OVERVIEW
Comox Valley: The Land of Plenty

The Comox Valley is a diverse region on Vancouver Island’s east coast situated between the Beaufort Range and the Comox Glacier to the west and the Strait of Georgia to the east. It stretches from the ocean to the alpine, Fanny Bay in the south to Miracle Beach in the north, including the main communities of Courtenay, Comox and Cumberland. It’s a vibrant mix of urban and rural, cosmopolitan and wilderness, well-known holiday destinations and hidden gems all within a 30-minute drive.

The Comox Valley has always been known as the Land of Plenty, first by the K’ómoks First Nation for its food sources, and today by residents and visitors who enjoy its rich diversity. Boasting some of the best agricultural land on Vancouver Island, the terroir of the Valley can be tasted in the extraordinary quality of the local products found in year-round farmers’ markets and used by local chefs. Named a Cultural Capital of Canada in 2007, the region is a haven for more than 1,000 artists. The Valley’s music and arts scene comes alive at local theatre venues, art galleries, studios and annual festivals. With access to skiing and snowboarding at Mount Washington and year-round golfing, fishing, mountain biking, hiking and paddling, the Comox Valley is custom-made for non-stop outdoor adventure. When it’s time to unwind, the area’s rejuvenating spas and beaches are among the Island’s best.

Nicknames: Land of Plenty; Valley of Festivals

Population: 62,326 (Source: BC Statistics)

Urban Centres: Courtenay: pop. 21,940; Comox: pop. 12,136, Cumberland: pop. 2,762 (Source: Invest Comox Valley)

Weather: The Comox Valley enjoys a coastal marine climate with warm, dry summers and short, mild winters. Average July high temperatures are 22.5°C (72.5°F) with average January low temperatures of 0.3°C (32.5°F). It is one of the few places in Canada where you can both golf and ski in the winter.

Economic Drivers: Courtenay, Comox and Cumberland are surrounded by 99,503 acres of provincially protected farmland. More than 450 operating farms contribute $30 million annually to the Comox Valley economy. Transportation, technology and tourism are other major economic contributors, as is value-added wood processing and niche wood products.

Comox Valley Celebrities: Kim Cattrall, actor, (Sex in the City) raised in Courtenay; Brendan Fletcher, actor, (Freddy v. Jason) born in the Comox Valley; Cam Neely, NHL Vancouver Canucks/Boston Bruins hockey player, (retired) born in Comox; BC author Jack Hodgins (Spit Delaney’s Island) grew up in Merville. The 2001 feature film Trapped, starring Kevin Bacon and Charlize Theron, was shot in the Comox Valley.

Claims to Fame:
- 445 farms producing everything from oysters, bison and wasabi to wine, vodka and cheese
- BC farmed shellfish is a premium quality Ocean Wise sustainable seafood choice
- Brambles Market in Courtenay, BC’s only grocery story selling 100% locally sourced products
- Mount Washington Alpine Resort, Vancouver Island’s biggest ski hill
- 12 nations have sent Olympic-calibre athletes to the Comox Valley for pre-2010 training
- A Cultural Capital of Canada (2007) with more than 50 annual festivals and events
- Della Falls in Strathcona Provincial Park, at 440 m (1,452 ft), is Canada’s highest waterfall
- Hornby Island is one of the few places in the world where scuba divers can see rare six-gill sharks
- Discovery of the fossilized bones of a prehistoric Elasmosaur along the Puntledge River
- The arrival of up to 3,000 magnificent Trumpeter Swans in the Valley in early November
**Best Beaches:** Saratoga Beach, Goose Spit, Miracle Beach, Nymph Falls, Trent River, Puntledge River, Comox Lake and Tribune Bay on Hornby Island.

**Major Attractions:**
- The [Comox Valley Heritage Experience](#), four well-marked self-tours of the Comox Valley
- 80 million year old fossils at the [Courtenay & District Museum & Palaeontology Centre](#)
- 19 Wing Comox heritage and WWII vintage aircraft on display at the [Comox Air Force Museum](#)
- The fascinating history of the multicultural coal mining village of [Cumberland](#)
- The seaside boardwalk, fishing harbour, diverse cafés and art galleries at [Comox by the Sea](#)
- Boutique shopping in [Courtenay](#), named “the most charming small town on Vancouver Island”
- Over 3,000 varieties of rhododendrons at [Kitty Coleman Woodland Gardens](#)
- More than 40 parks for hiking, biking, fishing, swimming and horseback riding
- Scenic Comox Valley farms, farmers’ markets, vineyards and [agri-tours](#)
- Nine golf courses, from a championship course to mini-golf, with six open year-round
- Camping on the Puntledge River next to the [Nim Nim Interpretive Centre](#)
- Yoga, a seaside spa and the Pacific Mist Hydropath at [Kingfisher Oceanside Resort and Spa](#)

**Arts & Culture:**
To commemorate the Comox Valley’s status as a Cultural Capital of Canada, an [Artist in Residency](#) ceramic mural is on permanent display outside the [Comox Valley Art Gallery](#). There are more than 1,000 artists and craftspeople living and working in the Comox Valley, twice the national average. The K’ómoks First Nations grounds is the site of the I-Hos Gallery and the I-Hos Arts Festival in July. You can visit artists at work during the [Denman Island Pottery Tour](#) in May and the annual [Artists of the Comox Valley Studio Tour](#) in June. [Hornby Island](#) is also home to many internationally acclaimed artists and their studios.

**Festivals & Events:**
- The [Filberg Festival](#), four days of arts music, food and fun in Comox
- [Vancouver Island Music Fest](#), three days of outdoor concerts near Courtenay
- [Cumberland Empire Days](#), since 1891, an annual celebration with a street market and parade
- [Comox Nautical Days](#), launched in 1958, includes dragon boat races, music and fireworks
- [Comox Valley Exhibition Fall Fair](#), open-air markets and mainstage entertainment
- [Comox Valley Shellfish Festival](#), BC Shellfish Farmers celebrate with local food and wine producers

**Transportation Links:** The [Comox Valley Airport](#) (YQQ) provides access to all points on central and northern Vancouver Island with daily direct flights from major Canadian cities, including Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton. Find information on flight schedules and car rentals at [www.comoxairport.com](http://www.comoxairport.com)
- Floatplane service on [West Coast Air](#) is available between downtown Vancouver and the Comox Bay Marina. Visit [www.westcoastair.com](http://www.westcoastair.com)
- [BC Ferries](#) terminals are located on Vancouver Island in Victoria (Swartz Bay) and in Nanaimo (Departure Bay or Duke Point) providing service to and from the Vancouver area. The BC Ferries terminal at Comox provides services to and from Powell River on the Sunshine Coast. For schedules or reservations, go to [www.bcferries.com](http://www.bcferries.com)
- The Comox Valley is just a 2.5 hour drive from Victoria and only 1½ hours from Nanaimo. Once north of Nanaimo, the fastest route is to take Highway 19. But the scenic [Oceanside Route](#) along Highway 19A is well worth the slightly longer trip. Port Hardy is 3½ hours north of the Comox Valley at the end of Highway 19
- [VIA Rail](#) operates one daily roundtrip on the [Malahat](#) dayliner from Victoria to Courtenay [www.viarail.ca](http://www.viarail.ca)
- [Greyhound Canada](#) provides service to and from the Comox Valley. [www.greyhound.ca](http://www.greyhound.ca)

Photos courtesy of Ross Robinson/discovercomoxvalley.com and Tourism Vancouver Island/Boomer Jerritt
Spot Olympians in training in the Comox Valley

Just because you didn’t score a ticket to the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games, doesn’t mean you can’t enjoy a front row seat watching some of the world’s future Olympians in action. Hundreds of athletes on 22 teams from 12 nations – including Germany, France, Finland, Sweden, Canada and the U.S – are undergoing pre-2010 training at the new 7,500 square foot training facility, the biathlon stadium and on the slopes at Mount Washington Alpine Resort in the Comox Valley. The climate, elevation and snow conditions at Vancouver Island’s largest ski hill are equivalent to the 2010 Nordic site near Whistler. Keep your eyes peeled for athletes in training for Olympic Snowboarding, Ski Cross, Snowboard Cross, Biathlon, Cross Country and Free Style Skiing. For more, go to www.sportcomoxvalley.com and www.mountwashington.ca

BC farmed shellfish from the Comox Valley is something to celebrate

More than 50 percent of all farmed oysters, mussels, scallops and clams in BC comes from the pristine ocean environment of Baynes Sound in Comox Valley south. Look for top producers like Fanny Bay Oysters (Union Bay) and Thetis Queen Seafoods (Black Creek) on the Vancouver Aquarium’s highly respected list of sustainable Ocean Wise suppliers. In downtown Comox, Anderton Bistro offers an array of Ocean Wise seafood choices on its menus. Each year, BC Shellfish Farmers celebrate “sea to table traditions” with local chefs, food producers, winemakers and culinarians during the Comox Valley Shellfish Festival in June. Anytime of year, shellfish lovers can enjoy a self-guided “Bounty from the Sea” driving tour of picturesque Baynes Sound. An easy-to-follow map is included in the Comox Valley Growers Guide available at local food retailers, the Comox Valley Visitors Centre and online at www.agrifoodcomoxvalley.com. See also www.fannybayoysters.com; www.andertonbistro.com; www.comoxvalleyshellfishfestival.ca

New boutique distillery to produce single malt whiskey in the Comox Valley

Intrepid Scot Andrew Currie, together with Managing Director Jay Odleifson and local farmer Patrick Evans, plan to become the first to start a boutique farm-based distillery in Canada, producing traditional single malt whiskey in the Comox Valley. Shelter Point Distillery is under construction on one part of 1,746 acres of farmland on the Oyster River, the site of a former
University of British Columbia research farm. The trio plan to use locally grown barley, stills manufactured in Scotland, high quality barrels and their own malting equipment. The secret ingredient: pure Oyster River water flowing from the Beaufort Mountain Range. The ultimate result: the “Water of Life,” traditional single malt whiskey made the old way like they do in Scotland. An initial run of 25,000 litres is planned for 2010. [www.shelterpointdistillery.com](http://www.shelterpointdistillery.com)

**Comox Valley spas draw inspiration from local waters**

Spa experiences at Kingfisher Oceanside Resort & Spa are all about ocean-fresh air and the calming environment of the sea. Spa etiquette here requires turning off cell phones and tuning out stress. The Pacific Mist Hydropath is a one-hour relaxing, detoxifying treatment in a West Coast setting of indoor sandstone-sculpted caves and pools. Other signature treatments include: Coastal Trek Foot Therapy, Restore Moor Mud Body Wrap and yoga sessions at the resort’s Starfish Studio. In Courtenay, Oh Spa at the Old House Village Hotel & Spa is the Comox Valley’s newest spa sanctuary. Unique treatments include the soothing rainforest Vichy Shower and the Hydro-Therapy Tub, which touts benefits for circulation and blood oxygenation. Oh Spa’s heated outdoor pool and hot tub are open year-round with lovely Courtenay River views. Elegant spa cuisine is served in front of the fire in spacious couples’ spa suites. Spa indulgences can be booked at [www.kingfisherspa.com](http://www.kingfisherspa.com) and [www.oldhousevillage.com](http://www.oldhousevillage.com).

**I-Hos Gallery 100% owned and operated by the K’ómoks First Nations**

In the beautiful cedar housefront of the I-Hos Gallery on the traditional lands of the K’ómoks First Nations (also Comox First Nations) legends are told through intricate carvings. A double-headed sea serpent (I-Hos) and a white whale (Queenesh) are incorporated into the design along with a masked sxwayxwey dancer wearing a tunic of swan feathers and shaking a scallop shell rattle. Inside the gallery, browse the artwork and crafts of a legion of talented First Nations artists. You’ll find gold and silver jewellery, prints, textiles, wood carvings and masks that reflect the Comox Band’s vibrant Northern Coast Salish history. [www.ihosgallery.com](http://www.ihosgallery.com)

**Comox Valley Story-Starters**

**Spring 2010**

**Tour the Land of Plenty with the Comox Valley Growers Guide**

On 99,503 verdant acres of provincially protected farmland, some of British Columbia’s most passionate and environmentally responsible farmers have created a growers’ paradise in the Comox Valley. It’s no surprise that the Valley is now rated as one of Canada’s top agricultural
destinations. Pick up your copy of the Comox Valley Growers Guide and get the inside scoop on weekly farmers’ markets, u-pick farms, market stands and where to buy fresh, local and direct from Valley farmers, food producers and winemakers. The Growers Guide provides maps and directions to lead you to more than 70 farms on three driving tours that include: “Bounty from the Sea” (oysters, scallops, clams) along Baynes Sound, “Land, Sights, Tastes and Traditions,” a tour of boutique farms, bakeries, markets and cheesemakers, and the northern “Farm to Fork” tour (wine, sausages, meat and poultry). Along the way, discover the Valley’s rich bounty from hand-collected fireweed honey to certified organic wasabi to grass-fed bison and pasture-raised free-range chicken. The Comox Valley Growers Guide is available at local retail food outlets, the Comox Valley Visitors Centre, visitorinfo@comoxvalleychamber.com, and can be downloaded online at www.agrifoodcomoxvalley.com

Taste Comox Valley year-round at farmers’ markets and a 100% local grocery store

A tayberry tastes like a burst of summer. This sweet, juicy cross between a blackberry and raspberry hits the peak of freshness from July to mid-August and is one of the many ripe, fresh-picked treats at Comox Valley farmers’ markets in the summer. With the phenomenal diversity of products being “grown, raised, baked or gathered“ in the region, the Comox Valley Farmers’ Market is open year-round at two outdoor Courtenay locations in the warmer months, moving indoors from October to mid-April to the Comox Band Hall. In June 2009, Brambles Market opened in Courtenay as BC’s (possibly Canada’s) only grocery store stocked with 100% local food and products, promoting an “eat local” 50-km diet. Year-round, there’s always something fresh, local and in season in the Valley. For more on Taste Comox Valley venues, events and seasonal specials, go to www.comoxvalleyfarmersmarket.com; www.bramblesmarket.ca; www.discovercomoxvalley.com

Comox Valley artists welcome visitors at annual studio tours and festivals

The fertile environment of the Comox Valley isn’t just ideal for farming; creativity flourishes here too. Painters, sculptors, potters, textile weavers, wood carvers, jewellry makers and craftspeople are among the more than 1,000 artists who live and work in the inspirational Comox Valley – more than twice the national average. Several times throughout the year, artists in the region open their doors to welcome visitors and showcase their works. The Annual Artists of the Comox Valley Studio Tour in July shines a spotlight on almost 40 local artists including Hornby Island’s Brian Scott, whose distinctively colourful paintings can be seen in galleries, restaurants and public areas around Vancouver Island. In July, Comox Valley artists take to the streets, joining local merchants, musicians and entertainers at the Local Colours Downtown Courtenay Arts Festival. For more on these and other artists’ events, visit www.comoxvalleyarts.org
Comox Valley golf courses maximize alpine views and local terrain

Views of the snow-capped Beaufort Mountains add a distinctive Valley element to playing 18 holes of championship golf at Glacier Greens Golf Course, just past the Comox Airport. Sunnydale Golf & Country Club in Courtenay has a Valley history going back to 1923. It was once owned by a group of Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) pilots from 442 Squadron in Comox and, at one time, was the only 18-hole golf course north of Nanaimo. Sunnydale’s mix of challenges and terrain in a majestic Comox Valley setting has made it a popular course to play for more than 80 years. Bring your A-game to the award-winning, platinum-rated Crown Isle Resort and Golf Community in Courtenay, featuring spectacular close-up Beaufort Mountain views, verdant rolling fairways and 11 lakes. www.glaciergreens.com; www.sunnydlegolf.ca; www.crownisle.com/golf.asp;

Kayak around the shallow-water Royston shipwrecks

A book titled The Ghost Ships of Royston, published by the Underwater Archaeological Society of BC (www.uasbc.com), describes how more than a dozen ships were towed into Royston harbour to act as a breakwater. On calm days at low tide, kayakers can paddle around the shallow water to view the hulks of old whaling boats, schooners, WWII frigates and scuttled tugs, along with the wreck of the Melanope, a 79-metre 1876 three-masted sailing ship. Comox Valley Kayaks leads guided excursions around the rich marine environment of Goose Spit, around the Royston shipwrecks and into the marinas in Comox harbour, a Valley hub for sailboats, power yachts and salmon fishing charters. www.comoxvalleykayaks.com/tours/comox-valley.html; www.comox.ca/discover-comox/marinas

Photos courtesy of Tourism Vancouver Island / Boomer Jerritt
Comox Valley Communities
Top Destinations in the Land of Plenty

Black Creek: A 20 minute drive along the Island Highway north of Courtenay, Black Creek lies at the far northern end of the Comox Valley. You’ll know you’ve arrived at this picturesque rural community when the Black Creek Country Market comes into view. Attractions: Miracle Beach Provincial Park, Oyster River Hatchery, Saratoga Speedway, top Vancouver Island salmon fishing, Saratoga Beach Golf Course, Seaview Game Farm.

Comox: The town of Comox has recently undergone a revitalization that has enhanced the historic ambiance of this lively waterfront community, sometimes called Comox by the Sea. In Comox, you can stroll the boardwalk to Fisherman’s Wharf to buy fresh seafood right off the boat, then shop the boutiques, antique stores and galleries along the friendly downtown Avenue. The town is also home to Canadian Forces Base 19 Wing Comox and the Comox Airport. Attractions: The Filberg Festival, Comox Fisherman’s Wharf, Comox Nautical Days, The Filberg Heritage Lodge and Park, Glacier Greens Golf Course, Comox Golf Club. For more, visit www.comoxbythesea.com.

Courtenay: The only incorporated city in the region, Courtenay is the urban and cultural core of the Comox Valley. Courtenay was named “most charming small town on Vancouver Island” by Vitality Magazine and with its colourful boutiques, artisans’ shops, theatres and restaurants, it’s easy to see why. Attractions: Sid Williams Theatre, Comox Valley Art Gallery, Courtenay & District Museum & Palaeontology Centre, Kitty Coleman Woodland Gardens, Vancouver Island Music Fest. For more, visit www.downtowncourtenay.com.

Cumberland: The historic village of Cumberland was a bustling coal mining community from 1888 to 1966, attracting workers from Europe, China and Japan. Today, the village keeps its multicultural history alive through its heritage buildings, Heritage Walking Tour, and historic sites like #6 Memorial Mine Park and well-kept local Japanese and Chinese graveyards. Attractions: Cumberland Museum & Archives, Cumberland Empire Days, The Big Time Out. For more, visit www.cumberlandbc.org.

Denman Island: A 15-minute ferry ride from Buckley Bay, 20 minutes south of Courtenay, takes you to the beaches, trails and artisan studios of tranquil Denman Island. Attractions: Fillongley Provincial Park, Boyle Point Provincial Park, canoe and kayak rentals, views of Chrome Island Lightstation, an art gallery and museum in Denman Village.
Fanny Bay/Union Bay/Royston: These three rural oceanside hamlets in Comox Valley south are world famous for premium farmed oysters, clams, mussels and scallops from the pristine waters of Baynes Sound. These sustainable products are used by top chefs across Canada and exported to Europe, Asia and the United States. **Attractions:** Fanny Bay Oysters (in Union Bay), Fanny Bay Inn, farmers’ market stands, boat launch, dive shop, Royston shipwreck sites, spectacular ocean scenery, historic Union Bay Post Office.

Hornby Island: A two-ferry, 50-minute trip takes you from Buckley Bay to Denman Island and onto Hornby Island. Explore fine sand beaches at beautiful Tribune Bay and Whaling Station Bay. The Hornby Island Co-op grocery store and surrounding artisans’ shops are the social hub of the island. Cycling and mountain biking are popular here. **Attractions:** Hellowell Provincial Park, the Hornby Festival, BikeFest, Ford’s Cove Marina and art gallery, diving among rare deep water six-gill sharks up to 12 metres long.

K’ómoks First Nations: The K’ómoks First Nations (also Comox First Nations) operates several successful businesses from traditional band territory on the Puntledge River, located between Courtenay and Comox. Shop in the carved cedar housefront of the I-Hos Gallery for Northwest Coast First Nations prints, jewellery, textiles, clothing, wood carvings and masks. **Attractions:** I-Hos Gallery, Puntledge RV Campground and the Nim Nim Interpretive Centre, I-Hos Arts Festival, Multicultural Festival. For more, visit www.comoxband.ca

Merville: This small hamlet at the north end of the Comox Valley was initially inhabited by a group of Canadian soldiers and their families who settled here after WWI and named it after a town in France where they were headquartered during the war. The area’s provincial parks offer excellent wildlife viewing, mountain biking and beachcombing. **Attractions:** Miracle Beach Provincial Park, Seal Bay Nature Park, Bates Beach saltwater fishing.

Mount Washington: Vancouver Island’s largest ski hill and year-round family resort, Mount Washington (1588 m elevation) offers one of the most spectacular coastal alpine settings in North America and has a consistent record for “the deepest natural snowpack in Canada.” Currently, 12 countries have sent Olympic athlete hopefuls here for pre-2010 training. Winter activities include Nordic sports, alpine, cross-country and night skiing, snow tubing, snowboarding and snowshoeing. Mountain biking, hiking and wildlife viewing are big summer draws. **Attractions:** Gateway to Strathcona Provincial Park, Nordic Centre, Snow Tube Park, scenic chairlift rides, Stay & Play packages. For more visit, www.mountwashington.ca or www.discovermountwashington.com

19 Wing Comox: Secretly constructed in 1942, the Canadian Forces Base (CFB) at 19 Wing Comox today is home to 442 Search and Rescue (SAR) Squadron and Canadian Forces School of Search and Rescue. SAR aircrews launch more than 200 missions a year and are responsible for an area that stretches from the Arctic to the Washington State border, and from the Canadian Rockies 1,200 km into the Pacific Ocean. The CFB Comox airfield is also used by the Comox Airport (YQQ). **Attractions:** Flights connections from YQQ, spring training grounds for the Snowbirds aerobatic team, Y2K Spitfire restoration project, Comox Air Force Museum.

Saratoga Beach: At the mouth of the Oyster River, this recreational area in Comox Valley north offers one of the most beautiful sand beaches on the east coast of Vancouver Island. At low tide, it becomes a quarter-mile ocean playground for kids and beachcombers. Swimming, camping, saltwater fishing and kite flying on the beach are popular pastimes, along with fly fishing on the Oyster River. **Attractions:** Oyster Bay Shoreline Regional Park, Trumpeter Swans at Woodhus Slough, storm-watching, Miracle Beach Adventure Mini-Golf.

For more information on Comox Valley communities, visit www.discovercomoxvalley.com/about-comox-valley_communities.htm

Photos courtesy of Mount Washington Alpine Resort/discovercomoxvalley.com, David Bazett/discovercomoxvalley.com
Take a self-tour of history and art in the Valley of Festivals

By Kathy Eccles

The Comox Valley’s main communities of Courtenay, Comox and Cumberland are rich troves of history, local centres of arts and culture, and the mainstages for a host of colourful annual festivals.

Explore the Valley on foot or by car

The Comox Valley Heritage Experience offers six well-marked self-tours of the Comox Valley, including four walking tours and two driving routes.

The Downtown Courtenay Heritage Walk takes you first to the Courtenay & District Museum – a treasure chest of local fossils, First Nations and early settlement history – located in the town’s former post office building. From there, the stroll includes stops at Native Sons Hall, the largest free span log building in Canada, the heritage houses on Cliffe Avenue built between 1910 and 1930, and the Nim Nim Interpretive Centre on the Comox First Nations traditional band lands.

The Courtenay Riverway Heritage Walk focuses on modern industrial history in the Valley and includes visits to wharves, marinas, shipbuilders, canneries, sawmills and the popular Whistle Stop Pub.

The first stop on the Town of Comox Heritage Walk is the Filberg Heritage Lodge and Park and its extraordinary garden planted in the 1930s with local and exotic plants, including Weeping Cypress, kiwi fruit vines, magnolias and dwarf conifers. Other stops along the route are the scenic Comox Marina boardwalk, St. Peter’s Anglican Church (circa 1939) and the historic Lorne Hotel. Built in 1878, it’s the oldest licensed hotel in BC and a famous Comox landmark.

There are four routes on the Cumberland Heritage Walk and the best place to start them all is at the Cumberland Museum and Archives. The museum’s Manager of Collections & Research Wendy Fried points out that Cumberland was a thriving multicultural coal mining town from 1888 to 1966. In its mining heyday, the village attracted workers from Europe, China and Japan, whose pasts are commemorated at historic stops throughout the village. She notes the heritage homes and gardens are “lovely” on the Camp Road & Little Jerusalem stroll, where visitors will see the original town and oldest houses in the village.
At #6 Mine Memorial Park, visitors stopping to read the storyboard will be standing at the head of the old mine where Fried explains several miners lost their lives. In the museum itself, she advises one of the biggest attractions is the life-size mining exhibit built by local miners; it’s large enough for visitors to stand up and walk through.

The Heritage Experience drive-tours encompass highlights of Comox Valley marine, military, farming and recreational history following recognizable signposts and landmarks.

**Art and history meld at Valley museums and galleries**

Unique Comox Valley museums showcase everything from 80 million year old fossils to vintage WWII aircraft. The Comox Valley is a link in the Great Canadian Fossil Trail and visitors can learn all about it at the Courtenay & District Museum & Palaeontology Centre. In 1988, a local resident and his daughter stumbled on the fossilized bones of a 12-metre long prehistoric Elasmosaur. A reconstructed cast of the discovery is now on permanent exhibit at the museum, which also offers guided fossil tours of the Puntledge River site where the bones were discovered.

The Canadian Air Force Base at 19 Wing Comox is also home of the Comox Air Force Museum, where eight vintage aircraft are housed in the Heritage Air Park and a Y2K Spitfire is being restored and on display.

The Comox Valley Art Gallery, housed in the former Courtenay fire hall, includes four exhibition galleries, historic archives and workshop space on two floors of the new Comox Valley Centre for the Arts. The Muir Gallery in downtown Courtenay is a showcase for community artists and for local and regional juried art shows. Visitors will find the Pearl Ellis Gallery next to the Comox Archives Museum in downtown Comox. Visit the gallery for annual shows of budding Valley artists and the museum for more on the pioneer and natural history of this pretty coastal community.

The K’ómoks First Nations outside Courtenay operates the I-Hos Gallery where visitors can shop in a carved cedar housefront for fine Northwest Coast First Nations wood carvings and masks, prints, jewellery and clothing.

**The Valley of Festivals celebrates in summer**

One of the Comox Valley’s best known summer events is the Filberg Festival, held each BC Day holiday weekend at the beginning of August. It’s four days of arts, music, food and fun at the nine-acre waterfront Filberg Heritage Lodge and Park. Comox Nautical Days, an event now more than 50 years old, is held the same weekend with an emphasis on family fun including dragon boat races, canoe jousting, live music, food, crafts and fireworks.
The exciting Vancouver Island MusicFest in July ties three days of outdoor concerts into such partner events as the Earth Day Family Festival and National Aboriginal Day. In 2009, *Outside* magazine named the Vancouver Island MusicFest one of the top 25 festivals in North America, and included a focus on its Living Green program.

Cumberland has celebrated its heritage each Victoria Day weekend since 1891. The village comes alive during Cumberland Empire Days with a pancake breakfast, street market, soapbox derby, fashion shows, dancing and an annual parade. The Big Time Out, held each August in Cumberland Village Park, is a one-day music extravaganza from noon to midnight.

At the annual Artists of the Comox Valley Studio Tour in June, up to 40 local artists get in on the act and open their studio doors offering driving and walking tours spanning the entire Comox Valley. For more on the Comox Valley Heritage Experience tours, local museums, galleries and festivals, visit [www.discovercomoxvalley.com](http://www.discovercomoxvalley.com).

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Approx. 950 words
How Green is My Valley?

By Kathy Eccles

Vancouver Island’s Comox Valley has been rated one of Canada’s top agricultural destinations. Ethical and sustainable farming and fishing practices are among the reasons the Valley’s premium green niche products are gaining international acclaim.

With one of the longest growing seasons in Canada – thanks to Vancouver Island’s famously mild winters – the Comox Valley has experienced a surge of agricultural development in recent decades. This is not run-of-the-mill factory farming. The Comox Valley has attracted passionate, innovative farmers and artisan producers committed to doing the right thing by both consumers and the environment. More than 445 Valley farms are producing or raising everything from oysters to venison, hazelnuts to Belgian endive to 10 varieties of organic blueberries.

They have a lot to work with, including clean water from the pristine aquifers of the Beaufort Mountains, excellent soil and proximity to a marketplace of more than two million people in the Pacific Northwest. On top of that, only about one-third of the Valley’s 99,503 acres of provincially protected agricultural land reserve is currently under production. Compare that to Okanagan farmland, which is about 95 percent cultivated. An April 2009 article in Canadian Farm Manager calls the Valley’s influx of enthusiastic food producers “rookie farmers with fresh ideas.“ Examples abound of Comox Valley boutique products with green pedigrees.

Certified Organic farms crop up in the Comox Valley

Big Dee’s Bees in Black Creek makes unpasteurized blackberry honey hand-collected from 80 acres of thornless blackberries; fireweed for honey, too, is hand-picked from along the Oyster River. Hazelmere Farms in Courtenay produces certified organic wasabi and a long list of organic produce including Asian greens like bok choi, soybeans (edamame) and snap peas, as well as roma and heirloom tomatoes, onions and herbs. Blue Moon Estate Winery’s fruit wines are made 100 percent from certified organic fruit grown by fellow Comox Valley farmers.
Eatmore Sprouts uses “ecologically conscious inputs and soil-building organic farming methods” to produce their crops of greenhouse-grown certified organic sprouts, including sunflower, clover, alfalfa and wheatgrass. The farm’s organic salad mixes, leeks, spinach and garlic are used by Valley chefs and sold in neighbourhood grocery stores. At Locals restaurant in Courtenay, Chef Ronald St. Pierre showcases “Food from the Heart of the Island” and lists on his menu which farm or purveyor the food comes from. Guests dine on hand-planted and hand-collected organic vegetables – like sweet peppers, chard, and winter squash – from Pattison Farms in Black Creek or can order lean, nutritious, grass-fed buffalo – raised free of chemicals, hormones or steroids – from nearby Island Bison.

Environmentally friendly methods are yielding superior products in the Comox Valley – not only from the land, but from the sea as well.

**BC farmed shellfish earns star status**

More than half the farmed shellfish in British Columbia comes from Baynes Sound, the nutrient-rich, glacier-fed 40 km (25 mi) channel between Vancouver Island and Denman Island dotted with the picturesque Comox Valley south communities of Royston, Union Bay and Fanny Bay. The Baynes Sound aquaculture industry, with a wholesale value of more than $37 million, has gained a reputation for producing farmed shellfish – including oysters, mussels, clams and scallops – of phenomenal quality. And much of it has received the Ocean Wise seal of approval, putting it under the umbrella of the Vancouver Aquarium’s respected conservation program.

Ocean Wise Program Manager Michael McDermid is enthusiastic about BC aquaculture, “What is great is that BC shellfish is quickly becoming world-renowned. Cultured shellfish is one of the great sustainable options we can choose.”

Steve Johansen co-owner of Organic Ocean Seafood agrees. Organic Ocean, recognized as Producer/Supplier of the Year at the 2009 Annual Vancouver Magazine Restaurant Awards, supplies about 80 top restaurants nationwide with cultured Baynes Sound shellfish. Johansen confirms Vancouver’s award-winning C Restaurant, the founding restaurant for the Ocean Wise program, uses the small, sweet, succulent Kusshi oysters from Deep Bay, Sound Select oysters from Fanny Bay, and has been using exceptional Baynes Sound farmed scallops for years.

Ocean Wise products from Fanny Bay Oysters in Union Bay are shipped internationally to Europe, Asia and the United States. Closer to home, Anderton Bistro recently became the first Comox Valley restaurant to become a member of the Ocean Wise program, offering menu choices like wild West Coast halibut, Vancouver Island salmon, BC spot prawns, Satori oysters from Denman Island, and Estevan albacore tuna.

Estevan BC Tuna, a Comox Valley family-based fishing business, sells fresh and canned troll-caught gourmet albacore tuna caught in BC waters using dolphin-friendly fishing methods. Ocean Wise BC Albacore Tuna is on the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s “Best Choice for a Healthy Ocean” list and has been approved as a green fishery by the Audubon Society.
The list goes on, but in the Comox Valley, artisanal and sustainable farms and fisheries are catching worldwide attention.

**Eat local on the Comox Valley 50-km diet**

When Brambles Market opened in Courtenay in 2009, it became the first grocery store in BC, possibly the first in Canada, to stock its shelves with 100 percent local products from around the province, but predominantly within a 50-km radius from the Comox Valley – everything from meat, fish and produce to condiments and spices.

The weekly Comox Valley Farmers’ Market is open year-round at two outdoor Courtenay locations, moving indoors in the fall and winter to the Comox Band Hall. In the summer, more than 70 local farmers are listed in the *Comox Valley Growers Guide* offering maps to u-pick farms, market stands and three agri-tourism driving tours.

Throughout the year, visitors can enjoy Comox Valley bounty at an array of “foodies” special events held at local farms, wineries, cooking schools, kitchen shops, restaurants and resorts. Two of the biggest and best annual celebrations of local culinary diversity are the Comox Valley Shellfish Festival in June and the Alpine Food Festival at Mount Washington Alpine Resort each September. For more information on Comox Valley farming, fishing, aquaculture and agritourism, visit [www.discovercomoxvalley.com](http://www.discovercomoxvalley.com).

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*Approximately 1,000 words*

Photos courtesy of Ross Robinson/discovercomoxvalley.com and Tourism Vancouver Island/Boomer Jerritt
Comox Valley Adventure Ranges from Mountains to Sea

By Kathy Eccles

From alpine meadows and lush rainforest to coastal waters and the rugged Comox Glacier – nicknamed by some after the great white whale Queenesh – the Comox Valley’s extraordinary landscape is custom-made for outdoor adventure enthusiasts.

Designated in 1911, Strathcona Provincial Park in the Comox Valley is BC’s oldest provincial park and Vancouver Island’s largest. It’s dominated by snow-covered peaks, alpine tarns and glacier-fed waters. Here, you’ll find the highest mountains in the Vancouver Island ranges and spectacular 440 m (1,452 ft) Della Falls, Canada’s highest waterfall. Hike or backpack on Strathcona Park trails and you’re treading on 380-million-year-old terrain. Prehistoric history is clearly carved into the landscape of the park’s preserved wild beauty, once the site of active volcanoes and ancient sea beds, its mountains forged by now-vanished ice sheets. It’s a spectacular setting for modern-day outdoor adventure.

The Upper Campbell Lake and Buttle Lake are popular places to canoe and kayak, with Buttle Lake offering the added bonus of excellent fishing for cutthroat and rainbow trout.

A hike to hilly Forbidden Plateau reveals the abandoned chairlifts and remnants of a former ski lodge that burned down in 2002, as well as magnificent views of the Comox Valley and the Strait of Georgia. In spring and summer, trails on Mount Beecher lead to brilliant alpine meadows of Indian paintbrush, Alaska saxifrage, stonecrop and the Olympic onion – the only place in Canada that it grows.

For intrepid climbers with their own gear – and plenty of skill and experience – the Crest Creek Crags surrounding Crest Lake offer 19 climbing crags for various skill levels, including Cougar Rock, Pipeline Bluff, Oz Wall, the Attic and Two Tree Edge.

Whether you’re hiking, cycling, fishing or cross-country skiing in Strathcona Park, bring your camera to catch rare wildlife like Roosevelt Elk, the endangered Vancouver Island Marmot, elusive
Vancouver Island Wolves, black bears, cougars and Coastal Black-tailed Deer. Bird-watchers will be thrilled to spot Ruffed Grouse, Trumpeter Swans, American Bald Eagles and Vancouver Island White-tailed Ptarmigan.

**Mt. Washington Alpine Resort**

Adjacent to Strathcona Provincial Park, visitors will find Mount Washington Alpine Resort, Vancouver Island’s largest ski hill. In November 2009, Mount Washington recorded more than 440 m of snow, breaking previous years’ records and demonstrating why the Comox Valley resort regularly lays claim to the highest snowfalls of any ski resort in North America.

Mount Washington’s climate, elevation and snow conditions have been compared to Whistler’s Callaghan Valley and the resort successfully attracted 22 teams from 12 nations to participate in pre-2010 Olympic training at its sophisticated new training facility and biathlon stadium.

Alpine skiers and snowboarders enjoy nine chairlifts and 60 runs on 1,600 acres of skiable terrain at Mount Washington. Night skiing, the Ozone Snow Tubing Park and lively après-ski bars, grills and cafes are other big draws at this popular all-season resort.

Nordic sports enthusiasts, typically start at the resort’s Raven Lodge then head out to explore more than 55 km (34 mi) of machine-groomed cross-country trails in Paradise Meadows. Snowboarders, too, can look forward to 20 km (12 mi) of scenic trails through a forested winter wonderland, winding up at the popular Snowshoe Fondue served at Raven Lodge. For summer sightseeing, there is one kilometre of disabled access boardwalk at the Paradise Meadows trailhead, suitable for wheelchairs and battery-powered scooters.

**Ocean adventure goes deep**

A true alpine-to-ocean destination, the Comox Valley offers open water adventure from kayaking around shipwrecks in Royston harbour to diving among massive deep water six-gill sharks near Hornby Island. But fishing is definitely one of the biggest attractions in the region. Salmon, halibut, and red snapper are popular catches in protected saltwater areas, while freshwater anglers head to local lakes and rivers for steelhead and cutthroat trout.
At Comox Fisherman’s Wharf and Comox Harbour Marina, pleasure boaters will find a full range of services, plus all the shopping, culture and amenities of downtown Comox just minutes away. From here, they can also rent sailboats and yachts (up to 50 ft) and arrange for skippers and bareboat training courses.

Gulf Island heli-tours, horseback trail rides, eco-paddling trips, whale-watching excursions and boat tours to see grizzly bears in the wild can all be arranged from the Comox Valley region or from close-by communities.

And for those who prefer outdoor adventure of a quieter kind, swimming, sunbathing or simply relaxing by the pool, Comox Valley beaches and resorts will not disappoint. Many offer everything from fine dining to luxury day spas to championship golf courses. For more on the Comox Valley’s alpine-to-ocean outdoor attractions and 40-plus parks, visit www.discovercomoxvalley.com.

Approx. 770 words

Photos courtesy of Tourism Vancouver Island/ Boomer Jerritt