

Victoria carries on British B & B tradition with elegant style

Tony Rockland homes offer first-rate accommodation
close to downtown and the ocean

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VICTORIA

The concept of bed and breakfast was invented by the British. Homeowners would welcome travellers into their homes and offer them a hearty breakfast the next morning to send them off on their travels again.

It is only fitting then that Victoria, with its strong British heritage, would carry on this tradition with gusto and style.

On a recent visit, I opted to stay at a couple of B & Bs in the elegantly, tony historic neighbourhood of Rockland, a place where barons, bankers and architects chose to live during the heady days of the gold rush.

Meticulous century homes line the winding cedar and fir tree-lined streets. Nearly every home has a garden worthy of a photo-spread in *Better Homes & Gardens*.

Government House, the official residence of British Columbia's lieutenant governor, is on the main thoroughfare of the neighbourhood with its 14.4 hectares of perfectly coiffed gardens rambling around the periphery of the home, all tended by hundreds of volunteers. The gardens are open to the public daily.

Rockland's location is ideal, just south-east of the city centre — a 15-minute or so walk into the downtown and five or six blocks to the ocean.

Here are three recommendations if the more amiable and intimate pace of a B & B is your style.

Villa Marco Polo Inn

Elegant is the only way to describe Villa Marco Polo Inn. The furnishings and gardens are tastefully Italian Renaissance. Crystal chandeliers, Persian carpets, objets d'art, antiques and rare books from around the world may sound stuffy, but it's anything but.

Proprietor Eliza Livingstone is responsible for many of the lavish collectibles around the house, having travelled extensively throughout the Middle East and at one time living in Persia.

Built in 1923 for a young bride, Villa Marco Polo has become a five-star Canada Select Inn endorsed by Conde Nast.

Four large, exquisitely furnished suites conjure exotic destinations: Silk Road, Zanzibar, Alexandria and Persia. King-sized beds hold court in each room, sumptuously decked out in fine linens and a sea of pillows and billowy duvets. Richly coloured rugs cover the hardwood floors and fireplaces add to the romantic ambience in each room. After a day of hoofing it around one of Canada's most walkable cities, a deep-jetted soaker tub is a welcome remedy for achy feet.

I stayed in the Zanzibar, a good-sized but cosy room with French doors that

overlook the expansive manicured backyard. A luxurious ensuite bathroom with a soaker tub, gilded mirrors and fine soaps and plush towels was enough to spoil me.

Looking out the French doors from my room, I felt like I could have been in a scene from *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Urn-filled greenery and flowers and statuary decorate the yard surrounded by lush bushes and trees. A reflecting pond with a fountain and floating water lilies completes the scene.

The dining room has an expansive table with seating for 16, where a different four-course breakfast is served each morning. Some of the selections include freshly baked bread and muffins, followed by dishes such as Baked Eggs Florentine, Shirred Egg with Tarragon



and Gruyere in Golden Phyllo Crust, topped off by a sweet.

Abbeymoore Manor

This rambling Edwardian home stands out with all its charm on the corner of Rockland Avenue and Pemberton Street in what is old Victoria. A wrought-iron fence winds its way around the corner lot as do the rambling English gardens. The scent of roses filled the air as I walked up the driveway.

Built in 1912, Abbeymoore Manor has all the elements of the Old English style right down to the tinder boxes by the fireplace and brass wall sconces.

Walnut-panelled walls, open-beamed ceilings, comfy overstuffed furniture characterized the main living room

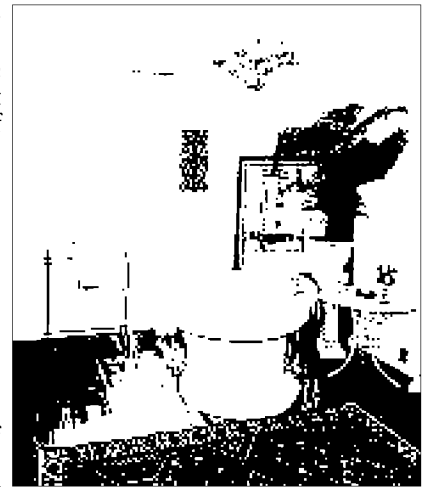
along with a typical colour scheme of forest green, crimson and gold.

Proprietors Ian MacPhee and Anne Mosher were just finishing up breakfast service when I arrived and the scent of orange muffins filled the air.

My room for the night was a large, comfy bedroom with ensuite bathroom, and a downy king-sized bed done up in luxurious duvet and linens. From the rooftop balcony off my room, I could glimpse the Strait of Juan de Fuca through the trees.

With 10 rooms, including two extended stay suites, the place was bustling. The next morning, a hearty breakfast of shrimp and goat cheese omelette, fresh fruit and scones had me more than ready for the day.

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A luxurious soaker tub awaits visitors in the Marco Polo's Zanzibar room.

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PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY THE VILLA MARCO POLO

The Silk Road is one of four exquisite suites at the five-star Villa Marco Polo B & B in Victoria.



A beautifully manicured Italian Renaissance garden surrounds the Villa Marco Polo.