

Come to Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands

There is a place where man and nature have learned to live harmoniously. Where bustling metropolitan life can be escaped within minutes for an afternoon of whale watching in the Georgia Strait, or surfing on the sandy coastal beaches. Where over 750,000 reside in modern cities and picturesque villages, spread among the majestic mountains and rich farmland off the jagged shoreline.

Stretching approximately 500 kilometres in length and 100 kilometres in width, Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands have been called “Canada’s Paradise in the Pacific.” Located on the country’s west coast, off the mainland of British Columbia, the islands are the perfect place to visit for a sanctuary from the rigours of the everyday. People move at a different pace here, as though the caressing seas and gentle breezes have lent a calm to their every step.

Nature, Uninterrupted

Nature lovers the world over owe it to themselves to witness the splendour of the islands at least once in their lives. In the serenity of the protected bays lie breathtakingly beautiful marine life scenes, where, in addition to the world-famous spawning salmon, one will see an incredible variety of fresh and salt-water fish, otters, sea lions, Blue Heron, dolphins, and Orca (Killer), Minke and Grey Whales. Meanwhile in the timber-rich forests and rolling hills live grizzly and black bears, deer, cougars, and raccoons, as well as rare species, such as the Roosevelt Elk, and the endangered Vancouver Island Marmot.

Bird watchers flock to the Comox Valley area every year to witness the beauty of the trumpeter swans, and the Parksville/Qualicum area for the Brant Geese, while overhead, the regal Bald Eagle soars in noble circles, while searching for meals in the winding rivers and bubbling mountain streams.

No matter your area interest, there is a tour available that will re-define your outlook on nature’s magnificence. Up for an early morning of snorkeling with the king salmon in Campbell River? How about an afternoon of drinking traditional Devonshire tea, while sailing through Johnstone Strait, some of the best whale watching waters in the world?

If a land-based adventure is more of what you seek, have an experienced guide take you for a full-day trip to the Glendale River Basin in Knight Inlet to see Grizzly Bears in their natural habitat. Along the way, look for Black Bears, dolphins, porpoise, and an endless collage of sea birds and fantastic coastal scenery.

Take matters into your own hands. Rent a sea kayak and paddle off for a tour of the many tranquil islands just offshore. Scuba dive to the sea wrecks teeming with aquatic life in the shallow, ice-blue waters of the coastal ocean floor. For the even-more daring adventurer, spelunking (caving), is a favourite pastime. Experienced caving enthusiasts can travel to the recently discovered Jurassic Cave, with its 952 metres of surveyed

passages, or any of the other formidable systems that dot the island. Geologists and rock collectors will be fascinated by natural phenomena like the Vanishing River, that disappears into a maze of underground caverns; the Devil's Bath, a rock bowl filled continuously by subterranean spring water; and the Eternal Fountain, which gushes magically out of the face of a rock crevice.

Helicopter, and airplane tours are also very popular, providing visitors with an opportunity to see ancient native villages, awe-inspiring remote locations and breath-taking expanses of untouched animal and plant life all in one day.

Further inland, you can catch a ride to the European-style tasting rooms and wine shops of the area's many wineries and brew pubs. For decades, Vancouver Island has been home to world-famous wines like Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, Gewurztaminer, Millefiori, Pignoletto, Madeleine Sylvaner, Bachus, Muller-Thurgau, Ortega, and Pinot Gris to name a few.

Vancouver and the Gulf Islands also boast some of North America's richest agricultural land. There are countless tours available through the thousands of acres of farmland that produce everything from all manner of fruit and vegetable to fresh-cut flower varieties and delicious apple cider.

Let your camera bear witness to the unforgettable sights this beautiful region has to offer.

Getting Your Feet Wet

If you prefer to *do*, rather than see, Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands offer a plethora of exciting activities. For the golfer in your life, the islands feature over 50 world-class, challenging and scenic courses that line the coast; and because of the area's balmy climate, most of them remain open and green, year-round.

If fishing is more your bag, this is the home of thousands of legendary angler's tales. The salt waters surrounding the island are a haven for all five species of Pacific Salmon: Chinook (King), Coho, Pink, Chum and Sockeye, as well as some "monsters" of the deep from 45 pound king cod all the way up to 440 pound halibut. In-land, the rivers and streams team with fresh-water fish like bass, or rainbow, cutthroat, and brown trout. And because of a highly successful hatchery system, abundant stocks of herring, anchovy and steelheads are also a certainty every year. There is no specific method for angling success on the islands... they all work!

What could be more relaxing than a vacation in this natural paradise? How about a day, or two, of pampering your body and soul in one of the island's luxurious health spas? Let your body feel the peace and sanctity that permeates the open-country air. There are several packages available for everyone, with many different soul-rejuvenating activities like aromatherapy and massage, fitness pursuits like tennis and racquetball, swimming pools, saunas, seaweed body wraps, manicures, facials, salt scrubs, mud baths, reflexology, and hydrotherapy.

Feel like painting the town red? The secret to a thriving night life is the people. And the residents of a city with such a proud artistic heritage make for an eclectic and culturally diverse potpourri. The metropolitan centres on Vancouver Island boast hundreds of thriving night clubs, bars and pubs, offering entertainment and music, and the very best of local, domestic and imported spirits and ales, to suit every taste.

Festivals you say? The region hosts dozens every year, including the Annual Great Walk, the Edge to Edge Marathon, the Cadillac Van Isle 360, the 4th Annual South Island Jazz/Blues Festival, Cobble Hill, Encircling Our Ancestors, the ICA FolkFest, the Victoria Flower & Garden Show, the Pacific Rim Chamber Music Festival, the Marine Festival & Int'l Bathtub Race, UKEE Days, 26th Annual Coombs Rodeo, the 25th Annual Coombs Bluegrass Festival, the Parksville Beach Festival, the 7th Annual Just for the heck of it, no reason at all Mid-Summer Nights Parade, the 11th Annual Kidfest, the Wines of the Island Festival, the Salt Spring Island Apple Festival, the Goldstream Park Salmon Run, the Christmas Craft Explosion, the Ladysmith Festival of Lights, the 10th Annual Festival of Trees, the 9th Annual Carol Ships Night, the Francophone Maple Sugar Festival, the Annual Brant Wildlife Festival, the Annual Dancing Man Music Festival, Annual Fire & Ice, and the Victoria Harbour Festival.

Feast til your Heart's Content

You will come for the sights, the sounds and the excitement, but once you've tasted the incredible array of foods that abound on the islands, you may never leave. A region such as this, with blossoming farmland next to bustling seas and churning fresh water streams makes for an oasis of culinary delight. The cuisine, like everything else in the area, has many ethnic influences, from Asian and European to Native American and Middle Eastern, there are several wonderful restaurants that reflect the best of each of them.

Seafood pulled fresh from the ocean daily. Giant fish caught in the purest of mountain streams and cooked by world renowned culinary artists. Steaks so thick and tender. Giant vegetables plucked from a plush garden or grown on a huge, bountiful farm. This is truly the place to eat. No matter your taste, Vancouver Island has just the spot for you to enjoy some of the best cooking in the world. Come and experience what devotees the world over have learned. Vancouver and the Gulf Islands is a paradise for heavenly cuisine. Don't forget to wash it all down with one of our award winning domestic wines and ales!

Tucked just off the West coast of Canada is a place where life has found a way to be the best it can be. There is no one way to describe the region of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands because it has something incredible to offer everyone. Climb, camp, fish, kayak. Tour, watch, witness, behold. Eat, drink, sing and dance. The world needs a place to go where man and nature have blended into a collage for the eyes and spirit. Come to islands and take a deep breath of the early-morning air because you've got a big day ahead of you.