



Photo: Kristin Phillips

TRIP IDEAS

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROVINCIAL PARKS IN BC

BC Parks celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2011. In 1911, Vancouver Island's Strathcona Provincial Park became the first of what is now almost a thousand provincial parks and protected wilderness areas that, when combined, encompass a landmass larger than the states of Washington, Oregon and California rolled into one.

From mega to mellow, the range of park destinations is matched only by the diversity of outdoor activities – go rock climbing, hiking, kayaking, beachcombing and more. Check out the following BC parks for a sample of things to do and see.

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Strathcona Provincial Park

On Vancouver Island, start exploring Strathcona Provincial Park from one of two main access points near Campbell River and the Comox Valley. On the way, source fresh produce at the Comox Valley Farmer's Market in Courtenay (Saturdays in summer) and buy fresh seafood off the dock in Comox or Campbell River.

Strathcona Park is a year-round destination for outdoor enthusiasts. Popular activities include hiking, camping, rock climbing, canoeing, wildlife viewing, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Adjacent to the park, Mount Washington Alpine Resort offers a wide range of activities; in the summer hikers and mountain bikers are drawn by the extensive trail network and chairlift access to high alpine areas. Take the opportunity to improve outdoor skills at Strathcona Park Lodge's Outdoor Education Centre, a unique feature of this park.

For a self-guided mountain experience, drive 16km/10mi uphill from Courtenay to Strathcona Park's Mount Washington entrance. Begin at the Paradise Meadows trailhead adjacent to Mount Washington Alpine Resort, and explore the new Centennial Trail, a 2-km/1.2-mi wheelchair-accessible stretch of boardwalk and hard-packed gravel that leads through old-growth forest into the park's Forbidden Plateau region. Backcountry enthusiasts can hike to Della Falls, whose 440-m/1,443-ft drop makes it one of the highest waterfalls in Canada.

Mount Robson Provincial Park

Drive four hours north of Kamloops or an hour west of Jasper National Park on the BC-Alberta border to Mount Robson Provincial Park, home to the tallest peak in the Canadian Rockies and the headwaters of the Fraser River, which flows 1,400km/840mi before reaching the ocean near Vancouver. Take time to explore the expansive network of hiking trails, go fishing in pristine lakes or watch for shooting stars in the many wilderness campgrounds.

Follow the Berg Lake Trail for an epic backcountry hiking adventure. This 23-km/14-mi trail (one way) showcases some of the province's most stunning scenery, including views of Mount Robson, lush forests, rivers, lakes, waterfalls and glaciers en route to the spectacular sight of glacier-fed Berg Lake. Mountain biking is permitted on the first section of the trail, between the Berg Lake Trailhead and Kinney Lake Campground.

Rest your head at one of three camping areas within Mount Robson Provincial Park. Wilderness campsites are located along the Berg Lake Trail (reservations are recommended) whilst other camping and RV facilities and accommodations are found in and around Valemount.

Naikoon Provincial Park

Fly two hours from Vancouver to Sandspit, take a floatplane from Prince Rupert or reserve space aboard BC Ferries for the seven-hour sailing from Prince Rupert to Skidegate. Naikoon Provincial Park encompasses the northeastern corner of Graham Island on Haida Gwaii (formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands) in Northern BC. Revel in the most pristine of provincial parks poised off the BC coast within sight of the Alaska Panhandle.

From park headquarters in Tlell, site of the Edge of the World Music Festival in early August, explore East Beach to find the remains of the shipwrecked Pesuta that lies within an hour's walking or cycling distance of the Misty Meadows campground. Follow spongy trails on foot or by bike along the rainforested banks of the Tlell River. After all the beachcombing, a vertical workout is in order. Climb Tow Hill for views of Rose Spit, McIntyre Bay and Agate Beach campground. Before leaving, shop for jewellery and carvings at studios in Masset.

Garibaldi Provincial Park

The year-round resort village of Whistler is the major gateway to Garibaldi Provincial Park. The park can be accessed by car from five entrances located along Highway 99 between Squamish and Pemberton, starting just one hour north of Vancouver. Pick up picnic supplies in Whistler's Creekside neighbourhood, and then head south to nearby Garibaldi Park's Cheakamus Lake trailhead. Make alternate plans for Fido; pets aren't allowed in Garibaldi.

Walk or mountain bike the gentle 3.5-km/2-mi Cheakamus Lake Trail to the river's headwaters. The easy path meanders through old-growth forest and affords views of Cheakamus Lake. Stop for lunch at the lakeside campsite or use it as a base to explore the park. Follow the 3.5-km/2-mi lakeside path to Singing Creek for views of Whistler Mountain and companion peaks. Come fall, Cheakamus Lake's colour intensifies to a turquoise hue as silt from the glacial melt accumulates and reflects sunlight.



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