

The Road Trip Report

Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

31 August-1 September 2026

*Where the Empire's
sun sets*



BC Parliament

The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia in Victoria has met here for 128 years. Originally a separate British colony, BC entered the Canadian Confederation as its sixth province in 1871.

Where the Empire's sun sets

MORE INFORMATION — Click on the underlined words.

International incidents are frightfully easy to start and difficult to end. I know. I started one.

As our ferry *MV Coho* from Port Angeles, Washington, USA approached British Columbia's capital city of Victoria, I posted a video clip of it on Facebook saying we had entered "Canuckistani" waters, meaning Canada's.

In the hour or so it took to drive off the boat and check into our hotel, my phone was blowing up with comments, the general tenor of which was that I should go back home but repeating the exact wording of which would get me kicked out of church. You'd have thought I'd autonomously changed the name of Lake Ontario.

It was embarrassing, but I forced myself to read every comment of hundreds. It didn't matter that I'd visited Canada many times before on vacation trips and as a sportswriter. Or that a quarter of Emily's grandparents came from Manitoba. Or that I'd heard the term and similar ones used north of the border. I was — and pleaded guilty to being — an "ugly American," flagrantly displaying my presumed national superiority when traveling abroad.

I wrote in the comments that I'd leave the post up for awhile so people could vent their anger, partly because the Canadian anger level is particularly high at the moment considering that the ugly American president can't understand why Canada — or Greenland or Venezuela — isn't begging to become our 51st state. But also, because I think Americans need to hear other country's citizens loud and clear in these times, and I was volunteering to send my kite up into that thundercloud as penance.

It was a bad idea, executed poorly. Only a couple of folks got my point. Damage done. After a couple of days, I deleted the clip.

None of that got in the way of our enjoying the tiny-bit-of-England vibe of Victoria, whose 128-year-old Parliament Building at dusk is pictured on the cover of this newsletter. Charles III in London is King in Canada, too, and his late mother, Elizabeth II, toured the building in 1983 and again in 2002, when a stained-glass window of her was installed to mark the 50th year of her reign. We had afternoon tea where the Queen did in the Empress Hotel around the corner, and it was served on china the hotel commissioned for one of her visits.

— *Continued after two picture pages*



Tea at the Empress

The dress code included these cautions:

- Please refrain from wearing hats. Exceptions are fascinators and fancy tea hats.
- No flip-flops or bare feet permitted. Exceptions are elegant sandals.

We got in.



The Empress in person

Now part of the Fairmont chain, the hotel was completed in 1908 by the Canadian Pacific Railway as part of a chain of hotels in major cities along Canada's first transcontinental railroad.

Building that line, finished in 1885, was a condition set by British Columbia for it to become a Canadian province.

Where the Empire's sun sets

— *Continued*

Victoria is proud enough of its colonial past to support a daily newspaper named the *Times Colonist*. But it's far enough in time from those days — and in distance from its colonizer — that it can still unintentionally ruffle royal feathers.

The province's proposed coat of arms, designed in 1895 by English-born Anglican priest and heraldry enthusiast Arthur John Beanlands, a Victoria resident for 15 years, was originally refused registration by the College of Arms, the government office in London in charge of such things. Perhaps he'd forgotten that the "sun never sets on the British Empire" (or the Spanish or Roman empires before that) because of the shield he designed in the center.

The shield featured symbols of British Columbia: alternating wavy stripes of blue and white representing the province's location between the snow-capped Canadian Rockies and the Pacific Ocean, over a setting sun representing BC's westernmost position in the nation. Because that was directly atop Britain's symbol, the Union Jack flag with a crown representing the royal family in the center, BC's sun was literally setting over the mother country.



BC's politically correct flag

Feathers ruffled for 92 years before QEII approved a full coat of arms with a revised shield placing the Union Jack at the top. Now the sun sets within the British Empire, not on it.

Meanwhile, in 1960, BC Premiere (the equivalent of a U.S. state governor) W.A.C. Bennett introduced the provincial flag pictured on this page with the elements in positions acceptable to Britain.

Three years ago, a series of plaques was added along the sidewalk in front of the Parliament written in the Lekwungen language of some of BC's indigenous tribes. They're visible in my photo. The messages acknowledge the "generous friendship, knowledge, culture and traditions" of the pre-colonial inhabitants, particularly the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. It was a "woke" act like the U.S. federal government and some states are trying to ban.

At a ceremony marking the plaques' installation, Raj Chouhan, speaker of the BC legislature, called the building "the largest symbol of colonialism in BC. ... In my small, humble way, I just want to share with you that it is my priority to make sure that this building now becomes more welcoming and inclusive."



Butchart Gardens

When the limestone quarry they owned on Vancouver Island near Victoria began to give out in 1912, Robert Butchart agreed to his wife's plan to turn the eyesore near their house into a publicly accessible garden. This scene is just inside the entrance.



Main house

The Butcharts' Italian Garden is the smallest of five primary gardens and is situated behind their residence.



Rose Garden

Emily and Mary Wood wander among:

- 7 types
- 280 varieties
- 2,500 plants



Sunken Garden

This is probably the most photographed view of the gardens and the site of the first garden inside the abandoned quarry.

- 5 acres
- 151 flower beds
- 65,000 bulbs planted in spring

Centennial totems

This is one of two totem poles carved by native carvers to mark the 100th year since the Butcharts moved to this spot in 1904.

