



# [TOURIST TRAPPED]

## Showing Off Your City Isn't Easy

I love having houseguests. Or rather, I love/hate it. Vancouver, as I've mentioned before, is kind of a cultural enigma and, inevitably, two days into a visit, I find myself scrabbling for new and interesting things to do with my guests. A sunny day stroll through Granville Island? Check. Dinner out? Check. Nude beach trip? Or, if said guests are prudish, regular beach trip? Check. Robson Street shopping excursion? (A stretch, considering that the Gap isn't exactly a cultural touchstone.) Check.

That's it. I'm fresh out of ideas. It's a bit of a problem.

A few weeks ago, a friend arrived from Calgary, and I was at once ridiculously pleased to see her and completely freaked about what I should do with her once she arrived. As I'm a Vancouver-area transplant, rather than a born-and-bred resident, this contradictory feeling grips me often. I desperately want people to visit me, but I stress about showing them a good time when they do. I get sweaty just thinking about it.

Now of course, there are many lovely things to do in this city. I know this. There are wine bars a' plenty and tourist destinations galore. The problem is that I don't want to show my guests "touristy" Vancouver. I live here, after all. I work in media. I should be able to induct them into

the authentic cultural scene. Alas, I'm not sure I'm doing it right.

The truth is, as much as I love dining out, I rarely do myself. And the beach? It's beautiful, but since I don't have a dog, more pressing activities, like work, tend to take priority. As for Granville Island Market, while it undoubtedly features some of the best meat, produce and atmosphere in the city, in my real life, I'm far more likely to hit up my local Safeway. And unfortunately, hanging out at home in front of a  *Buffy*  rerun is not what people have in mind when they decide to come to the West Coast.

I know what you're thinking: what about the Planetarium, the Art Gallery, the Aquarium, Stanley Park? The list of officially sanctioned things to do in this city is extensive. But in my mind, those things are all touristy, and therefore verboten. As is the case in most urban centres, destinations of note - the Colosseum in Rome, Big Ben in London, the CN Tower in Toronto - are visited almost exclusively by visitors and schoolchildren and ignored by true residents. And anyway, my guests tend to be out of grade school, unimpressed by both fine art and animals in captivity, and too Canadian to find trees particularly thrilling. As a result, I feel trapped? tourist trapped.

The sad truth is, when I first moved to this city,

I thought it was boring. I couldn't figure out what people did for fun (besides being outdoorsy, that is). I spent my first weeks here wandering the streets, wondering what all the fuss was about. Then somebody invited me to a party. Suddenly, I got it. The point of this story is that while it took a while for me to tap into the cultural scene, once I did, all was well. I want my guests to have that same experience, only without the preceding boredom.

In the end, when people come to stay, I most often end up hosting a house or dinner party, or inviting local friends over to play board games in favour of evenings out on the town. As for daytime activities, I let my guests decide for themselves. If they want to be touristy (and they most often do), they can be. On one hand, this feels like a cop out (and accounts for my love/hate stress-fest and sweaty palms). I worry that I'm failing to do this city justice, and failing to be a good hostess. On the other, organizing casual evenings is honestly what many Vancouverites do in their spare time, so it's a genuine cultural experience...isn't it?

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