

# Alaska 2012

In 2012, after a big trip to Europe the previous year we decided it was time to see more of America. We used airline miles and hotel points to add on to an Alaskan cruise with a few days spent in Seattle and Vancouver. After having gone on Caribbean cruises several times, we decided Alaska was a much better cruise destination.

Our time before the cruise in Seattle was too brief, just enough to know what we were missing. It was the same with a couple of days in Vancouver. We are certainly going back to each city someday.

Sheri Tiner  
July 2015



# Seattle, Washington

We arrived at the Seattle airport and without too much trouble found the train into the city. When I booked the hotel it looked like an easy four block walk from the subway station straight up Pike Street to our hotel. What I failed to notice was that the walk was all uphill and steep as hell. We finally made after only one rest stop. It probably wouldn't have been so bad but we were dragging our luggage with us. I had such grand plans of walking everywhere, which we did, but the vertical nature of downtown Seattle's streets made it more of an effort than expected.

Once we had rested we took a nice downhill walk to the Pike Place Market. Wow! The first stall is the large fish monger that we'd seen on television. The workers toss large fish from the ice bins over the counter to be weighed and sold. Totally bizarre, but pretty cool too.

We wandered the market checking out the wide variety of fruits and vegetables and reading the silly signs some of the vendors used. There is also an amazing flower market where you can pick up a gorgeous bouquet for just \$5.00. I wanted one so bad but I couldn't justify buying flowers to have in a hotel for just a couple of nights.



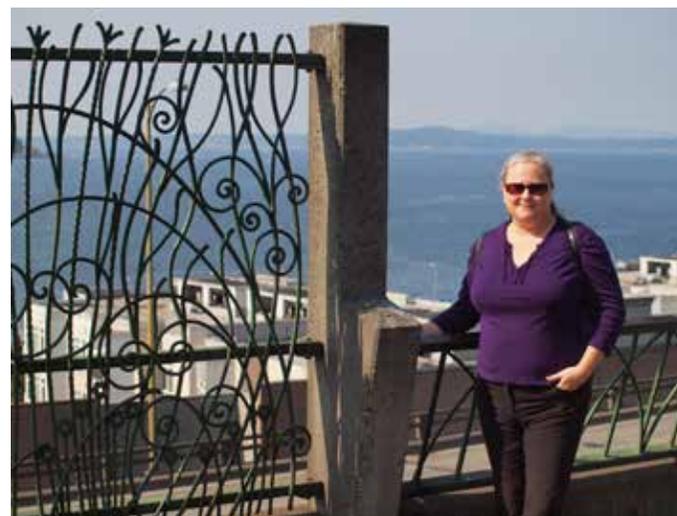




When we got hungry we went on down to the waterfront to look for Ivars Fish Bar, a restaurant a friend from work suggested. I'm not a seafood lover, but Kirk is, he ordered crab cakes and a sampler of three different kinds of chowder. I had the most amazing vegetarian dish of potatoes, portabella mushrooms and green beans in a lovely basil tomato sauce. I should have known Seattle would be good to vegetarians.

After dinner we zigzagged our way back up the hill to our hotel. We literally would walk up a block or two, then over one to rest from the climb. That was eleven blocks of up-hill and five blocks of relatively horizontal walking. Way to burn off the calories, I should have had dessert!

The next morning we took off exploring the city. We only had the one day as we would start our cruise to Alaska the following morning. There's quite a lot to see in just the downtown area of Seattle.



We wandered back down to Pike Place Market which had many more vendors early in the day, then back down to the waterfront. We caught a glimpse of the Space Needle and started making our way back up the hill with that as our goal. Again we practiced our zigzag routine and got to see a lot of the neighborhood. There was a lovely little garden with the coolest fountain and gorgeous flowers. It was a wonderful sunny day for September in Seattle. Not too hot, great for walking.





The Space Needle is in a park that also has the Chihuly Garden of glass and several museums. The view from the Space Needle is great but I see what the locals mean about the haze. Apparently blue skies don't mean you get to see for a long distance. We never did see Mount Ranier.



We wandered among the various museums taking photos of the amazing buildings and the Chihuly glass work then caught the monorail back to the center of downtown and ended up only a couple of blocks from our hotel. We'd had enough walking for the say so I got online to check restaurant reviews and found a good rating on a place we could see from our hotel window.



This was our first cruise on a Norwegian ship. The Jewel was beautiful, smaller than we had been on before, but still quite large. The cabin was comfortable and the cabin steward was fantastic. Unfortunately, unless you paid extra to go to the restaurants the food was average at best and sometimes not good at all.

Our first day was at sea but we never lost sight of land on either side of the ship which was a new experience, having cruised across the Gulf of Mexico several times. It was a nice change.

We woke the next morning in rainy Ketchikan, Alaska and immediately got on a smaller boat to go see Misty Fjord. On the way out of town we got to see our first bald eagle in the wild. The long lens purchased for this trip was worth every penny! The trip took about an hour and the skies remained overcast until suddenly, we had a sunny day.



# Ketchikan, Alaska





At first it seemed kind of silly to get off one boat and onto another for a tour but the trip was great. We met a couple named Bob and Rennie early on and spent a great deal of time with them the rest of the cruise.

The interesting thing about this part of Alaska is that it's a rain forest and incredibly fertile. If there is a place with dirt, something will grow in it. There are beautiful trees clinging to the sides of steep cliffs and everything is so green. The land was carved out by glaciers and the mountains raise straight up out of the water. There are small waterfalls everywhere.

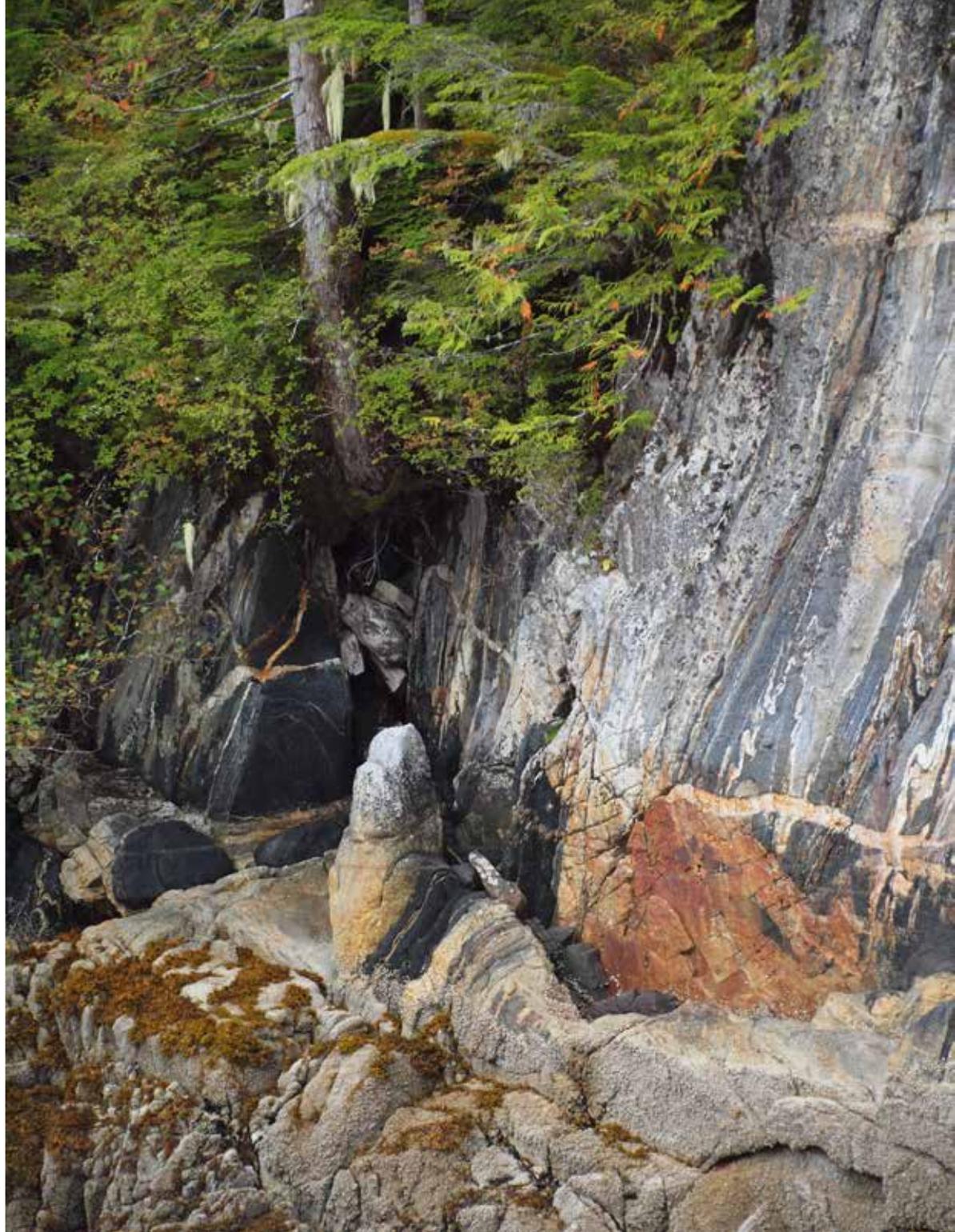
During first half of the tour, the guide pointed out sites of interest and talked about the environment and history of the area. On the way back a native Tlingit (pronounced cling-kit) gave us a history of her people and their clan system. There are two lineages, the Raven and the Eagle. These are divided into clans. There is a rule that you must only marry someone of the opposite lineage. Of course she was much more detailed about the whole thing and quite fascinating.





While the boat was moving it was kind of cold. I was the only one out on deck. Kirk was happily bundled up inside taking pictures through the window. This is pretty much how I looked the entire trip. I must admit, the lining was still in my coat that day however I removed it for the rest of the trip. One of the best things about Alaska for me was the cool temperatures.

When we arrived back in Ketchikan Rennie had a shopping agenda so we followed along. Most cruise ports have plenty of shopping, it's kind of hard to get away from. At least the town was pretty and we saw more eagles.



# Juneau, Alaska



On our third morning we were supposed to go see the glacier at Tracy Arm. I was so foggy we couldn't see a hundred yards. The captain waited a while but it just stayed foggy so we went on to Juneau.

As with all cruise ports, you land in shopping hell. We had time before our excursion so we followed Rennie again on her shopping mission. Again, the town was cute so it wasn't too bad.

When Rennie and Bob left to go on their excursion Kirk and I found a restaurant with a view of the harbor and watched sea-planes take off with tourists while we enjoyed excellent sandwiches, Kirk's of course was fish.



And then Kirk met Skadi and Freya and fell in love. Of course they were dogs, Alaskan Malamutes and their job was to make people smile. Russell Peterson brought the dogs to the cruise port for photos with tourists. Of course when we were there they were still puppies.



Once the hugs and kisses were over we set off on our excursion to a salmon hatchery, the Mendenhall Glacier and a salmon bake.



Salmon go home to spawn after several years in the ocean. They always go to where they were hatched. Hatcheries work by simulating a river where salmon swim up-stream and lay their eggs. The fish hatched there will always come back. This way they can protect the eggs and make sure as many fish are hatched as possible. Pretty interesting for a fifteen minute stop.



Our first view of the Mendenhall Glacier was truly awe inspiring. It was also cold near the glacier reminding you that is literally *ice*. We were very happy we were on the bus tour and not out on the lake with the kayak tour.

This is the most easily accessible portion of the much larger Juneau Ice Field which covers an area of 1,500 square miles crossing the border into Canada. Just what we could see was pretty massive.

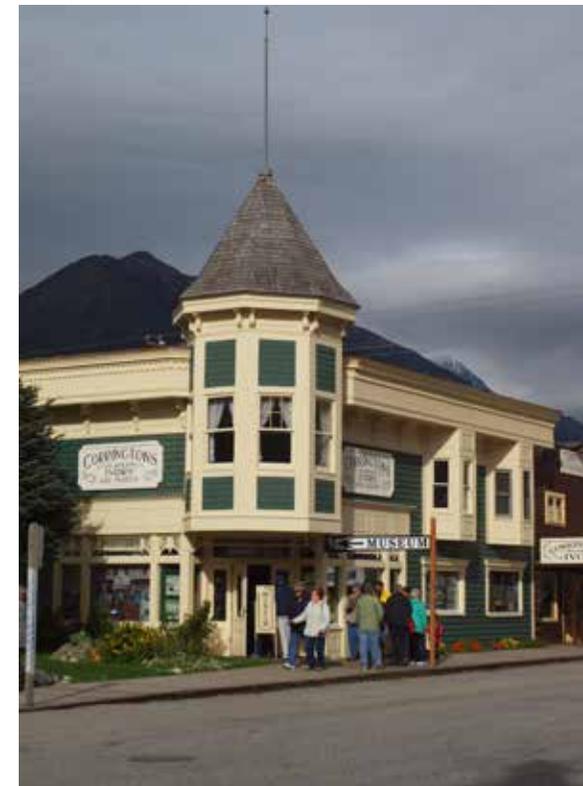
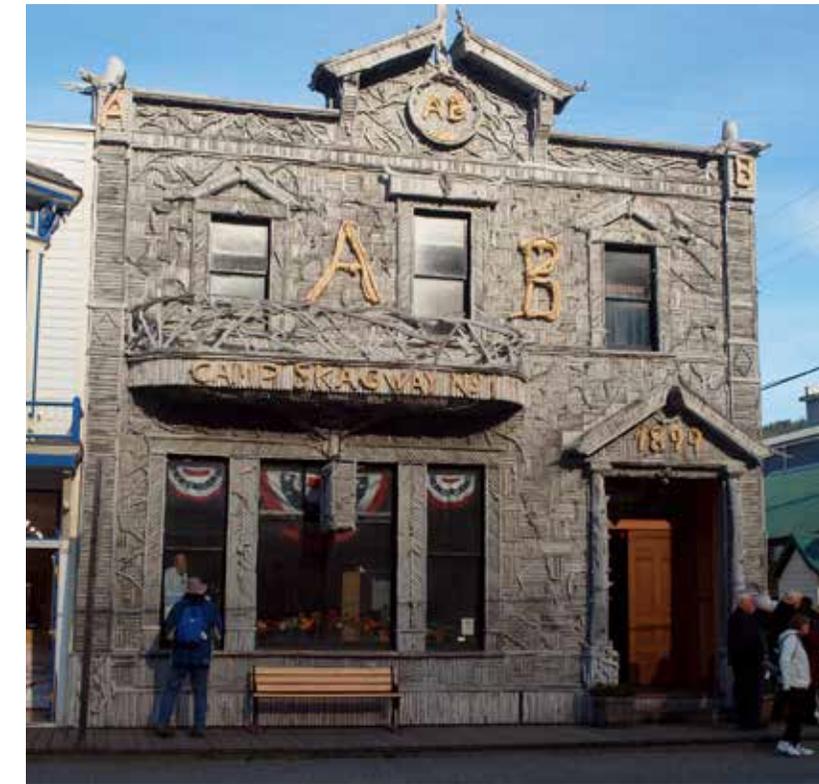




Before our trip several friends told me that we should go to a salmon bake while we were in Juneau. I wasn't thrilled about the idea because I don't much like fish but I was willing to go since Kirk does. There were so many delicious side dishes that I had plenty I liked and the salmon, roasted with a honey glaze, wasn't too bad either. We also sat around a campfire and roasted marshmallows afterward. It was a very nice evening in a beautiful setting.



# Skagway, Alaska



Kirk and I both liked Skagway best of all the stops in Alaska. There was less of a touristy feel to the town even though it did have many tourist shops. The town is very small (twenty-three blocks long and four blocks wide) so you see businesses catering to the locals as well as the tourist shops. The population is less than 1,100 but doubles in the summer in order to deal with the tourists. I probably helped that this is where we were going to see the sled dogs.





Our excursion began with a beautiful drive up into the mountains outside Skagway. When we arrived at the dog camp we got on heavy duty vehicles for the ride up to the dog-sled runs. It was a lot steep and a little scary but the views were amazing.

Once we arrived at the sled area we were divided up in small groups and got in to the carts the dogs pull. At first the dogs were lazing but when the musher walked over they jumped up and when he stepped on the cart you could see their excitement. As soon as he gave them the order they took off fast!

The dogs are chosen for their love of running and their ability to withstand the harsh cold. They're not pretty but they're tough and love their jobs.







On our way back down the mountain we stopped for a photo-op. You can actually see our ship in the distance. Everywhere you turn in Alaska is a beautiful view.

Back in the camp our guide told us about the equipment and what it takes to compete at dog sledding. He explained the special clothing, design of the sled and the mechanics of stopping. It's kind of like throwing out an anchor. You can't let the momentum of the sled take it into the dogs.

Yes, we got to play with the puppies. They had a lot of four to six month old puppies in training for us to pet. Anyone who ever wanted a Husky should experience the energy level of these dogs first. They never stopped moving. I think they have to pull a sled just to get tired enough to calm down.

After we got our fill of puppy love we headed back to the ship. It would be another day at sea before our next stop in Victoria, Canada.

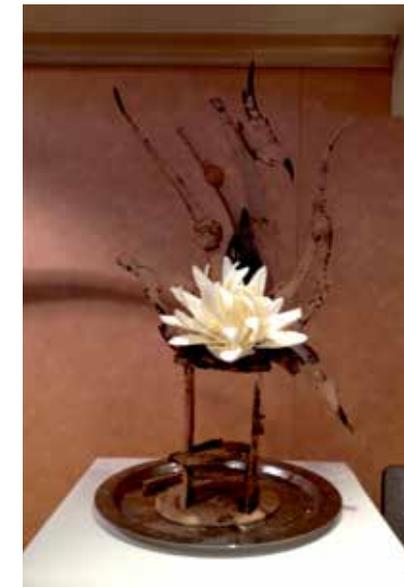


The day at sea between Skagway and Victoria was restful. We lazed on deck and got lucky enough to see a pair of orcas swimming just a hundred yards or so from the ship. We had seen whales blow in the distance early in the cruise but couldn't see more than that. We were pretty excited we finally got a whale sighting.

Kirk watched an ice sculpture demonstration on the deck. We saw it at the chocolate buffet later that evening. I have never seen so much chocolate served in



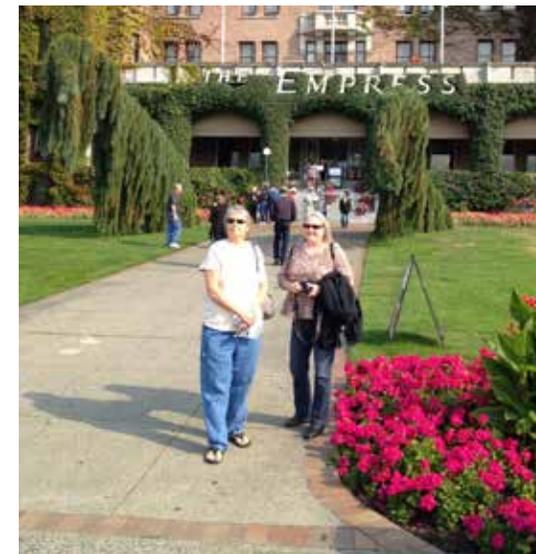
so many ways in my life. The chocolate eagle was fabulous! There were too many things to taste them all but I certainly tried. Kirk and I ended up getting plates of different things and taking a bite of each. Yum!



# Victoria, Canada



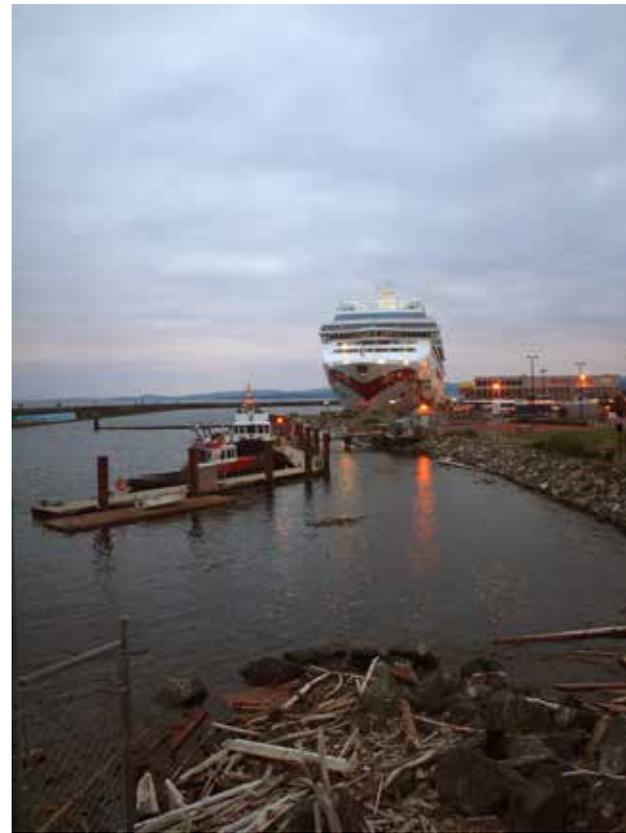
Victoria is a beautiful and colorful city. There are flowers everywhere, even in late September. We decided not to plan an excursion and joined up with Rennie and Bob again to tour the city. As usual it was a shopping thing but with scenery as nice as Victoria, I didn't mind hanging around outside and taking pictures.



When everyone finally got tired of shopping we went over to Chinatown for dinner. After dinner it was getting dark so we headed back to the Empress to catch a cab. The city lights up at night beautifully, I'm glad we stayed until dusk.



# Vancouver, Canada



My plan had been to stay in a hotel we could walk to from the cruise terminal. I carefully studied the map, determined the most central location to the sites we wanted to visit and booked the Victorian Hotel at the corner of Pender and Homer Streets. When our ship docked, it was at a different location than given in the cruise information and we had to take a cab to the hotel. It's a very good thing I studied the map or the cab driver would have taken us on a nice long tour of the city and charged a fortune to get us to the hotel.

I was watching the street signs and when we crossed Homer Street I noted the amount on the meter was C\$ 8.00. After we had ridden for a little while with multiple turns I told the driver he was going the wrong way. He insisted he was not. When I told him we had crossed Homer he told me we were on a street parallel to it. I told him we were not, that we were headed west and needed to go east. He figured out I knew what he was up to and turned around driving straight to the hotel. He told me I could pay him what I felt was fair. I gave him \$10, no tip.

We went for lunch at a diner around the corner from the hotel. The owner's friend was helping out managing the place while she was on vacation. He was an elderly man dressed in a suit serving tables and acting as cashier. He was so



friendly, giving us information on the area, things to see and places to go. The food was excellent too.

The first afternoon we walked down to Gastown to see the sights. It's the old part of Vancouver and named for "Gassy" Jack Deighton who owned the city's first saloon. He was known as "Gassy" for his talkative nature, not what we imagined when we first heard the name.

There is a beautiful steam clock in Gastown, it was built in 1977 to cover a steam grate, part of Vancouver's distributed steam heating system. It



actually looks quite old and it's pretty different to see a clock powered by steam.

We wandered around for quite a while and then found a nice Italian restaurant and had dinner then headed back to the hotel for the night.

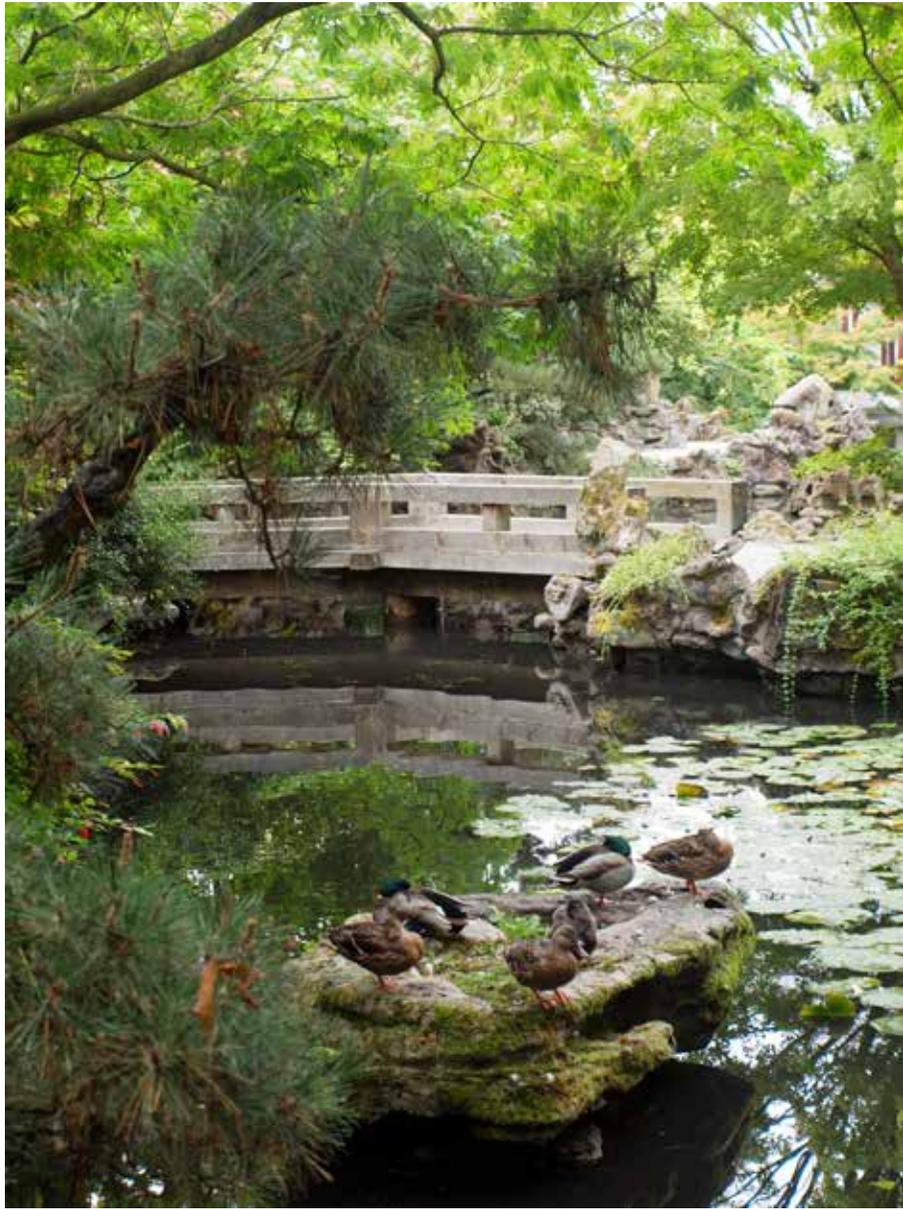


After breakfast at the hotel we headed out for Chinatown. I had a walking tour for the area that took us through parks, down streets full of oriental buildings (one that's only five feet wide) and even to an Asian grocery store.

We stopped along the tour and had dim sum. The server brings you a menu of small plates to share and you choose from a photo. You're not really sure what you're ordering other than it looks pretty. We did actually enjoy everything we ordered.

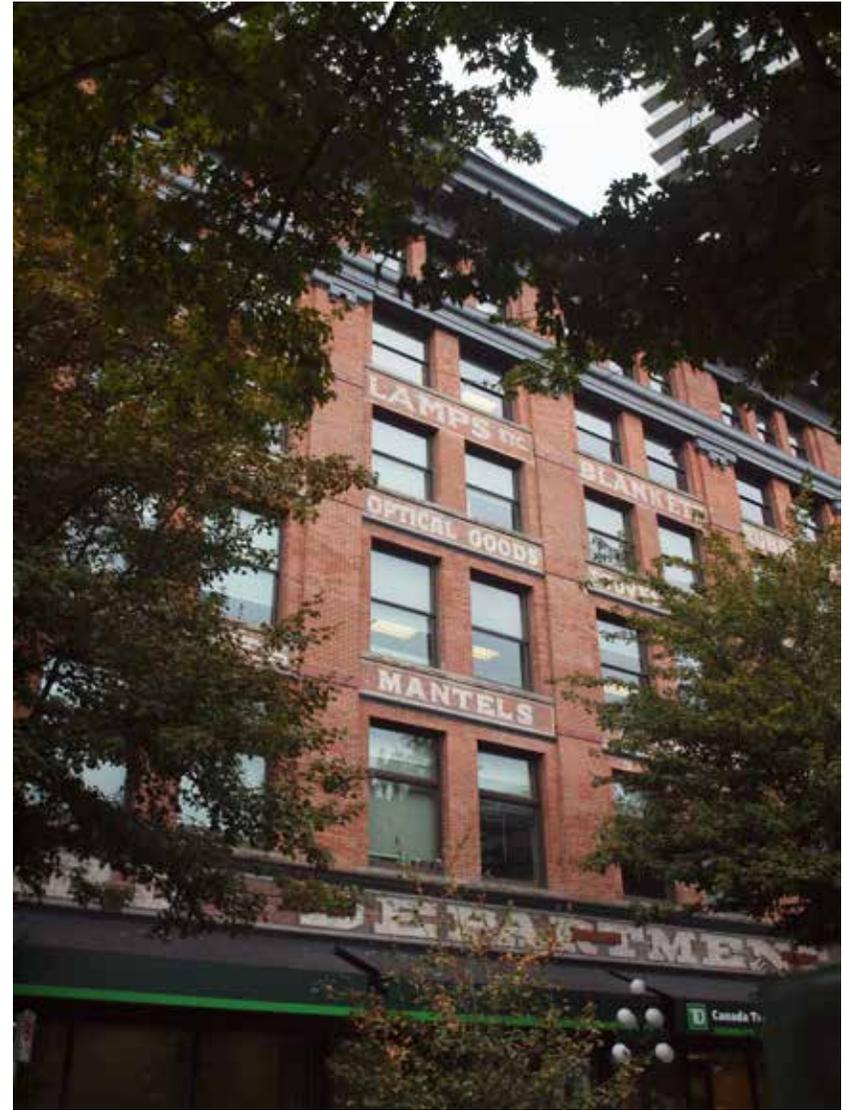
Our hotel was just on the edge of an iffy neighborhood. Two blocks north and west was the part of



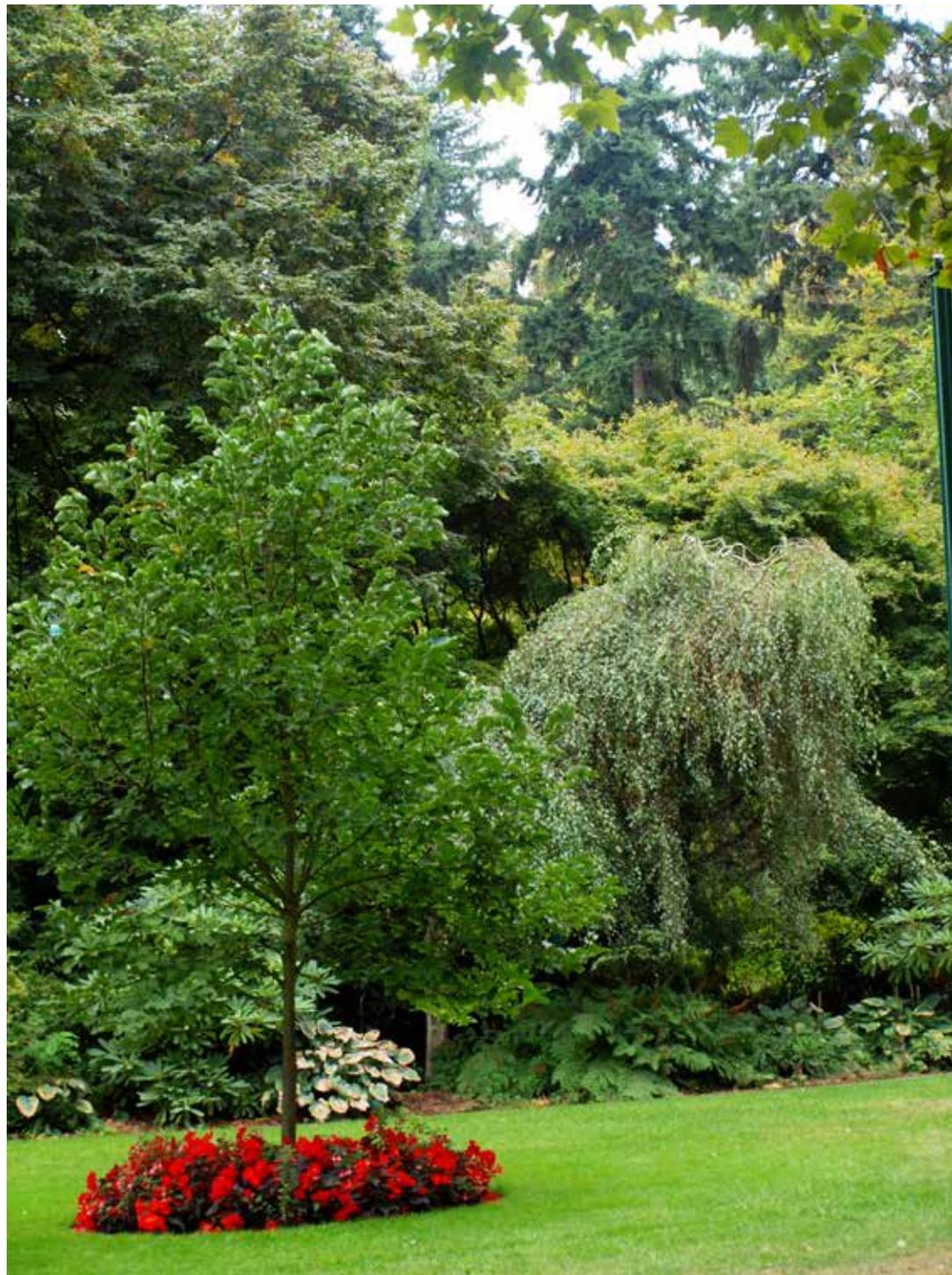


Hastings street that has the drug dispensaries and marijuana bars. Somehow there was a very firm line separating that neighborhood from ours. On our walk back from Chinatown of course Kirk insisted we walk down Hastings to see. We did. It wasn't pretty.

Dinner that night was a downtown pizza restaurant with an up-scale atmosphere but reasonable prices. So far in Canada we had eaten Chinese twice and Italian twice. We loved all of it.



On our last day in Vancouver we rented bicycles and rode around the seawall circling Stanley Park.



Vancouver is a wonderful city. Their public transportation system is easy to use and efficient. It was easy to catch the train to the airport the next morning for our flight home. I certainly hope we have the opportunity to go there again. There is so much we didn't get a chance to see and do.

