



Cathedral Grove



Top: TaNaMara View Below: Tofino Resort



Pure Canadiana

The great outdoors is the perfect backdrop to your romantic road trip on Vancouver Island. Waterfront communities on both coasts offer up warm hospitality and plenty of natural fun. | **BY DOUG WALLACE**

While the British Columbia coastal regions have a myriad of spots to explore, a road trip on Vancouver Island hits all the right notes. Hop in a car and onto the ferry at Horseshoe Bay to Nanaimo, then north to your first stop: Comox Valley. This thriving region offers nature-lovers plenty of adventure via wildlife viewing tours, mountain biking over 250 trails, year-round golfing – even caving on a rainy day. Add a tasting at 40 Knots Winery to your list of must-dos. You're staying at Kingfisher Oceanside Resort and Spa for the picture-postcard views of the Strait of Georgia and the unique Pacific Mist Hydropath at the resort spa.

Before you head down famed Pacific Rim

Highway #4 that winds through the mountains to the Island's west side, stock up on car snacks in Coombs, where the roadside Old Country Market has goats grazing on its rooftop pasture – a sight you can't miss. Along your two-hour drive, make time for two short walks: one at Little Qualicum Falls and the other at Cathedral Grove, home to the largest Douglas firs and red cedars in Canada. Once you reach the ocean, dip south for a night or two in Ucluelet, preferably in The Francis, a self-contained, high-style boutique inn. It's walking distance from the Wild Pacific Trail, a gorgeous eight-kilometre stretch of hiking through old-growth coastal rainforest.

Carrying on north, a few nights at the hip

Tofino Resort + Marina is next on the itinerary. This combo hotel, restaurant, bar, gym, marina and outdoor adventure centre is a hub of activity night and day with both tourists and locals. Before you leave town, try to spend an afternoon with Tofino Food Tours to get in on some of the area's top local culinary specialties.

On your way back to Nanaimo or Victoria, book in for a night or two in one of the romantic log cabins at Tigh-Na-Mara Seaside Spa Resort near Parksville, and make sure to hit the detoxifying mineral pool at its award-winning Grotto Spa. After that, you can start to plan your next visit.

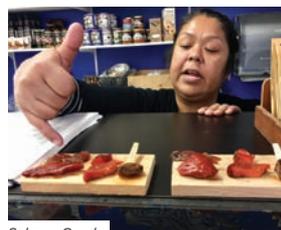
Six Things About Vancouver Island



> Vancouver Island has one of the warmest climates in Canada, mild enough to maintain subtropical flora like olive and lemon trees.

> Tofino is considered Canada's surfing capital, with year-round waves enticing surfers to 35 kilometres of sandy coastline.

> The Island produces some of the best hot-smoked sockeye and chum salmon in the world. Take some home from Docksider Smoked Fish Store in Tofino.

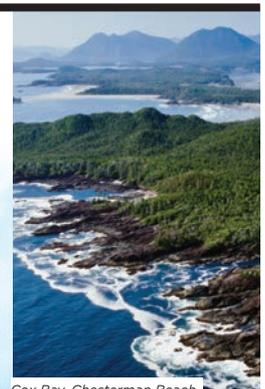


Salmon Candy

> The seasonal Ucluelet Aquarium is Canada's first catch-and-release aquarium, with an annual Release Day in early December.

> There are three main First Nations groups on Vancouver Island – the Kwakwaka'wakw, the Nootka and the Coastal Salish.

> Some of the Douglas fir trees on Vancouver Island are the oldest in the world, many commonly living up to 750 years old.



Cox Bay, Chesterman Beach