

The Road Trip Report

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

1-7 September 2026

*One
last
hurdle*



Dwarfed by a whale

The plaque for this sculpture of an orca at the entrance to the Vancouver Aquarium in Stanley Park reads:

"Skana - The Killer Whale known by the Haida [native tribe] to be chief of the world beneath the sea who from his great house raised the storms of winter and brought calm to the seas of summer. He governed the mystical cycle of the salmon and was keeper of all the ocean's living treasure."

One last hurdle

MORE INFORMATION — Click on the underlined words.

One of the things you quickly learn traveling among the cities of Seattle, Victoria and Vancouver is how important travel by ship is. If you're not up for long ferry rides and such, you're really stuck at home. Before our road trip to the Pacific Northwest ended (Southwest if you're Canadian), we also learned that even if you're up for ship travel, you don't always get where you want.

I briefly wrote about the size and significance of Washington State's ferry system in the Puget Sound region in the Seattle installment of this road trip newsletter series. But ferries are an even bigger piece of British Columbia's transportation and economic picture.

The province covers 40% more ground than Texas. But it's mostly empty. Sixty percent of its 5 million people live within the metropolitan areas of Victoria and Vancouver — the first on an island and the latter on the mainland — with 90 minutes of ferry travel between the two. All told, BC Ferries, now a publicly owned but government-subsidized company, operates 41 ferries with a total capacity of 27,000 passengers and crew primarily between two terminals in Vancouver and multiple towns and cities on Vancouver Island.

Our ferry from Victoria's Swartz Bay terminal to Tsawwassen, in the Vancouver suburb of Richmond, was the Spirit of British Columbia, one of two sister ships that are the largest in the fleet with room for 358 cars and 2,100 passengers and crew.

We arrived in Vancouver on a Wednesday in time for the clouds and rain to roll in and with just enough time for a quick drive into the city's Stanley Park. It covers 1,000 acres / 405 hectares (20% more than Central Park in New York), mostly with centuries-old giant hemlocks, red cedar, Douglas fir and Sitka spruce. It's named for the British lord and Governor General of Canada from 1888 to 1893. He is better known elsewhere for donating a giant silver cup to be awarded in the hockey-mad nation to its national champion. For most of the next year, his cup can be seen in the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto except when it's visiting Raleigh, North Carolina.

With bad weather forecast for significant portions of our next two days (Thursday and Friday) in Vancouver, we decided to use hop-on, hop-off tourist buses to explore in place of the outdoor activities in our original plan in the mountains north of the city. We started Thursday back in the park at the Vancouver Aquarium and ended downtown in the city's Gastown, its historic beginning near Canada Place, the cruise terminal where Emily and I were scheduled to board our Alaska-bound ship on Saturday morning when Hank and Mary Wood flew back to Charlotte.

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One last hurdle

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After a successful Thursday, we decided to celebrate the approaching end of our two-week adventure with a nice dinner at our hotel.

The next morning, Hank called us from his room.

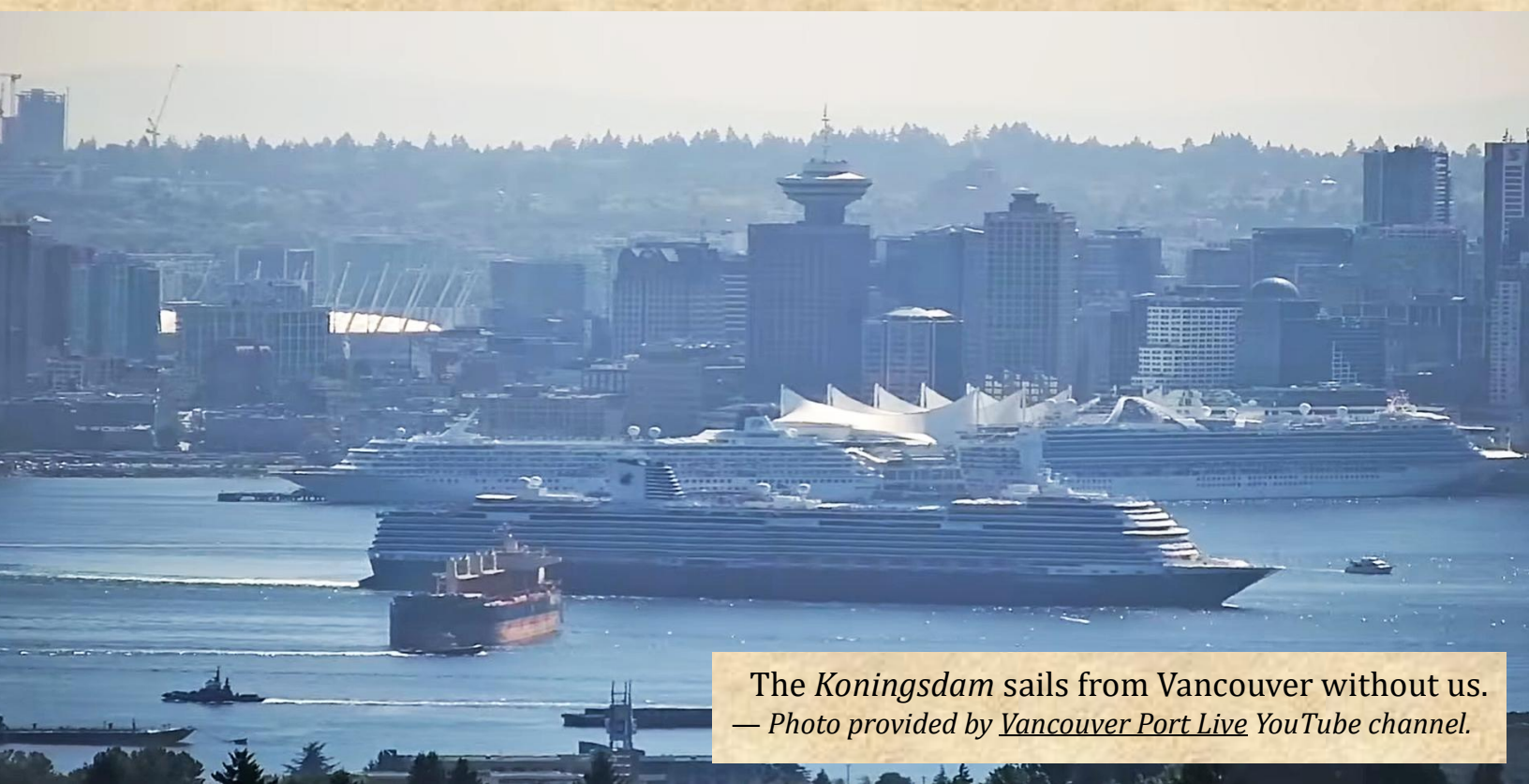
“Mary Wood’s sick,” he said. Bad cough, difficulty breathing and fever for the retired nurse in our family. She would later test positive for flu back home.

By Friday afternoon, Hank was experiencing the same symptoms. And in the wee hours of Saturday morning, Emily’s coughing and bathroom visits awakened me. Her forehead was hot. There was no alternative. I called the cruise line to cancel and then our travel insurance provider’s emergency number. They scheduled an appointment with their on-call physician for later that afternoon, an appointment that eventually was rescheduled for Sunday.

After getting Hank and Mary Wood to the airport, I began working on getting a new hotel for Emily and me the next couple of days because there was no more room in our inn. Found one near the airport where we camped out for two more nights while Emily rested. She was examined in Vancouver by the doctor, who wrote in his letter to the insurance carrier that “Cancellation of her entire trip was medically necessary.” He wrote a prescription.

By Monday, fortified with effective medicine, we began the three-day drive back to San Jose. Emily was feeling well enough to spend part of each day behind the wheel including the final stretch into San Jose. I was beginning to cough, but never got as sick as my three companions.

I’m writing this two weeks later and a day after re-booking our Alaska trip, at Emily’s insistence, for next May.



The *Koningsdam* sails from Vancouver without us.
— Photo provided by [Vancouver Port Live](#) YouTube channel.



Dog day afternoon

Some of the passengers on our BC Ferry meet for the first time.



Spirit of Vancouver Island

We've just passed our sister ferry, *Spirit of Vancouver Island*, in a tight passage between Galliano and Mayne islands (that's Mt Galliano in the background) called Active Pass.



What kind of fish is that?

Emily, Mary Wood and Hank sort through the sea life at the Vancouver Aquarium in Stanley Park.



Jellies and the deep blue sea

Moon Jellyfish fill a tank at the Vancouver Aquarium.



Puffing merrily along

The original settlement that became Vancouver was in this part of the city called [Gastown](#), because gas-generated steam distributed by underground pipes was used to heat buildings. Partly to stop homeless people from sleeping on a grate above a sidewalk vent to keep warm, this clock was built in 1977 at the site. Steam calliope tunes play every 15 minutes but the clock is actually electrically powered.



Home: positive ID

Not 10 minutes after crossing into California from Oregon on Interstate 5, we exited the Siskiyou Mountains and saw this, confirmation we were back in California. In addition to snowy Mount Shasta, there are a minimum of four other volcanoes visible in this photo.