 in summer for a deluxe suite kitted out with a jet tub, fireplace and balcony overlooking the ocean.

freezer. If there's still time left in the day, head over to Oak Bay Avenue to peruse the quaint high street shops and galleries and cap it off with an antipasto platter at Ottavio's, voted Vancouver Island's best deli.

Sidney

If you've been to the island, you've likely bypassed Sidney, the location of both the airport and ferry terminal. But this unpretentious seaside town is worth the stop, especially for families.

Kids will be hooked upon entry at the Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre. Access requires descending in a tricked out elevator that invokes a submarine being submerged into the sea. The floor rumbles, lights flash and all the bells and whistles

Royal Caribbean ship reimagined



PHIL REIMER
PORTS & BOWS

My first impression after boarding Royal Caribbean's Radiance of the Seas in Victoria was that the ship was being decommissioned.

While the outside of the ship had not changed, at that point, the inside public areas were virtually gutted.

It turned out that Radiance, the oldest in of the Radiance Class ships, was being remodelled — refurbishing is a word that does not do it justice.

Built in 2001, the 2,500-passenger ship was taking on many of the successful features you will find on Oasis of the Seas and Allure of the Seas, the two biggest cruise ships in the world.

It can take months to remodel a home. However, when you have \$30 million to spend and 1,000 workers at your service, you would be amazed at what can be

accomplished in only 21 days. When you add up the projects, there were 1,000, some lasting a few days, others lasting a few hours. With military precision, the Victoria Shipyard made it on time for the remodelled ship's first cruise to Alaska on June 10. This was also a chance for the yard to show off to the federal government, in hopes of getting a piece of the \$35 billion earmarked for new and remodelled ships for the navy, and beyond, over the next few decades.

Radiance of the Seas was also being remodelled to save money. With new paint on the bottom of its hull and a few changes to the propulsion system, it will save 5,500 gallons of fuel a week.

This makeover is all part of the "Royal Advantage" program being undertaken for older members of Royal Caribbean's fleet.

Radiance added seven new restaurants during its stay in dry dock. Samba's, a Brazilian Churrascaria-style restaurant — think meat — is \$25 for dinner only. Giovanni's Table, for family Italian dining, is \$15 for lunch and \$20 for dinner. Izumi, fashionably Asian

Fusion, has a la carte pricing. The Park Cafe deli, the "Dog House" for those who love hotdogs, the Quill and Compass Pub, and Rita's Cantina's, a Mexican restaurant, are included in your cruise price. Also opening will be the Chef's Table, at \$95, one of the most expensive restaurants at sea and with room for only 16 guests each night. You get five courses and wine.

When it heads south for the winter, Radiance of the Seas will have a series of itineraries that include 12-night trips from Sydney to the South Pacific, including Noumea, Vanuatu and New Caledonia, as well as the traditional 14-night cruises to New Zealand. As for what it costs to cruise on this remodelled Radiance, here's one example: Vancouver to Seward (Anchorage), seven days, Sept. 2, \$739.

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