

# Things to Do in Vancouver, Washington: A Family Guide

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Photo:

Explore the waterfront and grab a delicious bite to eat in Vancouver, Washington. Photo: Kate Loweth

If you are looking for a laid-back weekend destination that's full of kid-friendly activities, set your sights on Vancouver, Washington. Just three hours south of Seattle, the "Original Vancouver" has a revitalized waterfront lined with kid-friendly restaurants, plus an eclectic downtown with vibrant street art around every corner.

I recently headed to Vancouver with my teenage sons, and we found spots to enjoy a burger and fries, along with plenty of opportunities for outdoor recreation nearby. On your next family vacation, here are my recommendations for the best things to do when you visit Vancouver.

## **Explore the Vancouver Waterfront and Grant Street Pier.**

There's no better spot to grab a meal and take in the sights than the [Grant Street Pier](#) along Vancouver's waterfront. Part of the 5-mile Columbia River Renaissance Trail, this waterfront area has paved walking paths and plenty of spots to sit and enjoy the views of the river and nearby Portland. Kids will enjoy the Headwaters Wall — a water feature with a splash pad area that's perfect for a hot day.

Grab a meal at the many family-friendly dining options with river views while you're there. We enjoyed dining on the outdoor deck at the [Waterfront Taphouse](#), and the kids saved room to hit up [The Yard Milkshake Bar](#) afterward for the most over-the-top milkshakes we've ever seen.



Admire the view of the river from Vancouver's waterfront park. Photo: Kate Loweth

## **Visit Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge.**

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Just 20 miles north of Vancouver is this great day-hiking spot, especially if you are a birdwatcher or history aficionado. We enjoyed learning about the Chinookan people while visiting the [Cathlapotle Plankhouse](#), which is open to visitors during the summer and fall months. Naturalist-led birding hikes are popular in the refuge, where you can see sandhill cranes, Canada geese and plenty of turkey vultures.

Nearby, [3Peaks Public House and Tap Room](#) was the perfect spot to stop for some buffalo wings and brews. And plans to open an In-N-Out Burger here in early 2025 are in the works.



The Cathlapotle Plankhouse is open seasonally. Photo: Kate Loweth

### **Check out the public artwork.**

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One of the things we loved most when visiting Vancouver was walking the downtown area and snapping pictures of the colorful murals along the way. This self-guided art tour is perfect for teenagers, as you can shop and grab an ice cream from the many shops in this downtown corridor.

Once you've worked up an appetite, swing by [Thirsty & Hungry Sasquatch](#) for some New York-style pizza you can buy by the pie or the slice. Kids will enjoy the arcade games and pinball, while parents can try one of the many beers they have on tap.



Take a self-guided art tour through downtown. Photo: Kate Loweth

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### **Learn some Pacific Northwest history at the Fort Vancouver Historic Site.**

Families looking to learn about this area's past should plan a visit to this spot that has a reconstructed British fur trade fort as well as the [Pearson Air Museum](#). Admission to the air museum is free, and kids will love seeing the historic airplanes. Look for special Open Cockpit days where you can see these amazing machines up close.

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### **Spend an afternoon at the Columbia River Gorge.**

Take advantage of your close proximity to this gorgeous area that has kid-friendly waterfalls and hiking trails galore. It's just a 30-minute drive east of Vancouver to the stunning Multnomah Falls, but you'll want to pay attention to parking restrictions that require timed parking permits at various times during the year. While Multnomah is the easiest waterfall to see in the area (it's just off the highway), there are plenty of other options in the waterfall corridor if you aren't able to make a reservation. Both Horsetail Falls and Bridal Veil Falls are short out-and-back hikes perfect for kids.



Hike the trails and spot waterfalls in the Columbia River Gorge. Photo: Kate Loweth

## Head indoors to Big Al's Family Entertainment Center.

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You'll want to have a rainy-day plan when visiting Vancouver (it is the Pacific Northwest, after all). [Big Al's](#) was a favorite for my teens, who enjoyed air hockey and tons of arcade games, as well as bowling while we were there. Parents can park themselves at a table and order food to be delivered via QR code. Talk about an easy day!

## Where to stay

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We stayed a few nights at the [Heathman Lodge](#), just 15 minutes from downtown Vancouver. Our family suite was very roomy, with a king-size bed and sofa seating area, plus an attached bedroom with a queen-size bed. The onsite Hudson's Bar and Grill was convenient for nights when we didn't want to head out for dinner, and the property had live music and happy hour one of the nights we were there. You can be sure that we took advantage of the indoor pool to relax after our busy day. For donut fans, there's a Voodoo Donuts just a short drive from the lodge, and for those who prefer breakfast sandwiches and more traditional donuts, the old-school Angel's Donuts is another easy option. If you forgot anything at home, the Vancouver Mall is right around the corner.



Heathman Lodge is conveniently located near downtown Vancouver. Photo: Kate Loweth

### **More getaway ideas for Washington families:**

- [10 Cabin Getaways for Seattle-Area Families for Fall and Winter](#)
- [17 Kid-Friendly Lodges for Fantastic Family Getaways](#)
- [Sunriver, Oregon: A Stunning Destination for PNW Families](#)
- [Enchanting Seabrook: What's New for Families?](#)

*Editor's note: This trip was hosted by [Visit Vancouver WA](#) and [State of Washington Tourism](#), but all opinions expressed here belong to the writer.*

### **About the Author**

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