

Steve's TIPS for SIPS 2020

You likely have a smart phone and know how to check things out. But here are a few tips from a local.

GENERAL

The conference venue (Victoria Conference Centre) is attached to The Empress Hotel. Worth walking around in the public parts of the hotel.

There are dozens of little coffee places around and about.

The hotel fronts on Victoria's inner harbour. Generally has decent buskers. There is a tourism centre with maps etc. on the northwest corner of the inner harbour. To the southwest are the Legislative Assembly of BC (aka "The Leg") and the Royal BC Natural History Museum <https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/>. Museum gift shop is decent.

Behind the Museum there is a small clutch of food trucks. Not Portland, but not so bad.

Fisherman's Wharf <https://gvha.ca/marinas-facilities/fishermans-wharf/> is an easy walk and quite pleasant. Good chance of seeing seals.

Very near that (998 Humboldt Street) is [Finest at Sea](#), a damned fine fish shop with a very good food truck out front. The halibut burgers are seriously yummy.

There is a truly lovely book store on Government Street, [Munro's Books](#). Calming and uplifting at the same time.

Beacon Hill Park <https://www.victoria.ca/EN/main/residents/parks/beacon-hill.html> is perhaps 15 or so minutes walk from the venue. It is large and beautiful and abuts the Salish Sea, looking toward the Olympic Range of Washington state. Great trees and flowers etc., herons, peacocks, maybe a cricket game in progress, and a wee petting zoo.

If you have time and money, many people enjoy whale watching excursions. Or Butchart Gardens. Rather a trip to get out there, and not cheap, but it is a truly remarkable and beautiful place with interesting landscaping, trees, and fountains. Several types of gardens.

Get out on the water if you can. One of the easiest is <https://victoriaharbourferry.com/water-taxi/>; \$10 gets you a ride in a little boat from one part of the inner harbour to another (see website for details). There are also several places within easy walking distance where you can rent a kayak, hop in it, and paddle way for an hourly rate, such as <https://oceanriver.com/>

PRIDE

Victoria's Pride Festival is JUNE 23 – JULY 2, 2022. <https://victoriapridesociety.org/pride-2022/> We're a small city but we are proud.

MUSIC

Victoria International JazzFest <https://jazzvictoria.ca/jazzfest-home/> runs 24 June through 3 July. Tickets still available for some shows. I have to leave the conference dinner early on Tuesday evening to catch Lisa Fischer's show at the Royal.

Lucky Bar <https://luckybar.ca/> is a chill place, near the venue, and miracle of miracles they have DJs spinning tunes on Monday night from 9:30. But closed Tuesday.

BEER!

Spinnaker's Pub was the first brew pub in Canada. A fairly long hike from the hotel, but a nice building beautifully situated that features solidly hand-crafted beers. Nearer by is Swans, which is also a very nice brew pub. **But even closer to the venue are The Churchill and Garricks Head.** I hope to see you there. Really.

Restaurants: I recommend you call and check to see if these places are open and not slammed rather than just showing up.

FINE DINING (\$50-75)

Victoria is packed with good restaurants.

Café Brio, 944 Fort St. (between Quadra and Vancouver Sts.), 250-383-0009 <http://www.cafe-brio.com/>
My favourite restaurant in Victoria. NOT OPEN MONDAY OR TUESDAY at present. The cooking is west-coast-inflected Italian with a strong emphasis on locally harvested produce, meats, and seafood. The dishes are creative but not pretentious and, most important, they are delicious. The room is attractive and the atmosphere warm and energetic. Co-owning couple Greg and Sylvia are extraordinarily welcoming, and the wait staff are friendly pros. If all the tables are booked, see if there's space at the bar.

Agrius, <https://www.agriusrestaurant.com/menu> . VERY VERY good. Creative, interesting, seriously fun food, great drinks. Small. Easy walk. I put this in fine dining because they offer fine dining, but they also offer the best pizza in Victoria.

Brasserie L'Ecole, 1715 Government (near Fisgard St.), 250-475-6260 <http://www.lecole.ca/> Really looks the part of a French bistro. The frites are very good--not the best I've ever had, but up there. Excellent wine list; often a wide variety of special wines available by the glass (don't be shy about asking). The cheese selection is also particularly good. They do NOT take reservations, but you can stop by and give them a cell number.

Wind Cries Mary. <https://www.windcriesmary.ca/> I haven't been in this place since it changed hands and names, but reviews are very strong and it's very near the venue.

Nowhere <http://nowherearestaurant.com/> and Hanks A Restaurant <http://hanksarestaurant.com/> . Sibling restaurants attached at the hip. And I do mean hip. NOT OPEN MONDAY OR TUESDAY but magical, brilliant gem factories of crazy creative food.

PRETTY FINE DINING (\$35-55)

Zambri's 820 Yates St. (between Quadra and Blanshard, in the Atrium Building.), 250 360-1171 Seriously delicious pasta dishes, terrific soups, authentic pizza. I especially enjoy Zambri's for lunch. If you're an omnivore you can just order the daily special pasta dish without even bothering to ask what it is. And even for dinner this is probably my favourite in this category.

Be love <https://www.beloverestaurant.ca/> Creative **vegan** cuisine and fun cocktails. Easy walk.

Il Terrazzo Ristorante, 555 Johnson St., (near Wharf St.) 250-361-0028: This is a nice, informal yet classy place, with appealing decor, pleasant service, good food, and a pretty decent wine list. Especially nice if you can sit in the courtyard – inside tends to be quite noisy in a boisterous, cheerful way that folks over 50 may find tiresome. I especially like coming here for lunch. The dishes are not wildly unusual or adventurous, but consistently good.

The Tapa Bar, 620 Trounce Alley (between Government and Broad Sts. by View St.), 383-0013 This isn't really a tapa bar of the sort found in Spain. Compared to a real tapa bar, the dishes are bigger, pricier, and slower to arrive. But the location is quaintly attractive, the place is nicely decorated, they offer a variety of tasty dishes at reasonable prices (e.g., prawns sizzled in white wine & chipotle peppers, \$10.50), and they have a good beer list and some decent wines. This has been a successful restaurant for decades, which is not easy in this town, and they feed the homeless every Christmas. A few years ago the owners of The Tapa Bar opened up a place right next door, called Bodega. It's a tapa bar. Still not a real tapa bar like in Spain, but the menu is more Spanish-influenced. The octopus carpaccio is awesome. Quite good chicken liver parfait. Impressive sherry list.

Little Jumbo, down the hall at 509 Fort Street (easy to miss), 778.433.5535. <http://littlejumbo.ca> VERY serious cocktails. Rather high prices. Hip.

CASUAL DINING (\$20-35)

Pagliacci's, 1011 Broad St. (between Broughton and Fort Sts.), 386-1662 A Victoria standard for decades, Pag's (as locals call it) offers a little slice of the Big Apple with a dollop of nostalgia. Casual/funky/fun/noisy, tables packed together, lots of pasta dishes. They recently added some outdoor seating.

Pink Bicycle, 1008 Blanshard, (250) 384-1008 Redefines the burger. Never had a burger in a restaurant anywhere near this good. The mutton burger is a revelation. The truffled frites are to die for (but you can ask for a side of Lipitor).

Pizzeria Prima Strada, (NOT downtown, but walkable from downtown if you are fit and keen, and easily cab-able) 230 Cook Street (250) 590-8595 or 2960 Bridge Street (250) 590-4380 VERY good Neapolitan pizza. Perfect thin crust, top quality ingredients, perfectly cooked in a wood-fired brick oven. Formerly the best pizza in Victoria (but Zambri breathes down their neck and now Agrius blows them away).

Siam Thai, 512 Fort St. (between Government and Wharf Sts.), 250-383-9911 Might be Victoria's oldest Thai place. Consistently good. JJ Wonton Noodle House, 1012 Fort St. (between Vancouver and Cook), 383-0680 Very well done Chinese dishes of the sort familiar around here, and occasional surprises such as terrific lamb dishes.

China Town (which should be called China Street) includes Don Mee, <http://www.donmee.com/> , which is old fashioned with a large upstairs room with lots of round tables and dim sum carts. I also like Little Yunan Restaurant <https://www.littleyunanvictoria.com/> especially for dumpling soup. They usually have old jazz videos running on a small screen... Another excellent Chinese option, a 20-min walk from the venue, is J&J's Wonton Noodle House <https://www.jjnoodlehouse.ca/> They often have terrific specials (e.g., with fresh halibut or local prawns or lamb) so check the board.

Rebar Modern Food, 50 Bastion Square, 361-9223 Rebar has been "serving up the freshest, funkiest and healthiest food on the West Coast@ since 1989." The fare is mostly vegetarian but includes fish/seafood dishes. The co-owners here have published a darned good cook book that makes a very nice gift.

Sabor Mix Latino <https://www.skipthedishes.com/sabor-mix-latino-douglas-street> Just a casual little lunch place that has stolen my heart.

La Taqueria <https://www.lataqueria.com/> Very tasty Mexican food. Wide variety of tacos for \$7-8 bucks each, order as many or as few as you want.

Oh, I could go on, but Chairly duties call.

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