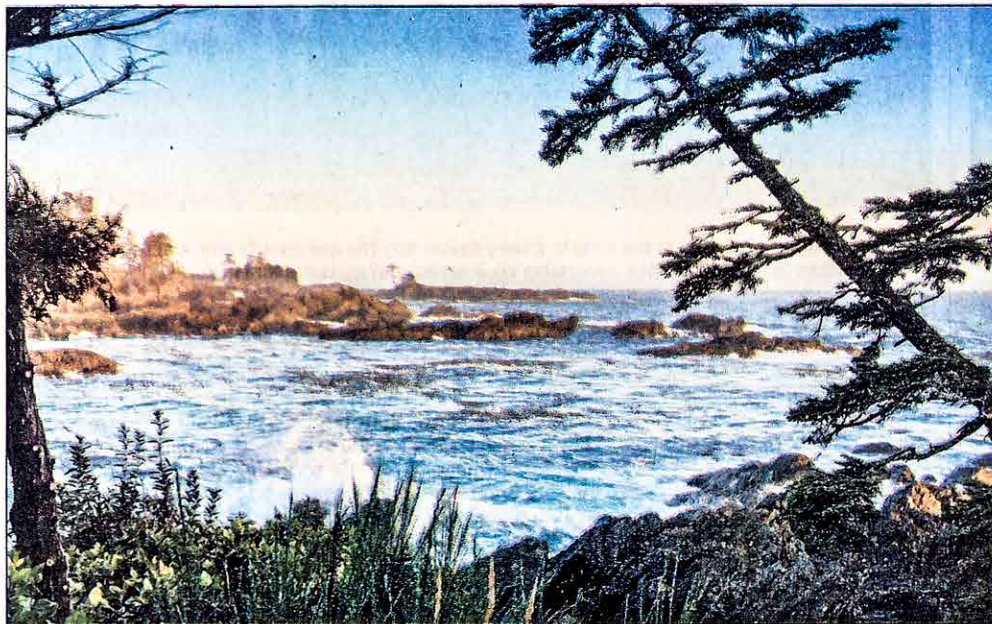


Discovering adventure and farm-fresh food on Vancouver Island



Photos provided by Steve Haggerty

Waves pound the shoreline near Ucluelet's Wild Pacific Trail on Vancouver Island, B.C.

Clueless in Ucluelet

By Anne Z. Cooke | McClatchy Newspapers

QUADRA ISLAND, CANADA

THE SHINY "Michael Jackson," popular lately with fishermen, isn't Ed Jordan's first choice. Even the pink and yellow "Disco Party" ranks higher on his list of hoochies. But after hearing that another Campbell River fishing guide hooked a 32-pound king salmon on it, he's reconsidering.

"Take a look," he tells me, idling the motor and rummaging through the tackle rack beside the wheel. Shaking his head, he unhooks a blue and green hoochie with silver sparkles and a tail like a hula dancer's skirt. "Nope," he says, after a long look. He puts it back and pulls out a Tomic Plug 602. This lure, five inches of ivory iridescence with a mean-looking hook, "swims" when you drop it overboard. "It's

IF YOU GO

To visit the south half of Vancouver Island, fly into Victoria, at the southern tip. From there it's three to four hours to drive to Campbell River, or west to Ucluelet. Or fly directly to Campbell River to vacation or fish in that area. Good roads, plenty of lodging and frequent shopping areas make renting a car the best way to travel.

Travelers need a passport to cross the border and to re-enter the U.S. For more information, go to www.hellobc.com or tourism-victoria.com.

old but it never fails," he says.

Sure enough, the Tomic does the job. By midafternoon we've hooked and landed two kings (Chinook) and a silver salmon (coho). To sweeten this sunny August day we've followed Quadra's ragged coastline, watched sea birds diving for dinner and spotted a pod of dolphins. Pleased, pumped and anticipating grilled salmon for dinner, we ask ourselves what took us so



Sports kayakers head out of the harbor in Ucluelet, Vancouver Island, B.C.

UCLUELET: British Columbia trek

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long to get here.

When you're a gypsy by trade, ever searching for new horizons, seeing the world — all of it — seems possible. But as one season succeeds the next and you postpone this trip, or that trip, some plans wind up in the reject pile. Until August, Vancouver Island, 299 miles long and 50 miles wide, lying off the southwest coast of British Columbia, was one of those places.

But not because it's too far away. Early morning flights from Los Angeles and Denver — and from most western U.S. cities — arrive in Victoria, British Columbia's capital city, around lunch time. Add an hour to rent a car and you're on your way. Give yourself a week and you can tour most of the lower half of the island, especially Ucluelet (you-CLUE-let), on the southwest coast. This was a place we knew nothing about but whose name alone was tantalizing enough to get out attention.

And so the adventure began. In Victoria, we tracked a pod of killer whales, explored the lively harbor scene and sampled the city's impressive new world of food. We spent a day as Canadian postmen, flying with mailman and pilot Mike Farrell on CorilAir's six-seater DeHavilland Beaver out of Campbell River. Farrell not only delivers letters, packages and emergency supplies to residents of six emerald-green islets, but he plays travel guide to sightseers along for ride, pointing out tidal currents, celebrity mansions, hidden harbors and apple orchards.

Following Route 19, between Victoria and Campbell River, proved as ample as potluck dinner at an Elks Club fund raiser. Harbors, inlets and towns dotted the eastern shore, some more scenic than others, but each with its fishermen's dock, sailboat slips, kayakers on the water and inviting green islets beyond.

Wandering through Nanaimo we ate lunch at Troller's Fish and Chips, a guidebook-recom-



Provided by Steve Haggerty

Penny Palen serves fresh seafood at Troller's Fish & Chips in Nanaimo on Vancouver Island, B.C.

mended restaurant that took us 20 minutes to find, but that more than lived up to its reputation. Heading west toward Tofino and Ucluelet on Route 4, we stopped to explore Cathedral Grove, walking among the park's 300 to 800 year-old Douglas firs, hoary ancients that have been spared the loggers' saws.

The biggest surprise was the abundance of farm-fresh food, sold or served everywhere. Stalls in open-air farmers markets, set back under shade trees near the highway, displayed piles of vegetables, fruit, cheeses, breads, fish, cuts of meat and specialty jams and sauces.

For a week we hustled, going 16-7. But we shifted to neutral in Ucluelet, taking time to wander along the Wild Pacific Trail and to tour the town's unique learning-focused aquarium. Even our lodging, at Black Rock Resort, was a poster child for the latest in minimalist design, instantly soothing. Ensclosed among white walls, plate glass and monochrome upholstery, watching the tide surge and ebb was almost obligatory.

In fact, the longer I watched the breakers rolling in, the harder it was to look away. As each wave rose, crested, curled over into a wall of foam, roared onto the rocks and slid in among the tree roots beneath the window, the easier it was to breathe deep.

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