

"Weekend in Victoria" by Sue Loucks, Telegraph Trail District

Did you know that every year Victoria hosts a fantastic event called "Be a Tourist in your own Hometown?"

http://www.attractionsvictoria.com/index.php/site/be_a_tourist/
(details are not up for 2012 yet...)

Also check this link, where someone posted the deals for 2011:
<http://vibrantvictoria.ca/forum/showthread.php?t=5023>.

Tourist is a promotion put on by Attractions Victoria to encourage Victoria area residents to visit the local tourist spots, but there's nothing to stop you from taking a group of Guides over there! For a very minimal fee, about \$10 per person, you get a book of tickets giving you free or half-price access to most of the most popular attractions, many of which cost \$10 for a single admission. It's a fabulous, fun, educational weekend, and if you plan it right you can cover up to 5 badges. (Disclaimer: it's been a while since I did Guides, and the badges may have changed a bit. Also, I don't have a program book so I'm going by memory here.)

We stayed at Bowker Hall in Oak Bay, a Girl Guide facility that is a short walk from the bus stop (see Note #1 for other ideas). This article is written assuming you are staying at Bowker Hall.

I've done this trip 3 times now, and here is the general plan:

AHEAD OF TIME

- book accommodations
- buy tickets! (Contact Attractions Victoria online)
 - o plan what you want to see, based on what is in the book for your year
- obtain a few PAPER copies of the Victoria bus schedule (you can get them mailed to you)
- make sure everyone can carry their own gear (see note #2)
- practice the "bucket brigade" (see note #3)
- check business hours for grocery store in Oak Bay
- check public swimming hours for Oak Bay swimming pool

THURSDAY

- catch 5:00 pm ferry to Victoria, eat bag dinner on ferry
- while on the ferry look at the bus schedule and have the girls figure out how you are getting to your accommodations (of course, you've

already done this, but help the girls figure this out too – it's part of the Traveler badge)

- catch the double-decker public transit bus into town (note: packs will not fit up the stairs! We let the girls go up while we sit at the back with all the gear
- transfer to second bus to get to Oak Bay
- buy groceries needed for breakfast and lunch
- walk to Bowker Hall
- go to bed!

FRIDAY

- eat breakfast, pack bag lunch
- take bus into town
- stop at Legislature to book time for tour (Note 4)
- visit Miniature World, Undersea Gardens, and the Wax Museum
- if you have time, the Maritime Museum is much more interesting than you expect!
- the Harbour Tour is also great – check tickets as it may be morning only
- eat lunch when you're hungry
- make sure to visit Roger's Chocolates and The Soda Shoppe for half-price treats!
- eat dinner at a restaurant in town (see note #5)
- head back to Oak Bay, stopping for a swim (and a shower!) at the Oak Bay pool
- get groceries for Saturday breakfast and lunch
- go to bed!

SATURDAY

- breakfast, make lunches
- bus into town
- visit the Royal BC Museum (Provincial Heritage badge, and possibly one or two others) (the touristy things are busier on Saturday, so do them on Friday)
- visit whatever you missed the day before (the Bug Zoo is awesome, although not included in *Tourist*)
- shop along Government Street and the Inner Harbour (the girls love this)
- dinner in town
- see an IMAX movie at the museum (half price)
- bus to Oak Bay, buy groceries, bed!

SUNDAY

- breakfast, make lunches, clean up and pack up

- bus into town (take everything with you)
- we usually have a little time to visit one more place on Sunday morning. We leave one Guider with all the gear in the courtyard behind City Hall, while everyone else goes to see one more thing. It seems every year the group splits into smaller groups for Sunday morning (not everyone wants to see the Bug Zoo!)
- get on bus out to the ferry. Get off at the BC Aviation Museum by the airport in Sidney, which is (was, anyway) on the bus route. Again, one person would stay outside to watch the gear while the rest go inside. (Aviation Badge)
- get back on the bus to the ferry
- buy dinner on the ferry
- sleep!!!

Hat Craft

I went to Michael's and bought colourful sunglass buttons. We also took needles, thread, and Mactac. When we were finished with the ticket books, we cut out a small portion of it (everyone picked a different part – some their favourite spot, some the logo) and covered it with Mactac, then sewed the sunglasses to the corner. Cute!

Random Notes

- Remember your uniform! It wasn't practical to wear uniforms the whole 4 days, so we decided to wear Guiding (ie camp) shirts on Thursday and Saturday, and Uniforms on Friday and Sunday. Tip: when the girls are not wearing their uniforms have them hang them over the backs of chairs at the hall – airs them out a bit and keeps the wrinkles down. And take a Sharpie to write names on the labels!
- I have taken Guides, and I think Pathfinders would enjoy this as well (although there's not the same badge-earning potential). I would NOT take Brownies – it's just too much for them.
- We've always had wonderful weather for this trip, but I would recommend taking at least one tarp so you can cover the gear on Sunday.
- Keep an eye out for other events going on. Last time we were there we got to tour the TV station!
- there is another stop you can make on your way to the Ferry on Sunday: Sidney has a new Ocean Discovery Centre right at the waterfront. If you stop in Sidney you can also get groceries to make sandwiches or similar for dinner on the ferry, or takeout, but this would mean another off-and-on-the-bus, and that bus doesn't run very often on Sunday. Also, you and the kids may very well be burned out by this point, so bear that in mind when you are planning.

Note #1: Book Accommodations

We've always stayed at Bowker Hall, a GGC-owned hall in Oak Bay, just outside of downtown Victoria. You sleep on the floor and it has minimal kitchen facilities, but it's cheap, safe, and only a short walk from the bus (although it feels like a long walk the first night!). There is a Guide House closer to downtown, but it's in a dodgy part of town. Another option: there is a Guide/Scout hall in Sidney, but it's a longer bus ride every day.

Note #2: Carrying Gear

Getting the girls to carry their own gear at this age is a bit of a challenge. The girls generally don't have quality, pack-small sleeping bags, and the seldom have proper backpacks that can carry everything. Luckily, there is a solution posted on the BC Guiding website: the bed sack (<http://www.bc-girlguides.org/wp-content/uploads/bedsack.pdf>). It's quick to make (or it can take two weeks and be a sewing badge!). Have the girls put their bedding into this bag and carry it on their FRONT, and their clothes and heavy items in their school backpack to carry on their BACK. This lets them carry everything NOT in their hands, and keeps them balanced as well! (Note: yes, you really do need the straps that long – the bag is much bigger when it's full.)

Don't allow the girls to plan to carry anything in their hands. They'll need their hands free for balance, and groceries!

Note #3: Bucket Brigade

As you can imagine, getting on and off a bus while wearing a bedsack on your front and a daypack on your back is simply a nightmare. Instead, teach your kids to bucket brigade their gear. (Apologies if you know this, but many don't.) To get ON the bus, a Guider goes on first, followed by as many girls as needed to make a line from the door to that Guider. Another Guider stands outside the door. The remaining girls stand by to fetch gear from the side of the bus where all the gear is piled and hand it to the Guider by the door. Each piece of gear is passed along the line to the Guider on the bus, who piles it up. The key is nobody carries their own gear onto the bus, with the possible exception of the first and last Guiders who may have packs too heavy for girls to lift (first aid kits, paperwork, extra stuff).

Make sure you practice this a few times before you go – through doorways and around corners – because kids really don't get this. You also want them to see that they need to pack light and as compact as possible, with nothing hanging off their bags.

Note #4: Legislature

There is a free guided tour of the legislature, and we considered this adequate for the Law badge. Although it didn't meet the "letter" of the badge, it definitely met the "spirit" of it.

Note #5: Dinners in Town

Eating at restaurants definitely added to the cost of this adventure, but we felt it was worthwhile because it gave us more time in town allowing us to go swimming and see an IMAX movie.