

VANCOUVER ISLAND

VICTORIA and the GULF ISLANDS

Nature & Wildlife Viewing

Your experience on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands will astound you with the variety of nature and wildlife in this region.

From tiny butterflies to massive whales, you're sure to get a thrill. Starting with the delicate butterflies, stroll amidst hundreds of exotic butterflies flying free in an indoor tropical rainforest. Vancouver Island offers two locations to view these delicate creatures in the South Island and the Central Island regions. Witness the entire life cycle of these amazing insects amongst spectacular flowering plants and foliage, fascinating birds, waterfalls and streams. This is a photographer's paradise and a truly memorable experience for the entire family.

The majestic Bald Eagle is always a thrill to watch and can be seen in most communities on Vancouver Island. Goldstream Provincial Park in the South Island region is a great place to view the Bald Eagles as they feast through the winter after the salmon have spawned in the fall. Additional birds that can be seen in the Vancouver Island region include herons, geese, ducks, vultures, hawks, grouse, shorebirds, owls, woodpeckers, sparrows, finches and more. Bird watchers from around the world are drawn to Vancouver Island to learn about their habitat and behaviour during wildlife watching tours or at interpretive centres at various locations. In many communities, you can expect to see more than 150 species of birds! If you're looking to learn about birds of prey, a new Falconry centre in the Cowichan region is open to the public for viewing of hawks, eagles, falcons and more. They even offer 1/2 day and full day courses on the art of falconry.

The mighty Orca, also known as the killer whale, are most predominantly seen around the South Island region from late May through October, and the North Island region from late June through October. Take a whale watching cruise with a local tour operator on an inflatable zodiac or a larger boat and learn about the wildlife near the shores as you search for this majestic mammal which may just give the ultimate viewing with a spy hop or a breach. For an up close and personal experience with the Orca, participate in a multi-day kayaking/camping adventure in Johnstone Strait where you may just get the thrill of a lifetime by coming face to face with these magnificent creatures. General wildlife viewing tours operate year-round in the South Island region and commence in May in the North Island region.

Each spring (mid-March/early-April) the entire North American population of Pacific gray whales migrates along the West Coast of Vancouver Island. An estimated 20,000 gray whales make the 16,000 kilometre round-trip journey between their mating and calving lagoons on the Mexican Baja Peninsula and their summer feeding grounds in the Bering and Chukchi Seas near the Arctic. Gray whales are most predominantly seen off the shores of Vancouver Island's west coast with tours based out of Ucluelet and Tofino.

During the Pacific Rim Whale Festival, the hosting villages of Tofino and Ucluelet, along with Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, offer a wide range of events providing entertaining and educational activities for all. With over seventy events, some highlights include the Chowder Chow Down in Ucluelet - a seafood chowder cook-off competition guaranteed to whet your appetite and please the palate, the Parade of Whales in Tofino and an amazing Art Show featuring the talents of our West Coast artists.



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—3 days
Comox Valley—1.5 to 2 days
Campbell River—1.5 to 2 days
North Island—2 days



A breaching Orca is an impressive sight.

Special points of interest:

- Goldstream Provincial Park & Interpretive Centre
- Cathedral Grove
- Telegraph Cove
- Falconry & Bird of Prey Centre
- Snorkelling with salmon, Campbell River
- North Island Wildlife Recovery Centre
- Coastal inlets for bear watching
- Pacific Rim National Park Reserve
- Strathcona Provincial Park

Land mammals like black bears, cougars, raccoons and deer are often spotted along the back roads and highways, especially in the pristine wilderness of the North Island and Pacific Rim regions of Vancouver Island. Although there are no Grizzly bears on Vancouver Island, there are guided viewing tours available departing from the North Central and North Island regions into the nearby inlets of the mainland for Grizzly bear viewing. These tours generally last one full day or are packaged into multi-day excursions.



Grizzly mother & cubs feeding near the shoreline

You may even be able to catch a glimpse of the rare and endangered Vancouver Island Marmot while in the Mount Washington area of North Central island. The Vancouver Island Marmot, one of the rarest mammals in North America, is protected by Haley Lake Ecological Reserve. Majestic

Roosevelt Elk, found only on Vancouver Island, are of particular interest with herds being seen primarily in the North Island area. For those interested in a hands-on experience, why not try snorkeling with the salmon in Campbell River? Just don a wetsuit, mask and snorkel and you're on your way! There are two companies that offer snorkeling tours with the salmon from the Campbell River area. Most of the rivers on Vancouver Island are alive with spawning salmon from late June through to September. Park facilities and trails exist along most rivers, which allows for the witnessing of tens of thousands of salmon swimming up the shallow waters to spawn. One of the world's most productive sockeye salmon runs can be viewed at Roderick Haig-Brown Provincial Park near Campbell River.

Wondering what happens when wildlife is injured? Why not visit the North Island Wildlife Recovery Centre, located in the Central Island region, which cares for birds and other ill, injured and orphaned wildlife to find out. Their goal is to release as many creatures as possible back into the wild.

There are hundreds of parks on Vancouver Island, which encompasses over 430,000 hectares of parkland. The diversity of parkland ranges from urban parks like Beacon Hill in downtown Victoria to the 253,000 hectare Strathcona Provincial Park in the mountainous interior of North Central Vancouver Island.

The natural environment and wildlife of the Vancouver Island region is an important aspect of life for residents and visitors of the Vancouver Island region. Multi-day annual festivals and events celebrating wild lands and wildlife include the Pacific Rim Whale Festival in March, the Brant Festival in April and Tofino's annual Shorebird Festival in May.

The Brant Festival in the Parksville / Qualicum Beach area celebrates the return of thousands of "*talkative little sea goose*", the Pacific Black Brant, as they make their way to our shores each year from the lagoons of Mexico. Here, they rest and feed and then continue on their way to northern breeding areas in Alaska and northern Canada. They are our symbol of the wonder, variety, beauty and excitement of nature.

In April, tens of thousands of birds and wildfowl reach the West Coast during their annual migration. Ucluelet and Tofino are directly in the path of the Pacific Flyway, and is an ideal location for nature watchers. During the annual Shorebird Festival held in Tofino and Ucluelet during May large flocks of birds fill the sky. The estuaries along Barkley Sound and Clayoquot Sound are resting places for the flocks. Along the beaches, watch for migrating shore birds and in the newly emerging greenery, seek out the migrating songbirds. This is an excellent opportunity to take a bird walk with local naturalists.

Wherever your journey takes you, you're sure to get a delight in the nature and wildlife that Vancouver Island offers.

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Snorkeling with the salmon in Campbell River



Thousands of spawning salmon make the annual journey upstream continuing the circle of life.

Did you know?

- 440 metre (1,452 feet) Della Falls, in Strathcona Provincial Park, is Canada's highest waterfall, and one of the ten highest in the world?
- Carmanah Walbran Provincial Park is home to some of the world's largest spruce trees, some reaching heights in excess of 95 metres (310 feet) and living for 800 years or more?
- Vancouver Island is North America's largest island off the Pacific Coast at 31,284 square km?
- Gray whales can reach lengths of up to 15 metres (50 feet) and weigh in at 36 tonnes?
- There are some 7,000 known species inhabiting the coastal waters of Vancouver Island, over 200 species of migratory birds and 33 species of land mammals?