

CHRISTMAS IN VICTORIA

By Ron Kirstein

If you are coming to Victoria soon, here is some information that might make your trip a bit more enjoyable. The weather here has been unseasonably warm floating between 7 and 10 Celsius day time highs (that is approaching 50 degrees F), not bad for winter. We have had our fair share of rain this December, but the more it rains, the warmer it is.

Start your Victoria visit at the Fairmont Empress Hotel. The Festival of Trees is on through January 4th. Visit the magical forest of decorated trees on display throughout the hotel and adjoining conference centre. You are invited to stroll the hallways and vote for your favorite tree with a minimum two-dollar donation. For more information call 250-380-1527. If you are going to the Fairmont Empress, why not make a reservation for the incredible buffet at **Kipling's**. This is one of the finest buffets in Victoria and a great way to celebrate the season. Reservations are recommended and can be made by calling (250) 389-2727

For something unique, take in Molten Obsessions Two from November 24 to December 31, 2004. Starfish Glassworks presents Molten Obsessions 2, hosting the second Pacific Pyros members show which promises to be a diverse and funky exhibit of the group's efforts. Emerging and established artists are represented. Exciting new work at affordable prices. This is your chance to collect early gems from future stars! Visit 630 Yates Street.

If you have nothing planned for Christmas day perhaps the Annual Christmas Dinner (Dec 25 from 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m) will fill your bill. It is prepared by the Peninsula Christmas Dinner Committee and takes place at the Mary Winspear Centre in beautiful Sidney by the Sea, just 25 minutes from downtown Victoria. For more information call (250) 655-6417 or Email: sidneycomdev@telus.net. Also contact The Mary Winspear Centre @ Sanscha & Charlie White Theatre Box Office - (250) 656-0275 or

Annual Christmas Celebrations take place at the Butchart Gardens from December 1 to January 6. Tens of thousands of lights brighten the holiday season. This winter wonderland is made even brighter by strolling carollers, children's entertainers, and a festive brass band. Great food is served up in the Poppyseed restaurant. Butchart Gardens is at 800 Benvenuto Avenue. Phone: (250) 652-4422

For a glimpse of Christmas past, visit Craigdarroch Castle a cast you eyes on a brilliant example of historic Victorian decorations and lights in the 1890's castle built by coal baron Robert Dunsmuir.

Christmas at Craigdarroch is celebrated traditionally with festive music. Tour the lavishly decorated castle, replete with Victorian decorations, hundreds of lights, singers and entertainment.

This year the theme is "A Child's Christmas" and displays of children's clothing as well as antique toys and furniture heighten your experience of Christmas in a bygone era.

Plan your visit in advance. Several ticketed events add significance to a Victorian Christmas experience: The Curator's Dinner and Tour, Sweet Night Music; and Hogmanay, A Scottish New Year's Celebration. Craigdarroch is open daily: 10am - 4:30pm, however it is closed Christmas Day(Dec.25), Boxing Day (Dec.26) and New Year's Day(Jan.1). It is located at 1050 Joan Crescent (off Fort Street). Contact the castle at: Phone: (250) 592-5323, Fax: (250) 592-1099 or Email:

www.sanscha.com or info@sanscha.com
Peninsula Celebrations Society - (250) 656-4365.

info@craigdarrochcastle.com

A very special show is now on at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Be sure to take in The French Masters, featuring works of art by Degas, Delacroix, Gericault, David, and Cezanne. Masterworks of 19th Century French Realism and French Drawings are two separate exhibitions from the National Gallery of Canada that, combined, present over three centuries of French drawings and paintings by some of France's most prestigious and celebrated artists. This exhibition ends in mid February.

The sixteen masterful paintings included in Masterworks of 19th Century French Realism include Degas, Cezanne, Courbet, Millet, Corot and Daumier. The exhibition features many stunningly landscapes as well as spectacular portraits of ordinary people.

The French Drawings exhibition of over 70 drawings as it surveys the works of French masters art from 16th to the 19th centuries. This extraordinary collection of works includes artists: Callot, Le Brun, Watteau, Fragonard, David, Delacroix, Gericault, Degas, Puvis de Chavannes and Redon. For further information, contact the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria at (250) 384-4101.

The Butchart Gardens are celebrating their 100th birthday and have transformed the gardens into spectacular displays of Christmas lights. As you wander through the glorious paths, the imaginative light shows illuminating the colourful flowerbeds will dazzle you.



Butchart Gardens Christmas Lights

The 12 days of Christmas are displayed with special scenes as you move through each Garden to the jolly sound of carollers singing traditional Christmas songs. If you are lucky, it might even snow, which makes the event even more spectacular. Snow is really rare in Victoria, but it can happen. In Victoria, you generally do not shovel snow, you simply wait for it to melt.

Many of the hotels have special Christmas packages. For example, try the Queen Victoria Hotel & Suites at www.qvhotel.com or call 1-800-663-7007.



A unique event takes place at the Fairmont Empress Hotel. From November 18th to January 3rd -- check out the "Festival of Trees". Groups and organizations throughout Victoria have decorated Christmas trees with themes that represent their business, organization or group. Visitors vote for the trees and the money raised goes to charity. There is no charge. Donations are asked for when you make your vote.

Victoria is the home of the Pacific Naval Fleet and from December 16 to 31, 2004 you can take in the 17th Annual Navy Lighting Contest at CFB Esquimalt. Come see all the ships lit up!

Buses pick up viewers off Admirals Road from 6 pm to 9 pm. Buses will ferry visitors around HMC Dockyard for the 20-minute tour. Parking will be available at the Naden entrance to the base, off Admirals Road, with buses leaving every 20 minutes. Closed Christmas Day.

Admission is by cash donation or a non-perishable food item for the Mustard Seed Food Bank.

Enjoy your visit to Victoria this Christmas Season and through New Years.

If you want a truly memorable Christmas or New Year, contact Sahhali Serenity Luxury B&B on Pender Island. This will be a get-away that you will never forget. Contact Penny at: 1-877-625-2583, she has specials throughout the holiday season.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Butchart Gardens Christmas Lights

AND HAVE A HAPPY

