

VANCOUVER ISLAND

VICTORIA and the GULF ISLANDS

Arts, Culture & Heritage

With scenery this inspiring, it's really no surprise that the Vancouver Island region is home to so many of Canada's greatest and most widely acclaimed artists and artisans. Visit galleries and shops located in virtually every community. Many galleries represent more than one artist and present a variety of art forms, from painting, sculpture, and carving to jewellery, pottery, and weaving. Another highly recommended way to see the arts of artists and artisans is in their own studios and galleries. Watch for the blue "artisan" signs along the roadways indicating a nearby studio.

Victoria, the Capital City of British Columbia, was originally established in 1843 by James Douglas as a fort for the Hudson's Bay Company. Bastion Square marks the site where a portion of the fort once stood. Also in Bastion Square, discover the province's sea-faring history at the Maritime Museum of BC, which is an excellent family attraction complete with pirates, shipwrecks, the "hanging judge", treasure maps and three floors of nautical exhibits.



Outdoor markets such as this display a wide variety of locally made artwork.

From here, walk to the world-renowned Royal British Columbia Museum which boasts an outstanding exhibit on the natural history of Vancouver Island and the province of BC from pre-Ice Age to present day. Visit Thunderbird Park, behind the Royal BC Museum where carvers create new totem poles in the carver's shed during the summer.

A short distance away, you will find additional sights including St. Ann's Academy, one of Victoria's most remarkable historic treasures; Helmcken House, a former doctor's residence and the oldest house in the province; Carr House, the birthplace of BC's most famous artist, Emily Carr; Point Ellice House, a rambling Italianate waterfront home with a lovely heritage garden; Craigdarroch Castle, the 39 room mansion built by Robert Dunsmuir, BC's first millionaire; as well as a treasure trove of artist galleries and studios. Get a taste of Canadian Military History at CFB Esquimalt Museum and Archives, housed in the former naval hospital on the historic base, HMCS Naden. If you head west on Highway 14, you'll reach Sooke and Port Renfrew, where many of British Columbia's finest artisans have galleries or studios. Sooke is also host for Vancouver Island's largest juried art show, *Sooke Fine Arts*. The Sooke Region Museum is a charming museum that depicts Sooke's pioneer history with a film presentation, informative exhibits, and delightful Moss Cottage.

A short ferry or floatplane trip away, the Gulf Islands offer tremendous arts and cultural experiences. ArtCraft, a summer-long exhibition and sale, showcases works by more than 250 Gulf Island artisans. Experience the wide range of art created on Salt Spring Island by following the Studio Tour Map which provides information on when local artisans open their studios for tours. On Mayne Island, visit the little shops in Miners Bay and explore local history at the museum, which was once a "gaol" ("jail") or visit St. Mary Magdalene Church, built in 1898, perched high above the road overlooking the rushing waters of Active Pass. On Gabriola Island, you can experience the long and colourful history evidenced by local treasures such as the petroglyphs located near Degnen Bay, the many historical farm and community buildings, and Gabriola's own museum. Tour local craft galleries and private studios to see the works of Gabriola's artisans and crafts people. Explore the amazing cave-like sandstone formations called the Malaspina Galleries.

Travelling north along Highway 1, you'll visit the Cowichan and Chemainus Valleys, reputed to have more resident artisans per capita than any other region of Canada. Stroll through the picturesque fishing village of Cowichan Bay, situated at the head of a natural deep-sea harbour, or play a game of tennis at the South Cowichan Lawn Tennis Club, one of the oldest lawn tennis clubs in the world, second only to Wimbledon. Visit Whippletree Junction, an unusual collection of shops and eateries constructed from 14 restored building fronts from the valley's former Chinatown. In Duncan, you can explore the area's First Nations heritage at the Quw'utsun' Cultural and Conference Centre with demonstrations of totem carving, weaving, bead working and knitting. Slightly north of Duncan is Chemainus, home of the Chemainus Theatre where you can enjoy a fabulous meal followed by a performance that is sure to leave you spellbound. Further north still is the charming town of Ladysmith. With its dozens of restored heritage buildings in the downtown core, it's no wonder that Harrowsmith Country Life magazine named it "One of the 10 Prettiest Places in Canada".

Continue heading north on Highway 1 and you'll reach the Central Island community of Nanaimo. Nanaimo is Vancouver Island's second largest city, and is known for its picturesque harbour. See artifacts and exhibits at the Bastion, built in 1853 and the oldest structure of its kind in North America. Stroll through the city on three heritage walks where interpretive signs describe



In 2004, readers of **Condé Nast Traveler** ranked Vancouver Island as the **Top North American Island** for the fifth consecutive year.

Suggested Minimum Travel Days

- Victoria—2 days
- Gulf Islands—1 to 2 days each
- Cowichan Valley—1.5 to 2 days
- Nanaimo—1.5 to 2 days
- Parksville / Qualicum Beach—3 days
- Port Alberni & Pacific Rim—2 days
- Comox Valley—1.5 to 2 days
- Campbell River—1.5 to 2 days
- North Island—2 days

Special points of interest:

- Royal BC Museum, Victoria
- ArtCraft, Salt Spring Island
- Quw'utsun Cultural & Conference Centre, Duncan
- Chemainus Murals, Chemainus
- New Castle Island, Nanaimo
- The Bastion, Nanaimo
- Old School House Gallery, Qualicum Beach
- Cola Diner, Qualicum Bay
- Coombs, Highway 4A
- Cathedral Grove, Highway 4
- McLean Mill National Historic Site, Port Alberni
- Pacific Rim National Park
- Cumberland
- Filberg Lodge & Park, Comox
- Haig-Brown House, Campbell River
- Telegraph Cove
- U'Mista Cultural Centre, Alert Bay

Nanaimo's colourful past, and browse the district museum which features exhibits on coal mining history, the Old Town Gallery, and Chinatown. Newcastle Island just offshore from Nanaimo, was the location of a coal mine and luxury resort in the 1930s. Today, it's a provincial park that is a favourite for walkers, picnickers, and cyclists. Take in entertainment at the 800-seat performing arts theatre. Further north on Highway 19 you will arrive in Parksville and Qualicum Beach, where you can browse through many of the artisans studios and galleries. Visit the Old School House Gallery and Art Centre for exhibits of potters, weavers, painters and other local artists, and see live theatre and music events presented at the Village Theatre or visit Bard to Broadway which features a summer repertory theatre program. Add a stop to the museum to see the palaeontology exhibit including fossils primarily from Vancouver Island and a 70,000-year-old adult female walrus nicknamed Rosie!

From here, you can choose to head west towards the Pacific Rim National Park (Option A), or continue north towards Port Hardy (Option B).

OPTION A Travelling west on Highway 4A, you will find yourself in the quaint "old west" village of Coombs. Area artisans frequently offer studio tours and the local country market offers a plethora of unique gifts and groceries as well as photo opportunities of the goats grazing on the grass-topped roof. A short distance away, a must-do is a stroll through awe-inspiring Cathedral Grove in MacMillan Provincial Park which features old growth Western Red Cedar and Douglas Fir, some estimated to be 800 years old. Continuing west, you'll find yourself in Port Alberni, where you can visit the Alberni Valley Museum, a treasure trove of local history, folk art, and First Nations culture. Browse through galleries and shops at the Harbour Quay Park and Market Place. Take a day trip on the MV Lady Rose and cruise the Alberni Inlet as this working vessel stops to deliver mail and picks up and drops off kayakers through the trip. Board the steam train and visit the McLean Mill National Historic Site.

Continue west and you'll travel along the very scenic Pacific Rim Highway to Barkley Sound and Clayoquot Sound. Here you'll find the coastal communities of Ucluelet and Tofino, and the world-renowned Pacific Rim National Park. Hike along trails through ancient forests in the National Park and in neighbouring islands. Venture on the 11-kilometre (6 mile) Ahousaht Wildside Heritage Trail on Flores Island, or take a guided walk/hike with a local guide or naturalist who will teach you about the flora and fauna of the area. Learn about the coastal marine life and the cultural history of the area's settlement, exploration, and development. The Wickaninnish Centre in the Pacific Rim National Park is an interpretive centre that presents a glimpse into the natural and human history of the Pacific Ocean. The winter presents a whole new experience along the west coast with exciting storm watching opportunities.

OPTION B Travel north on Highway 19A, you will come to charming and quaint coastal communities including Bowser, Fanny Bay, and Buckley Bay. Denman and Hornby Islands are a quick 15 minute ferry ride from Buckley Bay, where one can relax at one of the lovely beaches including Tribune Bay on Hornby Island, or enjoy the Hornby Summer Festival with a week of performances from opera and classical to jazz and family shows. Stop at the art gallery and museum in Denman Village and see a collection of works by island artists. Continue a short distance to the Comox Valley with some of the most beautiful farming landscape on Vancouver Island. Courtenay marks the first stop on Canada's Great Canadian Fossil Trail...visit the Courtenay Museum to see a life sized replica of an 80,000,000-year-old 12 metre (39 foot) Elasmasaur, or go to the Puntledge River dig site where you can try your hand at digging for fossils. Explore the history of aviation on the west coast at the Comox Air Force Museum. Experience Cumberland's rich history at the Cumberland Museum and Archives, which highlight a walk-in replica of a coal mine or stroll along the streets where the architecture reflects the town's history. During the August long weekend, visit Filberg Lodge & Park for the Filberg Festival, which is reputed to be the best arts & crafts festival in the province and highlights up to 140 of Western Canada's finest artisans.

An additional 30 minutes or so north will take you to Campbell River, beautifully set between Strathcona Provincial Park to the west and the Discovery Islands to the east. Learn about local industries with visits to a pulp and paper mill, a mine site, a salmon hatchery, or a forestry tour. Visit the Campbell River Museum featuring vignettes of early European settlement and an extensive collection of First Nations artifacts. Experience a First Nations adventure combined with a theatre performance. Visit Haig-Brown House Education Centre, a BC Heritage Site at the former home of writer and conservationist Roderick Haig-Brown. To learn more about the rich history of the First Nations people on Vancouver Island, be sure to include Wei Wai Kum House of Treasures and Gildas Box of Treasures Theatre in your itinerary. Continue west to Gold River and travel on the MV Uchuck III, a converted minesweeper that transports passengers and freights in historic Nootka Sound.

The North Island communities including Sayward, Telegraph Cove, Port McNeill, and Port Hardy offer exciting opportunities including community museums, forestry tours, and local artisan galleries and shops. Include a visit to First Nations attractions and cultural centres such as U'Mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, which contains one of the finest mask and Potlatch collections in the world. Stop at the Cablehouse Café in Sayward that has 2,700 metres (more than 1.5 miles) of logging cable enveloping it, or take a trip to Village Island and learn the history of "the Village of the Last Potlatch".

All this and more is yours to experience on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. **Just remember to bring your camera!**



Meander through rainforests and towering trees



Visit cultural heritage sites such as Village Island and be greeted with a traditional welcome



One of many murals that can be viewed in Chemainus

Did you know?

- Salt Spring Island is named for the salty mineral springs located on the north end of the island?
- Many of Canada's most acclaimed artists have chosen the Gulf Islands as their home?
- Duncan is home to more than 80 totem poles?
- The MV Lady Rose, now a passenger & cargo vessel that travels the Alberni Inlet, spent her early years providing food and supplies to World War II servicemen?
- Courtenay is the first stop on the Great Canadian Fossil Trail?
- The tallest totem in the world at 52 metres above ground can be seen in Alert Bay?

Contact Us:

Tourism Vancouver Island

Suite 203, 335 Wesley Street
Nanaimo, BC, V9R 2T5 Canada
Tel: (250) 754-3500
Fax: (250) 754-3599
Email: info@islands.bc.ca
Website: www.islands.bc.ca