

UAS Pocket Guide

UBC, Vancouver



University
Alliance for
Sustainability

General Information

If you just asked yourself whether you would like to spend a few weeks, or even months, in one of the most gorgeous cities of the world, well, your answer should be yes. Vancouver has an environmentally-friendly and eco-everything reputation on the West Coast. It is also said to be the city of bikers and joggers but if you fancy something more special you still have a never-ending range of options, such as: skiing, climbing, kayaking, surfing, tennis, ice hockey, rugby, and yoga.



View from Stanley Park // Photo: Barbara Bencze.

It doesn't matter whether you are a professional athlete or someone who likes to run along the beach twice a week, this city gives you all the air, the nature and the spirit to feel more alive than ever before. The temperate pacific climate, the mountains, the woods, and the ocean make even the most grey, rainiest winter days easy to get along with.



Downtown Vancouver. Queen Elizabeth Park // Photo: Sebastian Stagl.

Vancouver has a young history, the city was founded in the second half of the nineteenth century, and however, it has been officially declared to be on First Nations' territory, in fact, there was a First Nation's city here before the city that stands today. If you are interested in the local history or in First Nations history, you shouldn't miss visiting the Museum of Anthropology and the Museum of Vancouver. Pro tip: the Museum of Anthropology is right on the UBC campus and free for all UBC students.

Travel

Prior to your arrival you need to keep three things in your mind: you better have a visa to Canada or, from March 2016, you have to apply for an Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA; similar to the ESTA system of the USA). It is really cheap (CAD 6) and really easy, you will get an answer within a few hours. Besides you should have an acceptance letter printed out, just in case you still have to convince someone at the airport that you are welcome in Canada. And third, don't arrange medical insurance by yourself since, as an international student, it is requested that you get insurance from UBC (called Imed Card).



Sunset Beach, Stanley Park // Photo: Barbara Bencze.

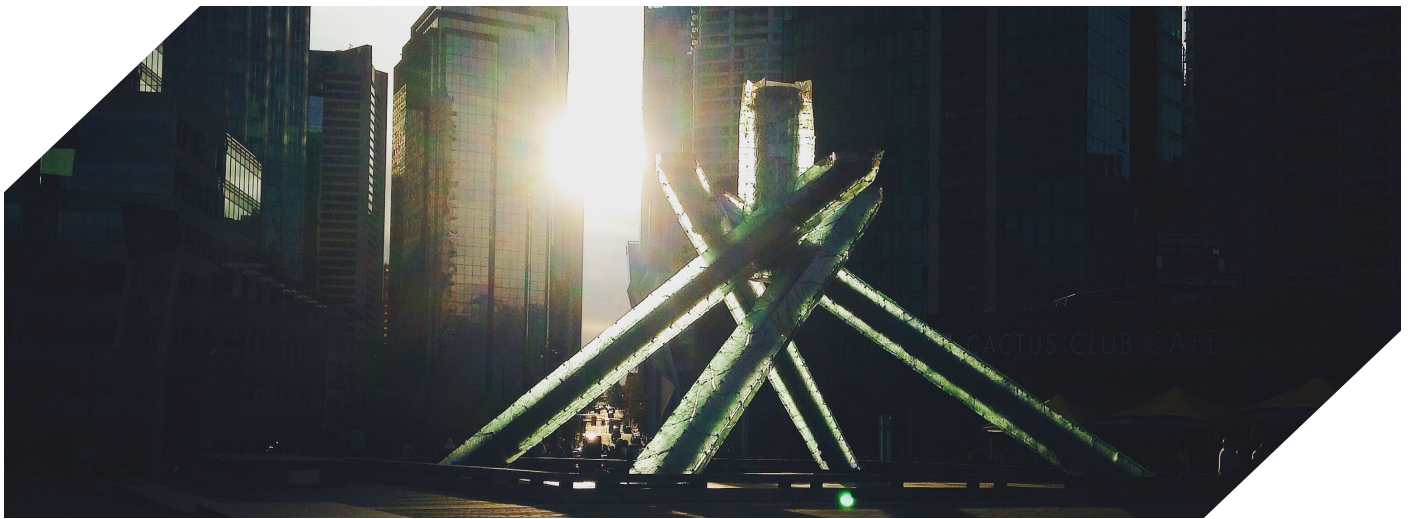
Living

Finding a room in Vancouver isn't quite as hard as in Berlin but definitely more expensive. The monthly rent can easily add up to 500-700 CAD for a single room in a shared flat. The best areas to live in Vancouver are located just south from the downtown core, in areas such as Kitsilano, Arbutus Ridge, Shaughnessy or West Point Grey. If you happen to be able to pay five times more for a room, you should look for a room in trendy Gastown, in the historical district downtown. If you prefer to pay less, check out the Broadway and Commercial Street area or Broadway and Main Street crossings. They are a bit further from the campus but by bus it should not be a problem to get home in less than 30 minutes.

The only district you should not move to is the downtown east side that extends to Main Street and 8th Avenue (especially Main Street and East Hastings). These districts can be dangerous as they are full of people suffering from addictions and other mental health issues, many people live on the streets, and the area is prone to crime. You can find a room to rent on craigslist but if you didn't manage to get a place to stay before you arrive, or you are only staying for a few weeks, there is a hostel at the UBC campus.

Getting started at UBC

At the university there is one person you will be really grateful for, her name is Wenjie (Wendy) Kang (wendy.kang@ubc.ca), the Go Global Advisor. She can answer almost all your questions that keep you up at night, as long as they are about school. You will get a Student Card from her and, if you are enrolled in courses, the so-called UPass – your access to the public transport system. It is very easy to pay for it, you will see, all you need is internet. Finding courses at UBC is not easy in general, since the system is a bit hard to get know. Ultimately, it will depend on the individual professor whether he or she is okay with you auditing the course and getting credits for it. The Sustainability Initiative at UBC has its own website where you can find a tons of relevant information. Moreover, under the Courses & Teaching tag you can find courses that focus on economic, social or environmental sustainability. In general, there are more courses offered during the autumn semester, which starts on 1st September and goes on until early December. You have to consider the general registration dates which apply to all students or your dream courses may be fully booked even before you could have thought about them. You can find more information about the academic calendar on the website.



University of British Columbia, Student Union Boulevard // Photo: Sebastian Stagl.

University System

You will see all your registered courses on UBC Connect, on the e-learning system of UBC, and you can find all of the course materials and literature you will need here as well. You can log in with your CWL-account (Campus-Wide Login) which also gives you access to all the PCs in the libraries, to install the VPN system on your laptop and to use the “ubcsecure” wifi on the campus.

The UBC is also part of the eduroam network that the Freie Universität Berlin uses. So, you can also login with the credentials of your home university. There is no library card, everything you need is your UBC student card. The Koerner Library is a really good place to focus and, just as in every other libraries on campus, you don't even need to use a cloakroom or a wardrobe, and you can just bring all of your stuff in with you. After dealing with security policies of European libraries for years and hoping to understand their systems, it was like heaven on the Earth.



Street view in Gastown // Photo: Barbara Bencze.

Campus

And when I say campus, I mean a little city in the city. It has everything you may need and is constantly being built and improved. One negative comment on campus life, is that food is extremely overpriced. Vancouver is known for its incredible foodie scene. Vancouverites value organic, local and seasonal food. Vancouver's diverse population is also reflected in the restaurants you can find, there is a great variety of food trucks, sushi places, diners, and restaurants offering all types of food, like Indian, Vietnamese, Mexican, Chinese, and especially fusion food. There are three restaurants you definitely have to visit once you make it to Vancouver. Number one is the Naam. It is a vegetarian restaurant, open 24 hours a day, founded during the most hippy times of the city, it's located on what was once called Rainbow Street (now has the boring name of 4th Avenue). The other two places are the very best sushi restaurant you have ever been to, the Eatery, and a bagel place called Siegel's Bagels that serves Montreal-style bagels. The food scene is changing constantly, of course, but if you just grab some sushi on your way home you can't make a mistake. If you are loose on the money, The Nomad and The Acorn are two further options that are definitely worth a visit. Once a year the Georgia Straight elects the best restaurants, cafés, bars, pubs and everything you can imagine; it has almost as many categories as the Grammy's. So, if you run out of ideas or want to explore something different, you can always rely on their tips. If you are a coffee junkie, Vancouver will be paradise for you. Especially if you are into cold brews. Even though the massive amount of Starbucks café gives the impression that Vancouver is just like any other North American city, there are a lot of great independent local coffee shops that offer local roasts. To name only a few, there is Matchstick Coffee Roasters, Gene Café, Café Kafka's, 49th Parallel Coffee Roasters, Our Town Café, Moja Coffee, etc. The best coffee on campus you can get at The Great Dane.





Totem Poles in Stanley Park // Photo: Sebastian Stagl.

Vancouver Specialties

Vancouver's music scene is quite awesome, even compared to Berlin's, since it is very close to Portland and to Los Angeles, and it isn't even impossible to get last-minute tickets for your favorite bands or DJ's gig. Just follow Vancouver on Songkick or any of the several what-to-do-in-Vancouver websites, such as Vancouver is awesome. If you are already full of delicious food, went out to the Fortune Club last weekend, and would like to just do something easy and fun, there are at least fifteen beaches you can walk along in the city. Just to mention some of them: Spanish Banks, Wreck beach, Jericho Beach, Kitsilano Beach, English Bay Beach, Sunset Beach, and of course, the whole Stanley Park, which is more like a forest than a park. Each and every beach is unique and perfect in their own terms. If you are very very lucky, you might even spot a whale, for example at Jericho Beach. You probably will spot a seal but there are many of them around Vancouver, so do not give up and go for the whale. If you are tired of the beaches you can always go to one of the surrounding mountains, such as Grouse Mountain or Mount Seymour. They are great for both hiking and skiing and reachable within an hour from downtown.



Wreck Beach // Photo: Barbara Bencze.

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