

Hiking the West Coast Trail



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TRIP IDEAS

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

Outdoor experiences on Vancouver Island take full advantage of the region's big trees and big breakers. Embrace Pacific Ocean activities with whale watching, kayaking or surfing in Tofino. Or stick to land adventures – try caving at Horne Lake or hiking the West Coast Trail.

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Cycling in Victoria

Victoria is the cycling capital of Canada. With idyllic rides like the Galloping Goose Trail and Seaside Touring Route, it is no wonder the city boasts more cyclists per capita than any other city in Canada. Tour Victoria's surrounding countryside: scenic farmland, picturesque lakes and tall maple trees.

Hike the West Coast Trail

The West Coast Trail is one of the world's most iconic wilderness hikes. This is a rugged, week-long, 75-km/47-mi hike on the island's wild western shore. The trailhead begins either 2.5 or 5 hours' drive from Victoria. Scramble up steep headlands, walk surf-swept beaches and sleep out under the stars. Reservations are required well in advance during peak season (June 15 – September 15), and proper gear and preparation are essential. If hiking the trail from north to south, stop at the Sooke Harbour House on the trip back for a fresh organic meal; many ingredients are grown on location in their famous kitchen garden.

Surfing and Kayaking the Pacific Rim

The small town of Tofino was named "Best Surf Town in North America" in Outside Magazine's 2010 Editors' Choice Awards. Step into a wetsuit and explore 35km/22mi of easy-to-access beaches with year-round surfing. Lessons and rentals are available. The Long Beach Lodge, a casual and elegant beachfront resort, is one of the best hotels on the coast.

Climb into a sea kayak for a tour of the Broken Group Islands, a protected chain of islands in Barkley Sound located in Pacific Rim National Park Reserve. Ucluelet is the departure point, with numerous operators offering rentals and tours ranging from quick day trips to multi-day excursions. For a memorable meal, visit Fetch Restaurant at the spectacular Black Rock Oceanfront Resort to enjoy West Coast cuisine using local ingredients.

Water Activities on Vancouver Island's East Coast

Experience a sense of wonder on a whale watching trip departing from Telegraph Cove on northern Vancouver Island. Many Orcas frequent the waters of the Robson Bight (Michael Bigg) Ecological Reserve in Johnstone Strait, which makes for one of the world's premier Orca-viewing destinations.

Kayakers will love the quiet, remote setting of Gulf Islands National Park Reserve on the south end of Vancouver Island. Pristine beaches, plentiful wildlife and sheltered waters combine to create an idyllic paddling environment.

Horne Lake Caves

Travel an hour north of Nanaimo to the underground realms of the Horne Lake Caves. With just a headlamp lighting the way, see dramatic rocks and crystals, or rappel down a subterranean waterfall on a guided spelunking tour (reservations are required). Once back into the sunshine, relax on the wide sands of Rathrevor Beach before heading to Sushi Ichi in Parksville, a local favourite with great Japanese food. A few minutes further south is Tigh-Na-Mara Spa Resort, featuring log cottages in a forest setting and rooms with ocean views.

Strathcona Hiking Trails

To see Vancouver Island's picturesque interior, travel an hour and a half from Nanaimo to Courtenay. From there, drive out of town to nearby Strathcona, British Columbia's oldest provincial park. Set out on one of the park's many hiking trails, which wind through sub-alpine forests and past mountain lakes.

Ziplining in Sooke

An hour west of Victoria, harness up for forest canopy ziplining at Adrena LINE Zipline Adventure Tours. Experience eight different ziplines, two suspension bridges and a 10-minute-long ATV ride as you soar up to 50m/164ft above the forest floor, reaching speeds of 60kph/37mph. This is a great family activity; tours are available for ages five and up.

Victoria Whale Watching

Starting at Victoria's historic Inner Harbour, board an open Zodiac boat for a far-ranging whale watching tour led by knowledgeable local guides. Track down the area's resident Orcas, and drift at a distance while watching tall dorsal fins slice through the water. Depending on the route, guests may also spot dolphins, grey whales and sea lions. Back at the harbour, try the fish tacones (taco-cones) at Red Fish Blue Fish (closed during winter months), one of Victoria's popular dockside eateries.

Vancouver Island Transportation

To reach Vancouver Island from Vancouver, board BC Ferries at Tsawwassen or Horseshoe Bay and travel to Swartz Bay, Duke Point or Departure Bay. The ferry passes by scenic islands and has great ocean views. Ferries from Washington State to Victoria are also available. By air, flights are available from Vancouver to Victoria, Nanaimo, Comox or Tofino. Flying times to Vancouver Island are around 25 minutes – and it's a lovely trip, so be sure to book a window seat.



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