Restaurants Victoria is a hotbed of good restaurants. Listed below are a few idiosyncratic suggestions that I hope you will find helpful. I’ve given a rough guesstimate of how much a moderately gluttonous/bibulous person might expect to spend including tax but not tip (15 - 20% unless service was poor). You will probably need a reservation at all of the places listed under “Fine Dining” and “Pretty Fine Dining,” but it’s worth calling them if it gets to be the last minute and you don’t have a reservation. Note that there are many fine places in Victoria that are not on this list.

Unless otherwise noted, the restaurants listed below are within +/- 15 minutes brisk walking distance from The Fairmont Empress Hotel. Bluebird Taxi answers 250-382-4235.

**FINE DINING ($50-75)**

Café Brio, 944 Fort St. (between Quadra and Vancouver Sts.), 250-383-0009  
Far and away my favourite restaurant in Victoria. The cooking is west-coast-inflected Italian with a strong emphasis on locally harvested produce, meats, and seafood. The dishes are creative but not pretentious and, most important, they are truly delicious. The room is visually attractive and the atmosphere warm and energetic. Co-owning couple Greg and Sylvia are extraordinarily welcoming, and the wait staff are friendly pros. If all the tables are booked, see if there’s space at the bar.

Brasserie L’Ecole, 1715 Government (near Fisgard St.), 250-475-6260  
[http://www.lecole.ca/](http://www.lecole.ca/)  
Perhaps my second favourite. Chef Sean Brenner was the chef at Brio when it first opened, and left after a few years to open the Brasserie with a partner. It’s small and really looks the part of a French bistro. The frites are very good—not the best I’ve ever had, but up there. The greatest strength of this place is the excellent wine list; often a wide variety of special wines available by the glass (don’t be shy about asking). The cheese selection is also particularly
good. They do NOT take reservations, but you can stop by and give them a cell number.

Olo, 509 Fisgard Street, 250-590-8795 http://www.olorestaurant.com/: For some reason the young couple who run this place recently changed the name from Ulla to Olo, and did some redecorating, but from the menu they appear to be doing the same sorts of creative, interesting dishes with fresh local ingredients as they have since opening about four years ago. Maybe they more firmly anchored the cooking in the Pacific Northwest. The room is small, with a light, clean, simple design. The menu is also small but creative and fun. They source high-quality local ingredients and cooking them in interesting ways that sometimes fuse several cuisines. They also have an unusual wine list, again small but clever.

Stage Wine Bar, 1307 Gladstone Ave., (NOT downtown, I recommend a cab) 250-388-4222 http://stagewinebar.com/; I love this place. They do very clever small tapas-like plates and offer about 10 wines by the glass, with the option of a full or a half pour. Very creative food, fun atmosphere, casual but skilled. Hip, popular, crowded. Best restaurant espresso in town. Serious cocktails.

Camille’s Fine Westcoast Dining, 45 Bastion Square, 250-381-3433: Terrific wine list; quite good food (sometimes a touch elaborate in presentation, but consistently delicious). The atmosphere can feel just a bit subterranean as the place is a half-floor below ground level, but nonetheless it’s a very solid restaurant and I recommend it highly. One of the quietest places to dine in town.

Matisse, 512 Yates St., (250) 480-0883 Good French food in a small, personal-feeling dining room. Elegantly set tables and excellent service. Great wine list (and lovely offerings of other sorts of drinks, such as cognacs). Pricey, and in my limited experience the side dishes don’t always completely succeed, but this is a lovely spot for a couple or small group (and, like Camille’s, it is quiet enough to allow calm conversation).
PRETTY FINE DINING ($35-55)

Zambri’s 820 Yates St. (between Quadra and Blanshard, in the Atrium Building.), 250 360-1171 Seriously delicious pasta dishes, terrific soups, authentic pizza, in a new downtown location. I especially enjoy Zambri’s for lunch. If you’re an omnivore you can just order the daily special pasta dish without even bothering to ask what it is. And even for dinner this is probably my favourite in this category.

Il Terrazzo Ristorante, 555 Johnson St., (near Wharf St.) 250-361-0028: This is a very nice, informal place, with appealing decor, pleasant service, good food, and an OK wine list. Especially nice if you can sit in the courtyard – inside tends to be quite noisy in a boisterous, cheerful way that folks over 50 may find tiresome. I especially like coming here for lunch. The dishes are not wildly unusual or adventurous, but consistently good.

The Tapa Bar, 620 Trounce Alley (between Government and Broad Sts. by View St.), 383-0013 This isn’t really a tapa bar of the sort found in Spain. Compared to a real tapa bar, the dishes are bigger, pricier, and slower to arrive. But the location is quaintly attractive, the place is nicely decorated, they offer a variety of tasty dishes at reasonable prices (e.g., prawns sizzled in white wine & chipotle peppers, $10.50), and they have a good beer list and some decent wines. This has been a successful restaurant for decades, which is not easy in this town, and they feed the homeless every Christmas.

About a year ago the owners of The Tapa Bar opened up a place right next door. It’s a tapa bar. Still not a real tapa bar like in Spain, but the menu is more purely Spanish. The octopus carpaccio is awesome. Quite good chicken liver parfait. Impressive sherry list.


CASUAL DINING ($20-35)
Heron Rock Bistro, 435 Simcoe St. #4 (between Menzies and Croft Sts., 383-1545
This place has only been opened a year or so, and I’ve only been once. Don’t be
put off by the location (beside a supermarket in the James Bay residential
neighbourhood, a bit of a walk from down). Every night of the week they feature
a different 3-course meal for $15!

Pagliacci's, 1011 Broad St. (between Broughton and Fort Sts.), 386-1662 A Victoria
standard for decades, Pag’s (as locals call it) offers a little slice of the Big Apple
with a dollop of nostalgia. Casual/funky/fun, tables packed together, lots of pasta
dishes. On the border between Apretty fine@ and Acasual@ dining.

Masala Bites, 1015 Fort Street, http://masalabites.ca/. Very fresh, tasty Indian
food. I especially like the two Chaat starters, and the naan is terrific. Clean and
bright. Service a bit spotty.

Sizzling Tandoor, 637 Johnson St, 250-388-5450. I haven’t gone to this place but
I have heard good things, including from a cab driver of Indian heritage. Also, I
had their naan once and it absolutely rocked.

Pink Bicycle, 1008 Blanshard, (250) 384-1008 Redefines the burger. Never had a
burger in a restaurant anywhere near this good. The mutton burger is a
revelation. The truffled frites are to die for (but you can ask for a side of Lipitor).

Pizzeria Prima Strada, (NOT downtown, but walkable from downtown if you are fit
and keen, and easily cab-able) 230 Cook Street (250) 590-8595 or 2960 Bridge
Street (250) 590-4380, : VERY good Neapolitan pizza. Perfect thin crust, top-
quality ingredients, perfectly cooked in a wood-fired brick oven. The best pizza
I’ve had outside of Italy.

Siam Thai, 512 Fort St. (between Government and Wharf Sts.), 250-383-9911
Might be Victoria’s oldest Thai place. Consistently good.

JJ Wonton Noodle House, 1012 Fort St. (between Vancouver and Cook), 383-0680
Very well done Chinese dishes of the sort familiar around here, and occasional
surprises such as terrific lamb dishes.
Don Mee, Fisgard. Old fashioned very large upstairs room with lots of tables and dim sum carts.

The Noodle Box, 626 Fisgard or 818 Douglas St. More of a take-out place, but they have a couple of tables. Pretty tasty for what it is, and very cheap. Loud and energetic.

Foo, 769 Yates Street, http://www.foofood.ca/ Like the Noodle Box, but with slightly better foo.

Sook Jai Thai, 839 Fort St. (between Blanshard and Quadra Sts.), 383-9945 I haven’t been to this restaurant for a while, but previously enjoyed it.

Rebar Modern Food, 50 Bastion Square, 361-9223 Rebar has been “serving up the freshest, funkiest and healthiest food on the West Coast@ since 1989.” The fare is mostly vegetarian but includes fish/seafood dishes. They also offer a bewildering array of freshly made juices (e.g., the “Liver Quiver” is a bracing blend of grapefruit, lemon, olive oil, cayenne, and garlic). The co-owners here have published a darned good cook book that makes a very nice gift. Reservations recommended. I heard recently that it’s declined a bit.

The Mint, 1414 Douglas Street, (250) 386-6468 Very hip. Lots of tasty treats such as chorizo naan pizza, Tibetan dumplings, and lamb curry. Open very late.

John’s Place Restaurant, 723 Pandora, 389-0711. As close to a diner as you’ll find in Victoria. My experience here is limited to breakfast, which they do quite well.