

Island Ideas...

Colourful Cabins – Nanaimo boasts countless hidden spots - places where you can relax and escape reality for a while. Piper's Lagoon Regional Park is one of those places. From the parking lot, a 300 metre man-made causeway leads to a small forested island. At the end of the causeway a rocky climb leads to the start of the Island's 4km trail. The lookout at the top of the 50 metre bluffs allows for views of Oceanside mansions, mountains, wildlife and boats passing by. Apart from the treed path, ocean backdrop and stunning views, the island offers excellent beach combing, seal and otter viewing and, with the proper equipment, rock climbing and kayaking. Halfway around the Island, another small Island – this one dotted with brightly coloured abandoned cabins - comes into view. During low tide, it is accessible across a muddy flat that is sprinkled with oyster and barnacle-encrusted rocks and coated with sea weed. Shack Island, as it is known by locals, is a step back in time to the days when un-serviced island cottages were popular. The history of the Island remains a mystery – some say it was settled by fishermen squatters in the 1930s and then passed down through the generations to its current owners. While the story of the characters that built and lived on Shack Island remains unknown, visitors can enjoy it as a beachcomber's delight, a boater's sanctuary, a dreamer's escape and a writer's inspiration. www.nanaimo.ca. Photo Credit: ChrisCheadle.com



Secret Dungeons and Castles – Cortes Island - one of the two Discovery Islands to boast ferry access - eludes a unique charm that only a remote place can. While it is no wonder that it is a magical place, no one expects to find a castle in the shelter of its forests. Its cinder block walls not yet crumbling or falling down of age, Wolf Bluff (known locally as King Karl's Kastle) is not your average castle. Karl Tiller, the man who can take credit for its design and construction, dreamt of castles and dungeons as a child, and decided to make his dream a reality when he moved to Cortes Island. During this time, wolves were abundant on the island, hence providing an ideal name for the fortress. The five-story, triple-turreted, eight-bedroom castle took thirteen-thousand hand-made cement blocks and twelve years to complete. Its dungeon features a torture chamber including homemade dummies in various states of torment with placards announcing their sins. Once a Bed and Breakfast, the castle's modern full-service kitchen is available for self-catering during longer stays. It is also a base of operations for caterers serving events in the dining hall, a room with space to seat up to one hundred people. Castle tours are lead by the man himself, and admission is by donation. If you ask nicely, Karl may even consider letting you stay the night at the Wolf Bluff Castle! www.vancouverislandabound.com/cortescastle.htm. Photo Credit: Boomer Jerritt



Mysterious Garden Sprouts History – While most settlers at the time abandoned the area, Bernt Ronning made his life in Port Hardy until the 1960's working as a trapper, fisherman and camp cook. His house and garden became a regular stop for those hiking from Cape Scott, Raft Cove and San Josef Bay. With a pump organ and a dance floor in-house, it is really no wonder that tired travelers looked to Ronning for entertainment and a boost of energy. He eventually cleared five acres of the rainforest and ordered seeds and cuttings of trees and plants from around the world to create his magical garden. After he left, the garden nearly disappeared under the encroaching forest. Flowers stopped blooming or died altogether, trees grew into unusual shapes and most of the hundreds of flowers in the terraced beds were lost. It wasn't until years later that the garden was restored. Though they lay dormant for many years, many of the rhododendron seeds survived and sprouted. While there are still many unanswered questions, more and more plants and trees are being identified as time passes - the variety and depth of the garden slowly emerging. Among its most fascinating attractions is a pair of Monkey Puzzle trees (male and female). They are among the oldest and largest of their species in BC and are one of the few pairs in North America that produce viable seeds. Guests are welcome to come uncover another piece of North Island History. www.vancouverislandgardentrail.com. Photo Credit: ChrisCheadle.com



Follow the Road Less Traveled – There are hundreds of miles of logging roads on Vancouver Island, many leading brave explorers to the hidden gems of the region. Port Alberni, with its extensive logging history, offers some of the most adventurous roads on the Island. While some are private, many are open for the public to explore after working hours. On the south arm of the Alberni Inlet, 100kms of gravel logging roads lead to one of Vancouver Island's most remote communities, Bamfield. Located in Barkley Sound, Bamfield is a quaint village offering superb salt water fishing and a staging post for other adventures such as hiking the West Coast Trail, sea kayaking the Broken Group Islands, surfing and parasailing Nitinat Lake and exploring Carmanah Walbran Provincial Park, which is home to some of the world's largest spruce and cedar trees, some estimated to be over 800 years old. The Nahmint Lake Loop, a 75-km loop through the mountains west of Port Alberni accesses several lakes and camping spots while the Sproat Lake Loop, another 75-km route, takes adventurers around the long narrow lake. Many of the Island's best fishing spots are also accessible via logging road: Doran Lake, stocked with Steelhead fry; Flora Lake and Gravie Lake, renowned for excellent Rainbow Trout fishing; Henry Lake, a small sub-alpine lake stocked with Steelhead; and Lowry Lake with its excellent fly-fishing opportunities are only a few examples. While out exploring the back-roads, watch for logging trucks and always pull over to give them the right-of way. www.albernavalleystourism.com. Photo Credit: ChrisCheadle.com





Aboriginal Chefs – Many of the sites and unique attractions in the region feature cultural displays and tours that provide a better understanding of the ancestral home of the Cowichan tribes. One of the elements that always brings people together is good food. The ancient food customs of the Aboriginal peoples have endured to this day and First Nation's cuisine is now impressing critics around the world. Many Aboriginal families follow the traditional 100 Mile Diet, gathering fish and shellfish from the seas and rivers, berries, seeds and greens from the earth and game from the land. Lucky visitors to the Quw'utsun' Cultural and Conference Centre in Duncan can experience the sights, sounds and tastes of the region all in one place. The Riverwalk Café at the Cultural Centre is the ideal destination to experience authentic Native cuisine. Their chefs use traditional ingredients such as salmon, venison, buffalo, and halibut - each dish prepared individually and served with a complimentary basket of freshly baked native breads. Treats include venison chili, roasted buffalo, pan roasted elk escalope and blackberry sweet scow bread among many other options. Guests are also welcome to partake in a Salmon BBQ, where they can watch dancers perform on the river bank while eating succulent salmon cooked on cedar stakes over an open fire. Exciting Native cuisine, educational excursions, comfortable accommodations, and exhilarating sports are all delivered by friendly and welcoming Aboriginal hosts throughout the region – year round. www.quwutsun.ca. Photo Credit: Boomer Jerritt



Relatives to MukMuk – Apart from captive breeding centres across Canada, the Vancouver Island marmot – or *Marmota Vancouverensis* – can be found only in the high mountainous regions of Vancouver Island. With a population estimated at less than 75 animals in 2001, recovery efforts have helped increase that number above 150 by 2008. Unlike any other marmot, this endangered species showcases a rich, chocolate brown fur and contrasting white patches. It also differs from the others in genetics, behaviour and ecology. Now, the Vancouver Island marmot has another unique attribute to add to its list: while he once only existed in cyberspace as a virtual sidekick to the three 2010 Winter Olympic mascots, Mukmuk – as he is affectionately known – has recently been freed and was given his own line of merchandise, including plush toys, pins, T-shirts and the orange and blue toque the character wears online. Keep an eye on this little guy as he cheers loudly for his friends during games and races. www.marmots.org or www.vancouver2010.com/mascot/en/profile_mm.php. Photo Credit: Tourism British Columbia



Bear Mountain Valley Course to open in April 2009 – Bear Mountain Resort, the premiere master-planned resort community on Vancouver Island, is about to boast Canada's first and only 36-hole Nicklaus designed golf offering with the much anticipated opening of the new Valley Course. No name is more legendary in the game of golf and course design than Jack Nicklaus. Developers at Bear Mountain Resort first brought that name to Victoria in 2003 when they opened the Mountain Course, a 19-hole masterpiece that holds the title of being the first ever collaboration of Jack Nicklaus and his son Steve. The Valley course's par 70, 6,981 yard, 18 hole layout is at a lower elevation than its sister Mountain Course, but also boasts a Nicklaus design amidst the same spectacular west coast rock and water features. The Nicklaus designed Valley and Mountain courses are cornerstone to Bear Mountain Resort's premiere master-planned community. Bear Mountain Resort's lush mountainside community defines resort living with a montage of residential and vacation real estate opportunities as well as the Westin Bear Mountain Victoria Golf Resort & Spa. The resort offers numerous features including the Santé Spa which was ranked among the top ten medical spas in the world by SpaFinder, eclectic and world-class restaurants, the state-of-the-art Mountainside Athletic Club, a Nicklaus Golf Academy (coming in 2009) and The Village. www.golfvancouverisland.ca; www.bearmountain.ca. Photo Credit: Golf Vancouver Island



Legend of the White Raven – The First Nations people tell legends of how the raven affected life as we know it. Sometimes depicted as a trickster, at other times as a spiritual symbol and even as the creator of human beings, the raven's stories are many. Tales illustrating how he stole the sun, moon and stars and put them where they are now, how he created light from a small box, why there is sickness and famine in the world today, and how the Ravens feathers turned from white to black, are all shared. Last year, two rare white ravens hatched near Qualicum Beach's Ravensong Aquatic Center. A startling and delightful sight, the ravens are fun to watch with their playful and intelligent antics and large vocabulary. Watching their acrobatics provides hours of enjoyment and laughter and their stories are inspirational and thought-provoking. www.visitparksvillequalicumbeach.com. Photo Credit: ChrisCheadle.com



Explore Nanaimo's Secrets – Visitors to the region are routinely amazed by the personalities, places, adventures, and unique entertainment available in Nanaimo. Secret Nanaimo is a community built by people who want to share, rate and comment on their favourite Nanaimo shop, activity or special spot. On Secret Nanaimo, visitors can discover others' secrets and make plans to experience them or they can venture out to make their own discovery and contribute it to the website. Every month new secrets are featured. In Nanaimo you'll find space; to breathe, relax and reconnect life. www.secretnanaimo.com. Photo Credit: ChrisCheadle.com



Going Down Under Island Style – Some of the mysteries of the Campbell River and Region lie tucked away inside the vaulted domes of underground caverns. Coral Cave is a medium/difficult cave located above Tahsis, accessible by a short hike, while the Weymer Caves are accessible by a habitat area that protects rare bats. The caves in the park are rather extensive, and should not be challenged without an experienced guide. The Little Huson Cave Regional Park can be easily accessed just off the road into Zeballos. Dozens of undiscovered caves, rock arches, sink holes and disappearing streams in the area await those who like to explore. On the road between Gold River and Tahsis are perhaps the most famous caves of the region - the Upana Caves. First discovered in 1971 and explored and mapped in 1975, the caves have since attracted thousands of visitors including the film crew for the TV series Huckleberry Finn and his Friends. The cave interiors remain in a relatively wild, undeveloped state, without the comforts and conveniences of major North American show caves. There are fifteen known entrances within the system and caves vary in size from single rooms to branching passages of considerable length. As with any adventure, ensure that you are well informed prior to attempting a visit to any of the caves on Vancouver Island. Contact the local Tourism Office for maps, park rules and regulations and directions. www.campbellriver.travel. Photo Credit: ChrisCheadle.com

Explore the Alberni Inlet – Forty kilometers long and roughly one and a half kilometers wide, the calm waters of the Alberni Inlet are consistently free of ice and navigational obstacles and offer a scenic direct route to the Pacific Rim. The Port Authority, which has jurisdiction of the Inlet from the Somass River to Tzartus Island, operates four marinas, as well as the Port Alberni Terminals. There are three pleasure craft marinas offering a total of 543 berths (Clutesi Haven, China Creek and Harbour Quay) and one Small Craft Harbour with a total of 500 berths (Fisherman's Harbour), used by commercial customers. Clutesi Haven Marina, on the Somass River, features fuel docks, a four lane launch ramp, a fish cleaning station, picnic areas and is the host site for the Annual Salmon Festival and Fishing Derby. In addition to its vessel accommodation, China Creek Marina and Campground, located eight kilometers south of the inner harbour, boasts 250 campsites, more than half of which are fully or partially serviced. Other amenities include a four lane launch ramp, showers, laundry, a general store, a playground and access to fishing licenses and fuel. The newest of the Port Authority's recreational boating facilities – the Harbour Quay Marina - is located downtown Port Alberni. Its amenities include showers, laundry, a security access system and on-site management. Another feature is the adjoining Lighthouse Pier which showcases the Maritime Heritage Discovery Centre. The Fisherman's Harbour is a multi-use facility accommodating the commercial fishing fleet, tugs, salvage vessels and pleasure craft and provides direct access to shore services. Experience the diversity of the region by sailing through it! www.portalberniportauthority.ca. Photo Credit: ChrisCheadle.com



Quatse River Hatchery – Originally constructed in 1983, the Quatse River Hatchery is located five minutes from Port Hardy in the Quatse River Regional Park. The Northern Vancouver Island Salmonid Enhancement Society was established at the same time to aid in the recovery of stocks and habitat in the region's rivers. The society is a non-profit community organization led by a Board of Directors that represent local conservation, environmental, fisheries, forestry and First Nation's groups. The four full-time personnel have their hands full with the Hatchery's incubation capacity for 1 million Coho and 2.5 million Pink eggs. In the busy season when their activities include additional fish culture, stock assessment, in-stream rehabilitation and restoration, community education and stewardship, environmental monitoring and community partnering, they are assisted by an additional twelve staff. <http://nvisea.org>. Photo Credit: ChrisCheadle.com



Spirit of 2010 – With the Vancouver/Whistler Olympic Games just around the corner, everyone is looking for a piece of the action. The newly developed Spirit of 2010 Trail spans the province, offering anyone interested an opportunity to join in the games. Though not continuous, the trail – known as the Cowichan Rail Trail - picks up on Vancouver Island and continues through Shawnigan Lake, Duncan and as far west as Lake Cowichan. It follows a 47km stretch along the former Galloping Goose Rail Line, which was once operated by the Canadian Pacific Railway. The trail also links by ferry to two Gulf Islands (Saltspring and Thetis/Kuper), the Saanich Peninsula and Horseshoe Bay in British Columbia's Lower Mainland. The Rail Trail passes through rural communities, forest lands and protected areas that provide habitat for several mammal and bird species including cougars, black tail deer, the pileated woodpecker, salmon and trout. Western hemlock, broad-leaf maple, arbutus, pacific dogwood and Douglas fir are the main forest species. For information on hiking and camping on the Lake Cowichan Rail Trail, visit www.campingrbc.com. For more information about the trail, visit www.spiritof2010trail.ca. Photo Credit: Boomer Jerritt



Eye to Eye with Nature – The Comox Valley is home countless unique wildlife viewing experiences – this is the region where you can really come eye to eye with nature. The Comox Valley is a veritable bird mecca, with exceptional opportunities to observe and photograph birds and wildflowers (www.comoxvalleynaturalists.bc.ca). Accessible only by boat and receiving half the amount of rain as some of the neighbouring communities, the Mittenatch Island Nature Provincial Park is home to the largest seabird colony in the Strait of Georgia and is an important nesting colony for thousands of Glaucous-winged Gulls. Nearby, the Courtenay River Estuary is home to spawning herring, attracting seals, Osprey, eagles, Blue Herons and many other marine birds looking for a meal. The region is also home to more than 2000 Trumpeter Swans - the largest colony on the west coast of North America – who spend their winter in the Comox Valley. The Lazo Marsh project complex consists of a total of 130.7 hectares of marsh and second-growth forest. Over 140 bird species including Mallards, Wigeons, Wood Ducks, and Canada Geese as well as salmonids and a variety of forest wildlife species have been recorded in this marsh. Birdwatchers will love Cumberland's Chinatown Marsh and naturalists will delight in the traditional Chinese plants that are the legacy of the significant Chinese community that lived there at the turn of the century. There are things to see apart from birds of course - dive the waters off Hornby Island and Flora Islet to come eye-to-eye with the Six-gill shark, a common species of deep water shark that can grow to a length of up to 18 feet. If you're looking for a great guide to show you around, join Blue Edge Tours for guided walking tours of Denman and Hornby Island (www.blueedgetours.com). www.discovercomoxvalley.com. Photo Credit: Comox Valley Tourism



Getaway Options Galore – If a romantic getaway is what you're seeking, Vancouver Island is the ideal destination. Whether you're in search of a quaint retreat or sophisticated accommodation, picturesque towns or modern cities, savoury culinary delicacies or wineries in abundance, natural majesty or year-round golf conditions, this accessible Island and its world-class facilities, are beckoning. Golf Vancouver Island has put together the ultimate package, providing specials for honeymoons, anniversaries, or a quiet weekend getaway with that special someone. Couples can enjoy two nights at their choice of high-end waterfront or golf course accommodations, a round of golf with a power cart, guaranteed tee time and the on-call service of the Golf Vancouver Island staff. Depending on the location selected, each couple will have a choice of a spa treatment, a romantic dinner for two, theatre festival tickets, a horse drawn carriage ride, a winery tour, or for the truly adventurous - a whale watching tour. Special treats such as a bottle of wine from a local vineyard, or assorted truffles round out the experience. Please contact Golf Vancouver Island for terms and conditions. www.golfvancouverisland.ca/packages/couples/index.asp. Photo Credit: Boomer Jerritt





Quiet and Quaint in Qualicum Beach – Apart from being a key participant in the Communities in Bloom competition, Qualicum Beach offers a colourful array of attractions while maintaining its clean, quiet and quaint atmosphere. While favourites such as the Milner Garden and Woodland and the Horne Lake Caves generally take the spotlight, there are scores of fabulous sights and sounds for everyone. Bright theatre lights shine on the community theatre productions in the Echo Players Village Theatre. Designed in the style of theatres in the 50's and 60's, this theatre has won numerous awards over the years. The Old School House Arts Centre, an 80-year old school house turned art centre, offers resident artists an opportunity to enhance their craft and chat with visitors at the same time. The Power House Museum has a growing collection of powerful artifacts where visitors can test their own power on the Power Cycle. The Vancouver Island Paleontology Museum displays one of the most complete collections of Vancouver Island fossils, while the Heritage Forest of Qualicum Beach is a 35-plus acre nature reserve showcasing an old-growth Coastal Douglas Fir eco-system, complete with forest trails and a salmon-bearing stream. Apart from residents and visitors, the area is also home to a number of refugees at the North Island Wildlife Recovery Centre and the World Parrot Refuge. If birds and butterflies are what you seek, look no further than Butterfly World & Gardens where you can stroll among hundreds of free-flying exotic butterflies. Find the goats that live on the roof at the Coombs Old Country Market or get eye to eye with a fish at the Big Qualicum Fish Hatchery. Of course, you can always enjoy the scenery at the sandy Rathtrevor Beach Provincial park, walk trails and enjoy beautiful Englishman River Falls Provincial Park or Little Qualicum Falls Provincial Park, hike to the 6000 ft summit of Mount Arrowsmith or try guessing the age of the (up to) 200 foot Douglas Fir, Western Hemlock and Western Red Cedar trees at Cathedral Grove. www.visitparksvillequalicumbeach.com. Photo Credit: ChrisCheadle.com

Torch Relay – In 2010, the city of Vancouver will officially introduce itself to the world as it hosts the XXI Olympic Winter Games. While key Olympic events will be taking place on the Mainland, Vancouver Island will be celebrating both before, during and after the games. On October 30th, the Torch Relay will touch down in the City of Victoria during its first stop on the Island. Many communities will have the opportunity to share in the excitement, while showcasing their community in the relay celebration. The 2010 Olympic Torch Relay, proudly presented by Coca-Cola and RBC, will connect Canadians in every province and territory, throughout a 35,000-kilometre journey, over approximately 100 days involving 12,000 torchbearers. On February 12, 2010 the torch will complete its journey, and will light the Olympic Cauldron. While the torch will be making its way through numerous Vancouver Island communities, the following are considered to be the Vancouver Island Celebration Communities: Victoria (Oct 30), Duncan (Oct, 31), Nanaimo (Oct, 31), Port Alberni (Nov 1), Tofino (Nov 3), Comox (Nov 2), Campbell River (Nov 2), Port Hardy (Feb 2). www.vancouver2010.com. Photo Credit: Comox Valley Tourism



Getting Even Greener – In 2007, Bear Mountain Golf and Country Club, Olympic View Golf Club and Crown Isle Golf Club joined the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program to develop effective conservation and wildlife enhancement programs. In 2008, Arbutus Ridge Golf Club ramped up its efforts to continue its commitment to environmentally sustainable practices and socially responsible management. In addition to receiving certification in Environmental Planning from the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, the Arbutus Ridge Golf Club formed a staff Greening Committee and is now one of only five golf courses in Canada to officially measure their carbon footprint. In the upcoming year, the Club will work on enhancing habitat for wildlife and preserving natural resources for the benefit of the local community. Using bio-degradable garbage bags, switching to oxygenic and enzyme-based cleaning products, reusing single sided paper, scanning rather than printing, using the company intranet to distribute information and using the low-ink setting on copiers are only some of the steps they have taken to reduce their footprint. The Satellite Bar and Grille at Arbutus Ridge also employs many environmentally friendly practices such as using only trans fat free 100% vegetable oil for frying, donating used oil to the Cowichan Bio-Diesel Cooperative, reducing paper napkins and to-go coffee cups, composting off-site, and purchasing local food when possible. Arbutus Ridge Golf Club was voted the Best Destination Golf Course in British Columbia by readers of Golf Nerve Magazine in 2006 and is owned & operated by the GolfBC Group. Jason Lowe, General Manager (250-743-5100 x34) or www.arbutusridgegolf.com. Photo Credit: Boomer Jerritt



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