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# OUTDOOR GUIDE 2007

*Vancouver Island: Victoria and the Gulf Islands*

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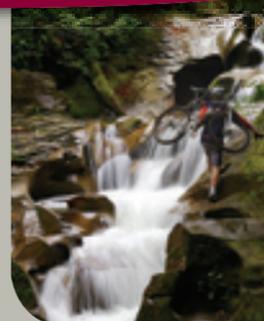


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**CONTENTS**  
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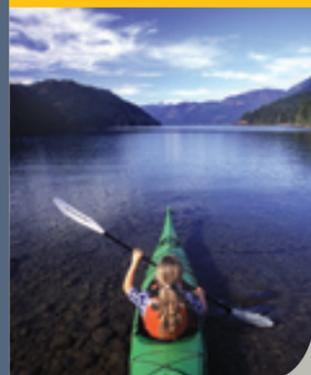
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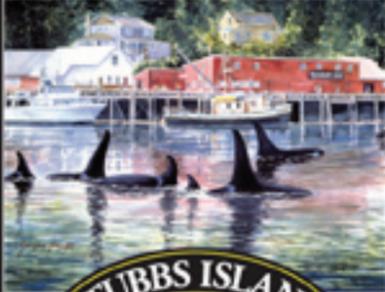
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# Vancouver Island

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**W**aves thunder onto sandy beaches and jagged shorelines. Ancient trees tower overhead in emerald rainforests. Clear streams rush from glacier peaks to pristine lakes. It's no surprise whales and bald eagles make themselves at home here.

Welcome to Vancouver Island's own little corner of Pacific Northwest paradise – the perfect place to retreat and revel in nature's grandeur. It's where grandfathers and grandsons land rainbow trout together in gurgling rivers. Where divers descend onto their first shipwreck. Where snowboarders ride some of the best powder around.

Indeed, nature's splendour is good for the soul. That's why everyone needs a little Island time. Visit any time of year. Our temperate Pacific climate is one of the mildest in Canada, so year-round you can get out and explore. Find out why readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* have named Vancouver Island the Top North American Island the last seven years in a row.

In the pages ahead you'll find hundreds of ideas for outdoor adventure excursions and the best places to enjoy them in and around Vancouver Island.

Want more info? Check out the Tourism Vancouver Island website at [VancouverIslandOutside.com](http://VancouverIslandOutside.com).



# Getting Here

No matter how you travel to Vancouver Island, the journey is scenic and easy. Here are the various transportation options.

**By ferry:** If you're traveling by vehicle from mainland British Columbia, the main points of entry for B.C. Ferries to Vancouver Island are:

- Swartz Bay (Sidney) from Tsawwassen (south of Vancouver)
- Duke Point (Nanaimo) from Tsawwassen
- Departure Bay (Nanaimo) from Horseshoe Bay (north of Vancouver)
- Little River (Comox Valley) from Powell River (Sunshine Coast)
- Port Hardy from both Prince Rupert and Bella Coola

The above ferry routes provide vehicle and passenger service with regular schedules. Reservations are available up to 24 hours in advance (except Little River/Powell River). For more information, call (888) 223-3779 (North America), (250) 386-3431 (outside North America) or visit [www.bcferries.com](http://www.bcferries.com).

From the U.S., Washington State Ferries offers vehicle and passenger service between Anacortes, Wash., and Sidney, just north of

Victoria. The M.V. Coho Ferry transports vehicles and passengers between Port Angeles, Wash., and Victoria's Inner Harbour.

High-speed foot-passenger service is available from Seattle to Victoria's Inner Harbour (Victoria Clipper) and from Port Angeles, Wash., to Victoria's Inner Harbour (Victoria Express).

**By plane:** Scheduled flights are available into Victoria and Comox International Airports; Nanaimo, Campbell River and Port Hardy Regional Airports; and Tofino Airport. Various float plane services in Seattle and Vancouver fly travellers to urban centres and remote locations on Vancouver Island.

### Getting Around

**By train:** VIA Rail offers scenic trips aboard the historic E&N route, which runs daily between Victoria and Courtenay with many stops along the way.

**By boat:** Various freight boats transport passengers from Port Alberni to Ucluelet and Bamfield or in the Nootka Sound from Gold River to Tahsis and Kyuquot. A passenger ferry also runs between Ucluelet and Bamfield. From Campbell River you can cruise to remote inlet communities in the Georgia Strait and the Johnstone/Queen Charlotte Straits.

**By plane:** Airports and float plane hubs with guided tour operations are available in many communities.

**By road:** Rental car companies are available in many communities. Motorcoach bus service routes run from Victoria to Port Hardy and to the West Coast. Some offer tours. Express shuttle buses offer daily scheduled service (from ferries, downtown, etc.) between Victoria, Nanaimo, Vancouver, and Tofino/Ucluelet.

### SCENIC DRIVES

Vancouver Island's efficient, modern highway system quickly moves traffic between destinations and provides loops to scenic marine highways. It takes approximately six hours to drive from Victoria in the south region to Port Hardy in the north region (504 km). Here are a few of Vancouver Island's most scenic routes:

#### Oceanside Route

 This route, one of the island's most popular driving tours, follows the spectacular coastline from the Nanoose Bay area north to Campbell River. Stop at sandy beaches in Parksville and Qualicum Beach. See lighthouses in Qualicum Bay, Bowser and Deep Bay. The Oceanside Route meanders through several charming communities including Fanny Bay, Union Bay, the Comox Valley, Black Creek and Saratoga Beach to Campbell River. Parks, beaches, golf courses and dozens of roadside attractions line the Oceanside Route.

#### North Island Route

 This route takes travellers into the pristine wilderness of the island's lush, densely forested areas – from Campbell River to Port Hardy.

Wildlife sightings are very common along this route. The population thins as you travel north, but you'll find a few small communities including Telegraph Cove, Sayward and Port Alice, which are known for their warm hospitality. Port McNeill's history is steeped in the logging industry, while Port Hardy is a transportation hub for cruise ships, ferries and float planes bound for wilderness adventures.

#### Pacific Marine Circle Route

This new loop skirts the edges of the South Island and Cowichan areas on a coast-to-coast journey of Vancouver Island. The 255-km route links Victoria, Sooke, Port Renfrew, Lake Cowichan and Duncan, with panoramic ocean views throughout. Explore the legislative buildings in B.C.'s capital city, Victoria. Hit the trailheads of the Juan de Fuca Marine Trail and historic West Coast Trail in Port Renfrew. Watch for bears on the gravel logging road leading to Lake Cowichan. Learn about First Nations culture in Duncan, and tour wineries in the Cowichan Valley. ●



#### Average Temperatures for South Vancouver Island Celsius (Fahrenheit)

	Minimum	Maximum
January	0.7 (33.7)	6.9 (44.4)
March	2.3 (36.1)	10.5 (50.9)
May	6.9 (44.4)	16.6 (61.9)
July	10.8 (51.4)	21.9 (71.4)
September	8.4 (47.1)	19.4 (66.9)
November	2.7 (36.7)	9.5 (49.1)

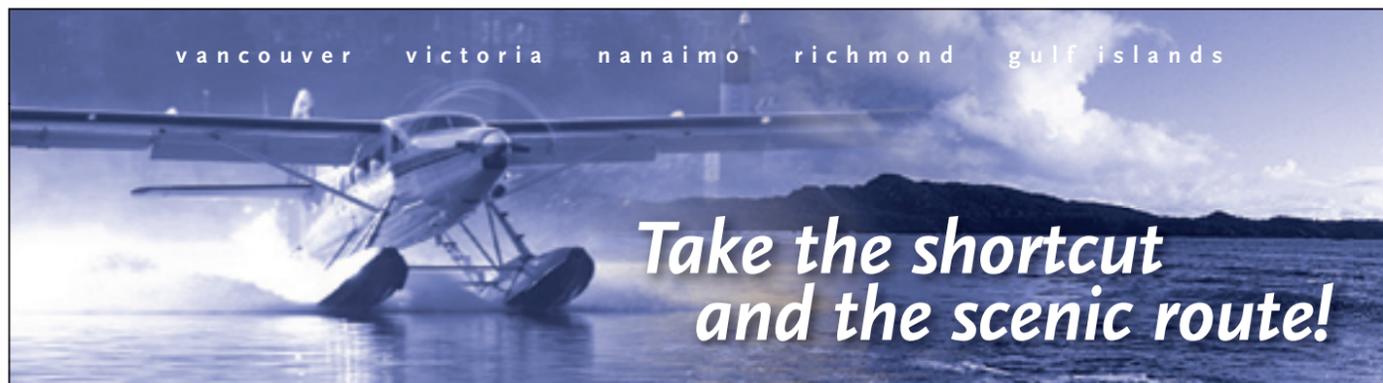
For driving times and detailed maps, see page 9 or go to: [VancouverIslandOutside.com](http://VancouverIslandOutside.com)

#### Quick Conversion Hint:

**1 km = 0.6 miles**

Go to [VancouverIslandOutside.com](http://VancouverIslandOutside.com) for a distance calculator.

vancouver victoria nanaimo richmond gulf islands



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To assist you with your travel in British Columbia, more than 100 communities operate Visitor Centres as members of the Visitor Centre Network. Their friendly staff offer personalized visitor counselling, community information, accommodation reservations, and provincial itinerary planning.



### Driving Times for the Oceanside (19A) and North Island Routes

- VICTORIA TO:**
- SIDNEY** — 34 min
  - SOOKE** — 24 min
  - DUNCAN** — 55 min
  - NANAIMO** — 1 hr 20 min
  - PORT ALBERNI** — 2 hr 30 min
  - UCLUELET** — 4 hr 28 min
  - TOFINO** — 4 hr 30 min
  - PARKSVILLE** — 1 hr 40 min
  - COMOX VALLEY** — 2 hr 40 min
  - CAMPBELL RIVER** — 3 hr
  - GOLD RIVER** — 5 hr 27 min
  - ZEBALLOS** — 6 hr
  - PORT HARDY** — 7 hr



### Distance Chart

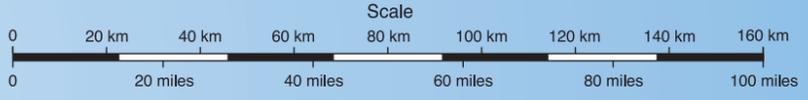
in Kilometres - 1 km = .6 miles approx.

<b>BAMFIELD</b>	246	<b>CAMPBELL RIVER</b>	217	191	<b>CHEMAINUS</b>	201	45	146	<b>COMOX VALLEY</b>	230	204	13	159	<b>DUNCAN</b>	337	91	281	136	294	<b>GOLD RIVER</b>	528	282	472	326	485	220	<b>HOLBERG</b>	336	310	113	265	106	400	591	<b>JORDAN RIVER</b>	202	176	17	131	28	266	457	134	<b>LADYSMITH</b>	252	226	43	182	30	317	508	136	51	<b>LAKE COWICHAN</b>	179	153	37	108	51	243	435	157	23	73	<b>NANAIMO</b>	145	117	76	73	87	208	399	192	58	109	36	<b>PARKSVILLE</b>	95	151	122	106	135	242	433	241	107	157	84	50	<b>PORT ALBERNI</b>	495	248	439	293	452	187	97	558	424	475	402	366	400	<b>PORT ALICE</b>	484	238	428	282	441	176	50	547	413	464	391	355	389	53	<b>PORT HARDY</b>	445	198	389	243	402	137	88	508	374	425	352	316	350	54	44	<b>PORT McNEILL</b>	375	349	152	304	145	440	630	36	173	175	196	232	280	597	586	547	<b>PORT RENFREW</b>	140	107	84	62	97	197	388	203	69	120	47	11	45	355	344	305	242	<b>QUALICUM BEACH</b>	310	284	96	239	80	375	566	88	108	110	131	167	215	533	522	483	127	178	<b>SIDNEY</b>	305	279	88	234	75	370	561	31	103	105	126	162	210	527	517	478	70	172	57	<b>SOOKE</b>	403	157	347	202	360	66	286	466	332	383	309	274	308	253	242	203	506	263	441	436	<b>TAHSIS</b>	217	273	241	228	256	363	554	362	228	279	206	171	122	521	510	471	401	166	337	331	429	<b>TOFINO</b>	191	248	218	203	231	338	529	337	203	253	180	146	96	496	485	446	376	141	311	306	404	42	<b>UCLUELET</b>	290	264	70	219	60	355	546	68	88	90	111	147	195	512	502	463	107	158	26	37	421	316	291	<b>VICTORIA</b>	442	196	387	241	400	135	170	506	372	422	349	313	347	136	126	87	545	303	480	475	201	469	444	460	<b>ZEBALLOS</b>
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- ### LEGEND
- Main Highway
  - Oceanside Route (19A)
  - North Island Route
  - Paved Road
  - - - Gravel Road
  - - - Car & Passenger Ferry
  - - - Passenger-only Ferry
  - + Major Airport
  - Park

- ### AIRPORT CODES
- Campbell River (YBL)
  - Comox (YQQ)
  - Nanaimo (YCD)
  - Port Hardy (YZT)
  - Vancouver (YVR)
  - Victoria (YYJ)



# VANCOUVER ISLAND



# Wildlife & Parks

There's nothing like the thrill of seeing your first bear in the wild. You're quiet and reverent... and wildly curious.

Vast undeveloped areas cover much of Vancouver Island, where numerous species of mammals, fish and birds reside. In fact, the Island is home to more than 80 provincial parks, 45 ecological reserves, two national parks, numerous national historic sites and dozens of regional parks.

Visitors experience up-close encounters with animals every day of the year from the safety and comfort of guided wildlife tours. Here's a quick look at where and when to find wildlife.

### Bear Watching

Head to the sparsely populated North Island or West Coast for a guided bear watching tour by boat, float plane or on foot. Bear watching season is April through October, when you can see black bears comb the coastline for crab or pluck spawning salmon from a stream. Grizzlies are not found on Vancouver Island, but tours are available from the North Island to the Knight Inlet area and from Campbell River to the Bute Inlet area.

**Best places to go:** Tours depart from Tofino,

Comox/Courtenay in Comox Valley, Campbell River, Telegraph Cove, Sayward and Port Hardy.

### Salmon Watching

From October through early December you can see the region's most famous fish spawning in almost every stream or river on Vancouver Island. For a unique up-close experience, take a salmon-viewing rafting or snorkeling tour in Campbell River July through October. Year-round, see salmon and learn about their lifecycle at numerous hatcheries.

**Best places to go:** Campbell River, Goldstream Provincial Park (Victoria), Stamp River (Port Alberni), Puntledge River (Comox/Courtenay in Comox Valley), Qualicum River, Upana River (Tahsis), Zeballos River, and Nimpkish and Salmon Rivers (Sayward).

### Bird Watching

You'll find bald eagles perched in trees along the island coastline nearly year-round. In late fall/early winter, salmon spawning attracts large numbers of these raptors to rivers and

streams. Head to the North Island Wildlife Recovery Centre in Errington to see eagles and other wildlife.

Spot dozens of native bird species on Vancouver Island, a popular stopover on the Pacific Flyway migration route.

**Best places to go:** Clover Point (Victoria), Somenos Marsh Wildlife Refuge (Duncan), Pacific Northwest Raptors Visitor Center (Duncan), Buttertubs Marsh (Nanaimo), Englishman River Estuary (Parksville), Goose Spit (Comox), and Tofino Wildlife Management Area (Tofino).

### More Wildlife in Island Parks

**Goldstream Provincial Park** (South Island) – Ancient forests, world-class salmon spawning stream and eagle watching programs. Wildlife: Salmon, mink, river otter, and bald eagles.

**Juan de Fuca Provincial Park** (South Island) A coastal park with dazzling beaches and stunning ocean views. Wildlife: Whales, marine birds, tide pool creatures. Black bears and cougars.

**Gulf Islands National Park Reserve** (Gulf Islands) Includes 15 islands and numerous islets and reefs. Wildlife: Whales, porpoises, dolphins, sea lions and seals.

**Carmanah Walbran Provincial Park** (Pacific Rim) – An awe-inspiring wilderness area with the world's largest spruce trees (95-m tall) and 1,000-year-old cedars. Wildlife: Black-tailed

deer, wolves, cougars and black bears. Woodpeckers, flickers, pigmy owl and the marbled murrelet.

**Pacific Rim National Park Reserve** (Pacific Rim) – Best known for its Long Beach segment between Tofino and Ucluelet. Also home to the West Coast Trail and Broken Group Islands. Wildlife: Black bears, cougars, wolves. Whales, seals and sea lions.

**Newcastle Island Provincial Marine Park** (Central Island) – Historic island accessed only by boat or a ferry from Nanaimo. Wildlife: Bald eagles, blonde raccoons, a purple martin colony, coastal black-tailed deer, great blue herons and harbour seals.

**Englishman River Falls Provincial Park** (Central Island) – Spectacular waterfalls in a lush old-growth and second-growth forest. Wildlife: Deer, woodpeckers, flickers and owls.

**Strathcona Provincial Park** (North Central) – This rugged mountain wilderness is B.C.'s oldest park and one of its largest. Wildlife: Roosevelt elk, marmots, wolves, cougars. Winter wren, kinglet, grouse, and white-tailed ptarmigan.

**Miracle Beach Provincial Park** (North Central) – A broad sandy beach and hiking trails that wind through lush forest. Wildlife: Seals, deer, salmon, eagles, great blue heron, osprey, kingfishers, kestrels and woodpeckers.

**Cape Scott Provincial Park** (North Island) – A true wilderness park with rainforests and

long white-sand beaches. Wildlife: Roosevelt elk, black bears, cougar and wolves. Seals, sea lions and whales. Otters, mink, common merganser and trumpeter swans.



## Islander's Tip

*"Go grizzly viewing with a guide company that has bear viewing as its primary activity and uses certified guides. You'll have a high probability of viewing success and minimize the impact on the bears."*

— Tom Rivest (Port Hardy), biologist & bear watching tour operator, 8 years watching bears off of Vancouver Island

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# Hiking

True wilderness. Breathtaking views. Few people. That's what locals (and visitors) love about hiking here. Trails lead to ancient rainforests, clear alpine lakes, wildflower meadows, cascading waterfalls and secluded beaches. From atop many of Vancouver Island's peaks you can look down at the ocean. Yes, this is paradise.

On the West Coast Trail near Owen Point.

You'll find scenic trails geared for all levels in every community. Set out on your own or take a guided nature tour. Year-round, biologists lead walking tours and hiking treks focused on ecology, wildlife viewing, marine life, birding and more.

For more information, maps and suggestions on shorter hikes, check with local Visitor Centres or go to [www.vancouverislandoutside.com](http://www.vancouverislandoutside.com). If hiking is the focus of your holiday, try one of these more challenging treks:

## SOUTH/WEST COAST

### West Coast Trail

**Length:** 75 km

**Location:** Pacific Rim National Park

Vancouver Island's most renowned trail. It requires total self-sufficiency and an average of five days to complete the moderate to difficult hike. See old-growth rainforest, spectacular beaches, surge channels, abundant marine life and sea stacks. Open May to September. User fees apply. Reservations recommended: (800) 663-6000. Wilderness camping.

**Trailheads:** Pachena Bay and Gordon River.

### Wild Pacific Trail

**Length:** 2.7 km & 4 km (two sections)

**Location:** Ucluelet

This trail skirts coastal cliff edges. It's an easy to moderate hike with spectacular views, old-growth thickets and a stop at the Amphitrite Point Lighthouse. No camping allowed.

**Trailheads:** Peninsula Rd. at Coast Guard Rd.; Big Beach Park.

### Juan de Fuca Marine Trail

**Length:** 47 km

**Location:** Port Renfrew to Jordan River

Expect awe-inspiring ocean views on this isolated trail. See long sandy beaches, towering forests and abundant wildlife. Strenuous day- or multi-day hiking with some easy to moderate day-hiking. Wilderness camping.

**Trailheads:** China Beach, Sombrio Beach, Parkinson Creek and Botanical Beach.

### Ahousaht Wildside Heritage Trail

**Length:** 11 km

**Location:** Flores Island (near Tofino)

This moderate to strenuous trail is the path less traveled. See a remote First Nations village, white sandy beaches, pristine wilderness, and views from the Mt. Flores summit. Wilderness camping. **Trailheads:** Cow Bay & Ahousaht Village, accessible by water taxi from Tofino.

## CENTRAL ISLAND

### Cowichan River Footpath

**Length:** 20 km

**Location:** Duncan

Hike along a Provincial Heritage River that begins at a beautiful waterfall and winds through a forested area. Six to seven hours to complete. Camping facilities. **Trailheads:** Cowichan Fish and Game Association Clubhouse and Skutz Falls.

### Log Train Trail

**Length:** 25 km

**Location:** Port Alberni

This easy forest trail was once a rail bed for logging trains. See the Cold Creek waterfall, McLean Mill National Historic Site, spectacular views of Mt. Arrowsmith. No camping allowed. **Trailhead:** Visitor Centre in Port Alberni.

## NORTH ISLAND

### Cape Scott Trail/North Coast Trail (NCT)

**Length:** 24 km/46 km

**Location:** Cape Scott Provincial Park

Excellent multi-day hiking on Vancouver Island's northernmost tip. See rugged coastline, beaches, 'pothole' tide pools, dense forest and abandoned Danish settlements. Wilderness camping. **Trailhead:** In Cape Scott Provincial Park. The two trails link at Nissan Bight and the NCT continues to Shushartie Bay.

### Nootka Trail

**Length:** 35 km

**Location:** West coast of Nootka Island

Tides dictate your trek along this near-sea-level trail that takes three days to complete. See waterfalls, sea caves, abundant wildlife, and ancient First Nations sites. Wilderness camping. **Trailhead:** Louie Bay or Friendly Cove, accessed from Gold River by float plane, boat or passenger/freight vessel.

### Della Falls Trail

**Length:** 16 km

**Location:** Strathcona Provincial Park

An arduous climb leads to one of 10 highest waterfalls in the world (a 440-m drop over three cascades), historic logging and mining sites, and two lakes. Wilderness camping.

**Trailhead:** Accessed via float plane or by boat from Great Central Lake.

### Mount Arrowsmith Trail

**Length:** Varies depending on route

**Location:** Mount Arrowsmith Regional Park

A strenuous trail winds to the 1,829-m summit with breathtaking views of Georgia Strait. Six to seven hours round trip. Wilderness camping. **Trailhead:** Cameron Lake picnic area. ●

## Islander's Tip

*"Always bring a waterproof layer and layers of wickable clothing including polypropylene, fleece or wool. Even in summer, conditions can quickly turn wet, windy and cold especially in the alpine or on the exposed West Coast."*

— Patrick Walshe (Qualicum Beach), biologist & nature tour operator, 15 years hiking on Vancouver Island

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It's not uncommon for paddlers to encounter a pod of orca or see a bald eagle dive for fish. At night under a full moon you'll get a glimpse of nocturnal wildlife foraging along the coastline. Day or night, the wildlife viewing opportunities are outstanding.

Kayaking, canoeing and whitewater rafting tour operators run lessons, guided day tours, overnight trips, and package tours that include other activities. Many are offered year-round and cater to every ability level. Here's a quick look at favourite paddling destinations around Vancouver Island.

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## Ocean Kayaking

- **Victoria/Sidney** (South Island) – Beginners' harbour paddling in Victoria's Inner Harbour and Gorge Waterway. Off-lying islands near Sidney are the gateway to Southern Gulf Islands National Park, home to thick kelp beds and orcas.
- **Gulf Islands** (Gulf Islands) – Islands in protected waters are home to native arbutus trees, sculpted sandstone shores, and arts and crafts communities. Launch from Cowichan Bay, Chemainus, Ladysmith or Nanaimo.
- **Broken Group Islands** (Pacific Rim) – Numerous tiny islands, surge caves and great campsites for multi-day trips. Access via Toquart Bay or by ferry from Port Alberni.
- **Tofino and Clayoquot Sound** (Pacific Rim) – Inside paddling to rainforest estuaries and outside paddling to open ocean beaches. Strong ocean paddling skills required for outside portions.

- **Discovery Islands** (North Central) – Many beautiful islands and the entrance to Desolation Sound. Easy access, sheltered waters, stunning scenery. Watch for tidal passes such as Seymour Narrows.
- **Baynes Sound** (North Central) – Calm waters off the Comox Valley are home to seals, sea lions, ocean birds, log booms, tugs and majestic mountain vistas. Perfect for beginners or relaxed paddling.
- **Nootka Sound and Kyuquot Sound** (North Central/North Island) – Remote protected inlets and off-lying islands near Zeballos and Kyuquot. Strong ocean paddling skills required for outside portions.
- **Johnstone Strait** (North Island) – Launch at Telegraph Cove to paddle among the orcas and across the Strait to the islands of the Broughton Archipelago. Watch for shipping traffic and fog.

## Canoeing

- **Elk/Beaver Lake** (South Island) – Easy paddling in a Saanich Peninsula regional park frequented by swimmers, windsurfers and anglers.
- **Cowichan Lake** (Cowichan) – A 43-km long lake with warm water, sandy beaches and beautiful scenery.
- **Quadra Island** (North Central) – Home to a large chain of fresh water lakes. Remote shores, warm swimming areas. Access at Main Lake Provincial Park.
- **Sayward Forest Canoe Route** (North Central) – A paddle and portage circuit covering 48 km of lakes and creeks near Campbell River. Calm waters except a few small rapids. Plan on three to four days to complete. Morton Lake and Gosling Lake are popular put-in spots.

- **Upper Campbell Lake & Buttle Lake** (North Island) – Incredible wilderness scenery in the 250,000-hectare Strathcona Provincial Park. Watch for strong afternoon winds on Buttle Lake.

## Rafting/River Kayaking

- **Cowichan River** (Cowichan) – Experienced whitewater kayakers navigate rapids between Skutz Falls and Marie Canyon. Conditions good year-round but best October - June. Launch at the Stoltz Pool day use area. Class II-III
- **Campbell River** (North Central) – Take a float trip any time of the year as a guide points out wildlife and tells stories about this B.C. Heritage River. Some rafting packages include snorkeling with salmon (mid-July until late fall). Class I-II.
- **Oyster River** (North Central) – A good river near Campbell River for novice paddlers. Tours run in the spring only when water levels are up. Class II.
- **Gold River** (North Central) – Navigate the twists and turns of swift white water rapids in spring, when runoff from the surrounding mountains swells the river. Class II-IV.
- **Southgate River** (North Central/Bute Inlet) – Paddle an isolated coastal river with glaciers, grizzly bears and waterfalls. Remote area accessed by helicopter or boat from Campbell River. Usually a multi-day expedition package. Class II.
- **Lower Nimpkish River/Upper Nimpkish River** (North Island) – Experience challenging rapids, pourovers, a waterfall, limestone canyons, surfing holes, and excellent wildlife watching. May to July and again in the fall. Class II-IV.

## River Ratings\*

Class I - Easy  
Class II - Novice  
Class III - Intermediate  
Class IV - Advanced  
Class V - Expert  
Class VI - Extreme

\* International rating scale. Class levels are based on normal water flows. High water or low water levels can affect classification significantly.

## Islander's Tip

"Ocean kayaking is ideal in summer, when temperatures and sea states are milder. In winter, abundant rains cause our many rivers to rise and so river kayaking is a popular activity."

— Don Barrie (Lake Cowichan),  
kayak instructor, 21 years paddling  
on Vancouver Island

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# Cycling & Mountain Biking

▶ Mount Washington's trails will challenge mountain bikers of all levels.

Thanks to a mild coastal climate, cyclists on Vancouver Island can ride 365 days a year. No wonder long-distance road cyclists and adrenaline-junkie mountain bikers love it here. In fact, Victoria was recently named the Cycling Capital of Canada after census figures showed that more residents use a bicycle for transportation than in any other city in Canada.

Visiting cyclists are sure to go home with a tale. Maybe it's about wildlife crossing a remote back road. Maybe it's about the extreme downhill after hitching a ride up on a mountain chairlift. Virtually every community on Vancouver Island has memorable biking routes. Here are a few favourites for visitors planning a holiday around cycling:

### Road Rides

- **Island Hopping Tour** (Gulf Islands) – Board a ferry from either Crofton or Swartz Bay and sail to Salt Spring, Pender, Saturna, Mayne, and Galiano Islands. Pedal through pastoral settings, stopping at craft galleries and local farmer's markets.
- **Galloping Goose Trail** (South Island) – This 55-km trail starts on the urban back streets of Victoria and leads through farmland and rugged wilderness to the Sooke Potholes, a favourite swimming destination.
- **Back Roads Bear Tour** (South Island/Cowichan) – Watch for bears as you follow Hwy. 14 northwest of Sooke along the coast to Port Renfrew and on the logging roads connecting to Lake Cowichan.
- **Winery Route** (Cowichan) – Country roads meander through the valley and past several vineyards and cideries, popular way stations for weekend riders on this 12-km route.
- **Climber's Route** (Central Island/Pacific Rim) – Not for the fainthearted. This is a long 185-km haul uphill from Parksville through the mountains along Hwy. 4. But a huge

reward awaits adventurous cyclists: the rugged West Coast.

- **Wilderness Road Tour** (North Island) – It's a 300-km trip from Courtenay to Port Hardy along Hwy. 19 and 19A. The population thins and wildlife abounds in this remote north island region.

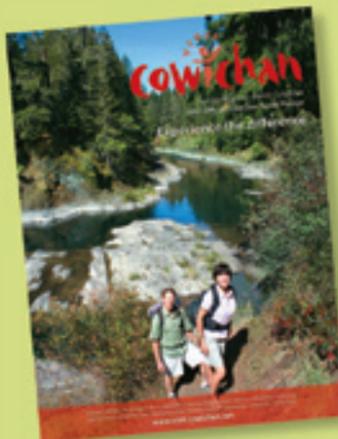
### Mountain & Trail Rides

- **Mount Work/Hartland Road Mountain Bike Park** (South Island) – Despite its location near a Saanich landfill, this park (affectionately known as 'The Dump') is wildly popular among moderate to strong riders. Tight single-track, roots, rocks, logs and drops.
- **Top Bridge Park & Hammerfest Course** (Central Island) – Trails range from moderate to extreme at Top Bridge in Parksville. Equally challenging is the Hammerfest area at nearby Englishman River Falls Provincial Park, home to the annual Hammerfest race.
- **Mount Washington** (North Central) – Two chairlifts give you and your bike full access to terrain ranging from novice to advanced downhill trails. Open July to Thanksgiving.

- **Doumont Road Trails** (Central Island) – Located at the north end of Nanaimo, this is one of the premier trail systems on Vancouver Island with more than 100km of maintained singletrack. Excellent for all levels of riders.
- **Mt. Geoffrey Regional Park** (North Central) – On Hornby Island cruise through the clean air of a quiet forest and out to a bluff with spectacular ocean views. An extensive trail system of old logging roads and single-track for novices to experts.
- **Cumberland Area Trails** (North Central) – Challenging cross-country and downhill trails cut through Cumberland's lush forests. Trails are mapped, signed and start right from downtown.

For more information stop by a Visitor Centre, visit VancouverIslandOutside.com or find detailed trail maps at local bike shops. •

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### Islander's Tip

*"Get your bum back behind the seat when you're riding down Vancouver Island's steep rock faces. Momentum is your friend. If you carry enough speed, you'll roll right over those rocks and roots. Low psi in your tires will make the ride even smoother."*

– Wendy Simms (Nanaimo), Canadian National Cyclocross champion, 10 years riding on Vancouver Island

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# Storm Watching

▶ Another winter storm batters the West Coast shoreline.

## The fate of the Carelmapu

Over the centuries fierce weather has foiled many mariners along Vancouver Island's West Coast. On November 22, 1915 heavy gales took the *Carelmapu*. The three-masted Chilean cargo ship got caught in a violent squall that swept it onto the rocks at Long Beach in Tofino. Despite a rescue attempt by the *Princess Maquinna*, the 242-ft (74-m) ship's iron hull broke in two and sank, killing most of her crew. Only five survived, including the captain and his Great Dane. Some wreckage still remains at the site today.

Twenty-five-foot waves explode against jagged shores. Rain falls nearly horizontally. Driftwood reverberates in low groans on the beach. Tree branches whirl and creak. It's winter on the West Coast ... and you're enjoying the impressive storms in comfort – at an award-winning luxury resort.

## Islander's Tip

“Winter storms have incredibly high tides – so high that the water will completely cover the entire beach. Before venturing out to experience a storm, grab a free Tide Guide from the place where you're staying so you'll know what to expect.”

— Carly Hall (Tofino), resort manager, 10 years storm watching on Vancouver Island

No question, Mother Nature is in charge. Beginning in the fall, an enormous low pressure system builds in the Gulf of Alaska and picks up steam on its path to Vancouver Island. November through February, gale after gale lashes our exposed western shores.

The performances are spectacular, dramatic, unforgettable – drawing winter vacationers from around the world to the tiny fishing villages of Tofino and Ucluelet. The growing popularity of storm watching here is unmistakable. Even *The Times* newspaper in London and *USA Today* have written stories about the Vancouver Island West Coast experience.

### The Wild Side

Storm watching attracts all types. Adventurers can don waterproof gear (supplied by accommodation properties) and venture out to safe designated viewing points. Take a hike and see how the area wildlife weathers the storms. Or venture out of the harbour on a boat tour to the edge of the surge.

Local surfers turn out to ride the swells, which are much larger and more powerful in winter than any other time of year. Head to the beach and watch them, or gear up and take advantage of winter's big, clean breaks.

### The Retreat

For others, winter storms are the perfect occasion to come and do nothing. Winter-time is a quieter time of year in the villages of Vancouver Island's West Coast. You'll find solitude here.

Get cosy by a fireplace – with a good book and a down duvet – and watch the fury on the other side of the window. Go for a spa treatment. After the storm passes, comb the beach. Swells have been known to wash ashore glass Japanese fishing floats and other treasures.

When booking accommodations, ask what storm packages are available and which activities can be combined.

**Best Places to Watch:** Inside a cozy seaside hotel, resort or cabin (Tofino), South Beach in Pacific Rim National Park, Amphitrite Point on the Wild Pacific Trail (Ucluelet), Pachena Bay (Bamfield).

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# Surfing

“...Tofino is Surf City, Canada”

Surfing... in Canada? Exactly. That's part of the novelty of it. First thoughts of surfing usually evoke images of tropical temperatures and southern settings. But, as nature would have it, some of the most consistent surf in the world is here along Vancouver Island's West Coast.

Although some old-timer Tofino locals have been riding these waves for 20 or 30 years, surfing just caught on here five or six years ago. A handful of surf shops and schools opened on Vancouver Island and are attracting wave hounds from faraway places like Portugal and Mexico. International surfing competitions now happen here, and *Surfer* magazine and other international media have covered the growing trend.

### The Big Attraction

Consistent surf. Vancouver Island's West Coast gets the brunt of storms that originate in the Gulf of Alaska or come from Japan and build momentum over the huge Pacific Ocean. Waves break on gradual sandy beaches, which happen to also be easily accessed by car.

Experienced surfers can rip almost every day of the year (and as late as 10pm when the sun sets in summertime) on uncrowded waves. Views of snowcapped peaks and dense forest aren't seen in other surfing meccas around the world. Incredible wildlife encounters – with sea lions, seals, whales, or jumping salmon – are common.

### When to Go

For beginners, the best time to learn is May through the beginning of September. Swells are small and friendly, usually 1-3 ft. Intermediates and more experienced surfers: expect 5- to 20-ft swells from late September through February. Surf shops in Tofino and around Vancouver Island rent gear and run hourly lessons, day camps and even week-long surf experiences in remote locations.

### Best Places to Go

- **Tofino** (Pacific Rim) – People call it Surf City, Canada, and with good reason. It's the only place with a road to the beaches where the surf's up. All other breaks on Vancouver Island must be accessed by

boat and you need a guide. In Tofino, Long Beach and Chesterman Beach are most popular among beginners and experts alike. Here, waves break on gradual sandy beaches. Cox Bay is another favourite, although the rip currents can be dangerous for beginners.

- **Nootka Island** (North Central) – You'll find a beach break and reef and point breaks, but the remote area can be reached only by boat. Surf villages in this coastal rain-forest offer all-inclusive, week-long surf packages for beginners and experienced surfers. Although surfing is the focus, other outdoor activities are also included.
- **Port Renfrew & Jordan River area** (South Island) – This break happens inside the Juan de Fuca Strait, not on the open ocean, so the surf isn't consistent. Due to tides and specific wind and swell directions, surfing conditions don't occur daily. Only experienced surfers should navigate these waters. Popular spots include Sombrio Beach and Jordan River, both wilderness areas. ●

## Gearing Up

No doubt, surfing in Canada is vastly different from surfing in the tropics. You'll need the right gear before you go. Here's what locals use:

### The wetsuit:

3-4 mm neoprene in summer and a 5-6 mm neoprene (with hood, gloves and boots) the rest of the year.

### The surfboard:

Mostly an 8-10' longboard or 4-6 1/2' shortboard usually made of polyurethane foam covered with layers of fiberglass cloth and polyester or epoxy resin.



▶ Making a bottom turn near Tofino.

## Islander's Tip

“Local shops have specific equipment made for women and female instructors with a different perspective on the whole surfing culture. When you're trying something new, it's important to get instruction from someone who understands your learning needs.”

— Jayson Bowers (Tofino), instructor and surf shop owner, 14 years surfing on Vancouver Island

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# Caving

## You could actually spend months underground here and still not see everything.

More than 1,500 caves lie beneath Vancouver Island, including the longest cave in B.C. Spelunkers call this the 'island of caves.'

Vancouver Island's caverns are ranked among the most significant and spectacular in the world. Head down under and you'll find beautiful marble and crystal-filled chambers, underground waterfalls and ancient fossils. And that's just at one cave. Others have unusual rock formations, disappearing rivers and other natural curiosities.

Guided tours range from easy treks to five-hour adventures with underground rock climbing and rappelling.

### Best Places to Go

- **Horne Lake Caves Regional and Provincial Parks** (Central Island) – This was recently named B.C.'s Best Natural Outdoor Site by Attractions Canada. Two smaller caves (Main Cave & Lower Main Cave) are open year-round for self-guided tours. The larger Riverbend Cave is open for guided family-oriented tours in the summer or by reservation. Features: Crystals, a seven-storey underground waterfall, ancient fossils, underground rock climbing and rappelling. The parks run summer Family Adventure

Camps, which include four days of activities (cave tours, canoeing, beach games, etc.), teepee camping and all meals.

- **Upana Caves** (North Central) – This fascinating network of interconnected caves near Gold River and Tahsis has 15 known entrances and more than 300 m of passages. Take a guided tour or pick up self-guided tour information at an area Visitor Centre. Features: An underground river and smooth white marble walls.
- **Little Huson Cave Regional Park** (North Island) – In this park near Port McNeill are several easily accessed caves and limestone deposits that make up the Quatsino Formation. Features: A disappearing river and giant natural rock archway.
- **Devil's Bath/Eternal Fountain Cave** (North Island) – Devil's Bath near Port Alice was once a huge underground cavern that has since collapsed and can be explored at the surface. Nearby is Eternal Fountain, whose passages are sculpted from red rock. Guided tours are available. Features: Subterranean waterfalls and an underground spring.

## Islander's Tip

"Dress warm. The cave temperatures range from 5°C to 8°C year-round."

— Richard Varela (Horne Lake), cave program director, 20 years caving on Vancouver Island

► Diving in a garden of gorgonian coral.

# Diving

Jacques Cousteau is said to have ranked the waters of the Pacific Northwest among the world's best places to dive, second only to the Red Sea for marine life diversity.

Readers of *Scuba Diving* magazine recently named British Columbia the Top Overall Dive Destination in North America. It's easy to see why.

Vancouver Island's cold, clean waters offer divers excellent visibility (especially in winter), numerous shipwrecks to explore, and close encounters with big marine life.

### Wrecks & Reefs

More than six retired ships have been sunk off the eastern coast of Vancouver Island, creating two artificial reefs in Victoria, three in Nanaimo and one near Campbell River. The island's newest artificial reef is a decommissioned Air Canada Boeing 737, which was sunk just offshore from Chemainus in 2005. On the West Coast you'll find historic shipwrecks where numerous sailors ran aground near Bamfield.

### Big Marine Life

Vancouver Island is one of the few places in the world where elusive six-gill sharks can be easily seen, usually around Hornby Island in the Comox Valley and in Barkley Sound. At many sites around Vancouver Island you can experience spectacular wall dives with rarities such as the giant Pacific octopus and friendly wolf eel. Large Stellar sea lions put on an excellent show for divers during the fall and winter months, and harbour seals make appearances year-round.

### Local Colour

Underwater photographers revel in all the colour here. Port Hardy is world-renowned for colour and diversity of marine life that isn't found anywhere else on Vancouver Island. High tidal flow areas, often in narrow passages between two islands, are filled with new life and loads of strawberry corals, orange sea pens and purple starfish.

**Best places to go:** Nanaimo, Victoria, Port Hardy, Comox Valley/Hornby Island, Campbell River area, Barkley Sound, Nootka Sound, Sidney, Brentwood Bay, and Saanich.

For more information pick up a free copy of the Vancouver Island Dive Guide at a local Visitor Centre.

## Islander's Tip

"The biodiversity is enormous in remote areas on the West Coast like Barkley Sound. There are wrecks, reefs, kelp forests and an incredible array of invertebrates."

— Peter Mieras (Port Alberni), dive shop owner, 10 years diving on Vancouver Island

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## Winter Activities

▶ Record-setting snowfalls on Mount Washington reached 10 m (39 ft) one recent winter.



Winters on Vancouver Island are an outdoor adventurer's dream come true. Here you can ski in the morning and golf, fish or scuba dive in the afternoon.

Our temperate climate lasts year-round. Come winter, the only significant snowfall happens in the mountains. And when it falls, it comes in heaps – about 10 m a year on average. Some years, Vancouver Island peaks get more snow than British Columbia's renowned Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains. Our frequent, fresh powder is heavenly for snow sports of all kinds.

Most of the action is at Mount Washington and Mount Cain. Mount Washington, in the Comox Valley, is the region's biggest full-service ski area and boasts the deepest all-natural snow base in Canada. The mountain is open

year-round, and December through mid April you'll find every type of snow activity, as well as dining, rentals and accommodations.

Mount Cain, off Hwy. 19 about two hours north of Campbell River, was recently named Best Community Ski Hill in the country by *Ski Canada* magazine. There's a true rustic alpine feel here in the guest cabins and lodge's restaurant and ski shop (with rentals), open Saturday through Monday in winter.

**Downhill skiing and snowboarding:** Mount Washington features 60 runs, a new expert-only bowl, two terrain parks, a half-pipe and high-speed chair lifts including Canada's first double-offload lift. Mount Cain has 18 runs with two T-bars and a handle tow.

**Cross-country skiing:** Scenic trails at both mountains. Mount Washington's 55 km of trails extend into Strathcona Provincial Park.

**Snowshoeing:** 20 km of trails (gentle to rolling hills) at Mount Washington. Mount Cain's trails range from gentle sub-alpine to mountaineering steep. ●

### Islander's Tip

*"When venturing on the back roads in winter, make sure you have chains and good tires to ensure you make it to your destination."*

— Chris McGourlick (Mt. Cain), alpine resort employee, 20 years skiing on Vancouver Island

# Fishing

*"Awe-inspiring settings and consistent catch"*

If it's a big fish story you're after, you've come to the right place. For more than a century, Vancouver Island's sport fishing has attracted people from all over the world. Anglers come for the awe-inspiring settings and consistent catch.

DAVID NUNUK / ALLCANADAPHOTOS.COM

▶ Salmon fishing at sunset.

The Island's fishing lodges have hosted many heads of state, politicians and Hollywood celebrities such as Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, John Wayne and Susan Hayward. Renowned 20th-century fly-fishing author and nature conservationist Roderick Haig-Brown lived here along the banks of Campbell River. Some of his books are now collector's items, and an annual British Columbia book prize has been named after him.

You'll find lodges, resorts and fishing charters in, literally, every community. Try an adventure package that combines fishing with other outdoor activities including golfing, skiing or whale watching. For the ultimate fishing holiday, stay at a wilderness resort that can be reached only by boat or float plane.

### Saltwater Fishing

Vancouver Island's most sought-after saltwater prize is the chinook salmon, the largest of the

five salmon species, with big ones weighing in at 40+ lbs. But it's also a thrill when you hook an 8-lb. pink salmon with light terminal gear or a fly rod while beach fishing. The salmon season runs year-round here, peaking May through October.

You're just as likely – with a quick change of depth – to find halibut, lingcod, sole or rockfish in these same waters. Halibut season starts in March and runs through January. When hooking halibut, you can catch anything from a 15 lb. 'chicken' to a 200 lb. 'barn door.' While you're out on the water, drop a trap or two to catch a feast of crab or prawns.

**Best places to go:** Ucluelet/Tofino, Port Renfrew, Port Alberni/Bamfield, Gold River/Nootka Sound, Zeballos, Port Hardy/Port McNeill, Campbell River, Victoria, Comox Valley.

### Freshwater Fishing

Freshwater anglers will find healthy stocks in numerous lakes and rivers, where various species of trout are plentiful. Smallmouth bass make their home in the south region of Vancouver Island.

There are more than 100 steelhead rivers here, including the famed Stamp River out of Port Alberni, which has a large run December through March when the fish return to spawn. In the fall rivers teem with sockeye, chinook, coho and chums, making anglers' dreams come true.

**Best places to go:** Stamp River, Cowichan River, Big & Little Qualicum Rivers, Cowichan Lake, Sproat Lake, Spider Lake, Elk Lake, Gold River. For more sport fishing information, visit [www.bc fishing.com](http://www.bc fishing.com) or pick up a free copy of the B.C. Freshwater & Saltwater Sport Fishing Guide at a local Visitor Centre. ●

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**Islander's Tip**

*"Vancouver Island is a light tackle enthusiast's paradise. Whether you fly fish or prefer spinning or casting tackle, you can find something on the saltwater beaches or in the river estuaries, streams and lakes to keep you busy pretty well all year."*

— Robert Jones (Courtenay), fishing magazine editor, 49 years fishing on Vancouver Island

**Island Fish**

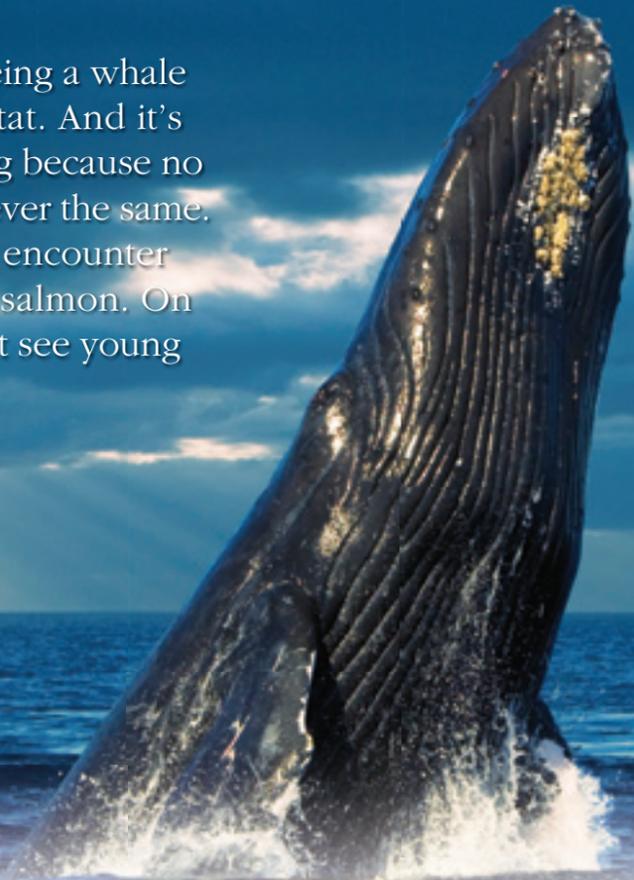
- Pacific salmon (chinook, coho, sockeye, pink & chum)
- Pacific halibut
- Lingcod
- Flounder & sole
- Greenlings
- Rockfish
- Trout (steelhead, rainbow, cutthroat, brown, Dolly Varden, brook)
- Smallmouth bass



# Whale Watching

▶ Humpback whale breaching.

It's pure magic seeing a whale in its natural habitat. And it's always exhilarating because no two sightings are ever the same. One trip you may encounter a pod feeding on salmon. On another, you might see young siblings playing.



Around Vancouver Island you'll find three very different populations of whales. Migrating gray whales make their way up the West Coast each spring. The southern resident population of orca stays in the Juan de Fuca Strait/Haro Strait area from spring through fall. And the northern resident population of orca sticks around the Johnstone Strait and Blackfish Archipelago during summer and fall.

In each of these regions, whale watching tours boast high sighting rates (90-98%) in season. The trained naturalist or biologist on board will point out whales, explain their activity and offer interesting background on the pod. Many tour boats are equipped with hydrophones so you can hear vocalizations in clicks and songs.

**Here are the three most popular areas for whale-watching excursions:**

## South Island

Spring and summer are the ideal seasons to see the southern resident population of orca, although sightings do occur through October. The Juan de Fuca and Haro Straits in the Victoria area are home to three resident orca pods: J, K, and L pods. About 80 whales

belong to these pods, currently listed as endangered by both Canada and the United States.

**Other wildlife:** Tours see the occasional minke, humpback and gray whales. Seals, porpoises, sea lions and bald eagles are spotted regularly.

**The bonus:** Convenience. Several tour operators – with all types of boats and schedules to choose from – are based in Victoria's Inner Harbour, close to hotels and other attractions.

## Pacific Rim

This area enjoys the longest season for whale watching, mid February through October. Each year, the gray whale migration (22,000+ whales) along the western coastline runs from early February through April, inspiring the Pacific Rim Whale Festival in Ucluelet and Tofino every March. About 15-20 gray whales stay around the area to feed until November, when the main migration passes again on its journey to the breeding lagoons of Mexico.

**Other wildlife:** Tours see humpback whales consistently and transient orca once every two to three weeks. Sea lions, sea otters and other wildlife sightings are also common.

**The bonus:** On the West Coast the whales are generally in the same place all the time and not too far from the docks, so sighting rates around Tofino and Ucluelet are often above 98%. Since less time is spent 'looking,' whale watchers get more quality time with the whales.

## North Island

About 200 whales make up the northern resident orca population, whose 16 pods stay in the Johnstone Strait area from late June through December. It's the most predictable place to see orcas around the island. In fact, tour operators say they run out of good weather and people long before they run out of whales. (So tours run only through Thanksgiving.) Find tours in communities from Campbell River to Port Hardy.

**Other wildlife:** Tours see minke whales occasionally. Humpback whales, Pacific white-sided dolphins, sea lions and other wildlife sightings are common.

**The bonus:** Check out the Whale Interpretive Centre on the docks at Telegraph Cove, where you'll find more than 40 skeletons of marine mammals including an enormous fin whale. ●

## Islander's Tip

*"Don't let the weather change your mind about going whale watching. The whales often can be quite lively on a day that the weather seems off-perfect. They love to feel the sensations of rain and wind on their skin."*

— Alan McGillivray (Victoria), whale watching tour operator, 14 years watching whales on Vancouver Island

## WHALE WATCHING



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▶ No one time of day is better than another for spotting whales.



## What to Look For

It can happen fast – that magical moment when a whale surfaces. And you don't want to miss it. Here are a few things to watch for:

- **The blow** – A whale's blow (or spout), a cloudlike column of warm moist exhaled air, is often the first thing you spot in the distance.
- **The flukes** – Before diving long and deep, whales often show their wide fan-shaped flukes (or tail). The tail's weight above the body helps the whale descend.
- **The knuckled back or dorsal fin** – If the whale is close enough, during and after its blow you can see its knuckled back (grays and humpbacks) or its tall dorsal fin (orcas).
- **The breach and splash** – When whales hurl themselves out of the water and plunge back in.
- **The spy hop** – When an orca suddenly appears and pokes only its head up, or spy hops, near a boat to have a look.

## Adopt an Orca

Want to learn more about killer whales? Adopt a wild one.

Scientists in British Columbia have identified and documented each orca's name, gender and year of birth. They've drawn up a complete family tree for each pod. Every time a killer whale is born, it's added to the family tree.

Through the British Columbia Wild Killer Whale Adoption Program, you can name "your" whale and help contribute to the organization's conservation efforts. Packages include an official adoption certificate, ID photo and biography of "your" whale, a CD of whale sounds, and an annual newsletter covering the latest discoveries.

For more information, visit [www.killerwhale.org](http://www.killerwhale.org) or contact the program, based at the Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Centre, at (604) 659-3430.



## Boating & Sailing

Push away from the dock and you'll be amazed at the intriguing history and stunning beauty you can only discover by boat off Vancouver Island's shores.

Cruise remote inlets among high forested hills, sheltered bays and quiet saltwater lagoons. See remnants of the holiday resort on Wallace Island where Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio had a cabin. Watch a bald eagle soar or a whale breach.

### Smooth Sailing

In the sheltered Georgia Strait there are hundreds of popular marine parks and quaint island communities where you can explore and replenish your supplies. You can also spend weeks cruising protected inside waters on the West Coast. The Broken Group Islands, a spectacular maze of sheltered coves and densely treed islands, is a popular haven with anchorage and campsites. Vancouver Island is also well known in the yacht racing community for its challenging competitions – the annual Swiftsure International Yacht Race and the Cadillac Van Isle 360 International Yacht Race.

### Tours, Rentals & Lessons

Prefer someone else at the helm? You can find boating and sailing tours all over Vancouver Island. Fully guided tours range from working freighters to luxurious yachts and can last from a few hours to several days or more.

Whether you're headed for the ocean or one of the numerous lakes here, experienced certified skippers can rent sail and powerboats for an hour, day or week. Two of Vancouver Island's largest lakes, Sproat and Cowichan, offer houseboating opportunities.

Live-aboard courses with expert instructors give vacationing boaters a chance to earn various certifications from the Canadian Yachting Association or the International Sail and Power Association.

**Best offshore places to go:** Gulf Islands, Barkley Sound, Clayoquot Sound, Desolation Sound. ●

### Islander's Tip

*"Be sure you know how to use your Current Tables. There's a lot of water moving through the narrow channels of the B.C. coast, and these tables are the key to your safe passage"*

— Ross Campbell (Heriot Bay), boat captain & charter tour operator, 30 years boating around Vancouver Island

BOOMER JERRETT

► Cowichan Bay Regatta.

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#### NEWCASTLE ISLAND

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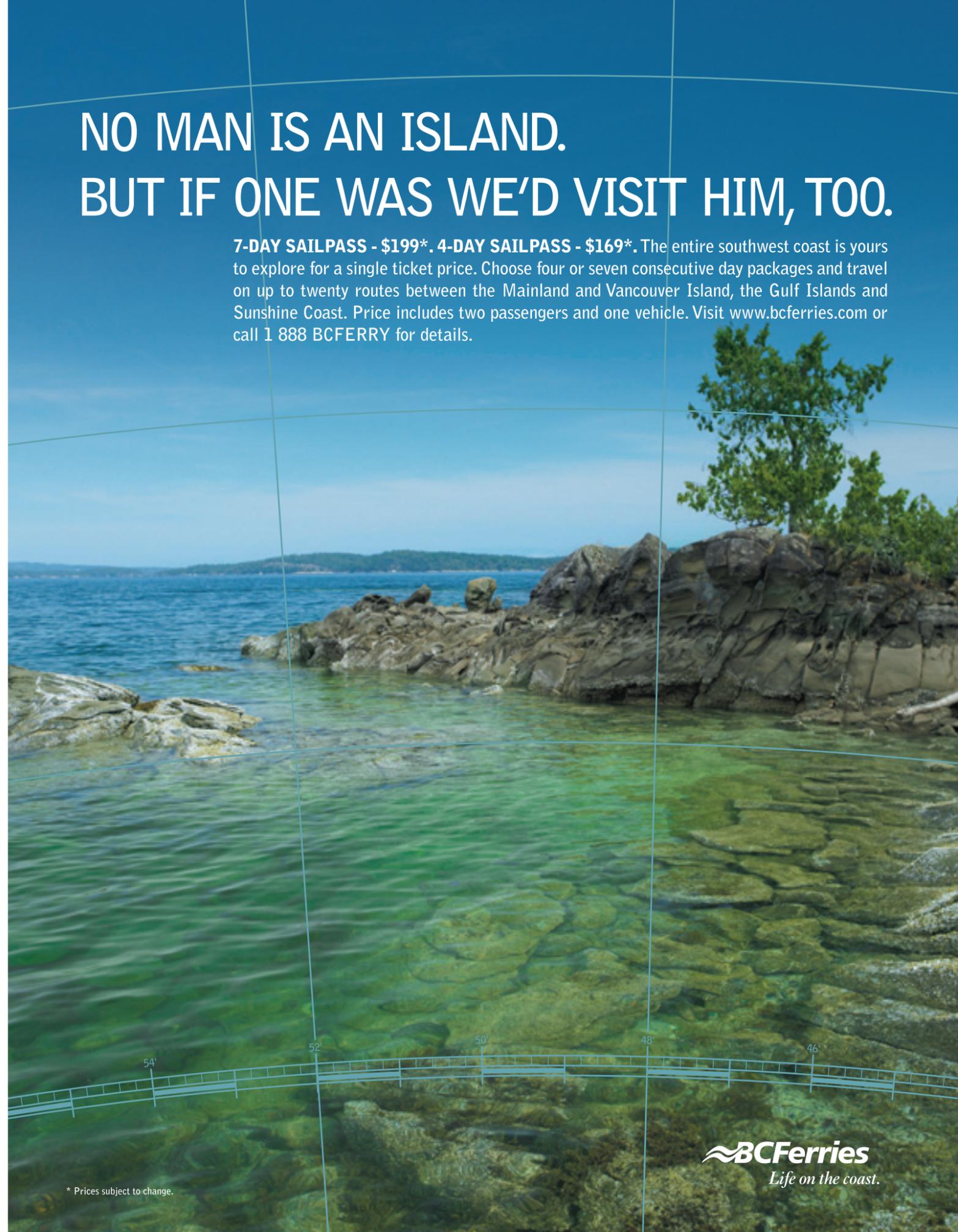
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