

Riding the chair lift, Mount Washington Alpine Resort



TRIP IDEAS

FAMILY ACTIVITIES ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

Central Vancouver Island, from Nanaimo to Comox, is full of family friendly spots. See dinosaur bones, tour through a dark cave, snorkel with seals or go ziplining between trees. Prefer a little relaxation? Sandy beaches and family friendly resorts have something for all family members.

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Nanaimo

Start the fun in the historic seaside city of Nanaimo, where the ferry from Vancouver arrives. Check out the Sports Hall of Fame exhibit in the Nanaimo District Museum, then head to the waterfront for a cannon firing demonstration at the Nanaimo Bastion, a 159-year-old fortress.

For an energetic day out, tackle the aerial adventure course at WildPlay Element Park, where ziplines, bridges and swinging logs are suspended high in the trees, or head out to the harbour to snorkel with seals (Sunset Diving offers snorkelling trips).

For overnight accommodations, book a family suite overlooking the harbour at the historic Best Western Dorchester. In the morning, it's French toast at Mon Petit Choux, a French bakery near the harbour. For lunch, take the kids on a ferry ride to the Dinghy Dock, Canada's only floating pub and restaurant.

A great time to visit Nanaimo is during the World Championship Bathtub Races, part of July's annual Nanaimo Marine Festival. Watch competitors race bathtubs around the harbour.

Oceanside

Oceanside, located just north of Nanaimo, is a long string of beaches that links Parksville, Qualicum Beach and Nanoose Bay.

Rathrevor Beach Provincial Park, with its wide sandy beach and warm water, is an Oceanside must-stop. After building

sandcastles at the beach, play a game of mini-golf in Parksville, or head to Coombs to see goats grazing on the sod-topped roof of the Coombs Country Market. Take the family sea kayaking in Nanoose Bay or explore the caves (there are family tours) at Horne Lake Caves Provincial Park.

Where to feed an adventure-filled family? Lefty's restaurant in Parksville serves up tasty burgers, wraps and potato wedges, and Morningstar Farm is known for its yummy artisanal cheeses and offers farm tours.

A cottage at a seaside resort is a good option for those with younger children. Try Oceanside Village Resort – it has an indoor pool, a beach and private patios. Tigh-Na-Mara Seaside Spa Resort has a mile of sandy oceanfront, a lavish spa complete with mineral pool and waterfall, and a roster of kids' and family activities ranging from swim lessons to campfire stories.

Courtenay and Comox

Beyond the beaches of Oceanside are Courtenay and Comox. At Crown Isle Golf Resort in Comox, villas with kitchens overlook the fairways. When mom or dad aren't golfing, the family can hike and bike at nearby Mount Washington Alpine Resort (the Tread Shed at the base of the mountain rents downhill bikes). In downtown Courtenay, check out the elasmosaur (a dinosaur-era sea creature) skeleton at the Courtenay and District Museum and Palaeontology Centre. Snacks? Head to the Atlas Café, a popular local hangout in downtown Courtenay, for quesadillas and peanut stir-fries.

Strathcona Provincial Park

Mountainous Strathcona Provincial Park is a favourite destination for many families. Strathcona Park Lodge offers packages designed for families that include rock climbing, kayaking, survival skills and adventure games. Mom and dad can relax in the wood-fired sauna on the beach.

Vancouver Island Transportation

BC Ferries sail from Horseshoe Bay (just north of Vancouver) and Tsawwassen (south of Vancouver) to Nanaimo several times a day. Ferries from Powell River (on the Sunshine Coast) sail to Little River, near Courtenay. In a hurry? Harbour Air, Westcoast Air and Seair Seaplanes fly from downtown Vancouver to downtown Nanaimo in just 20 minutes.



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