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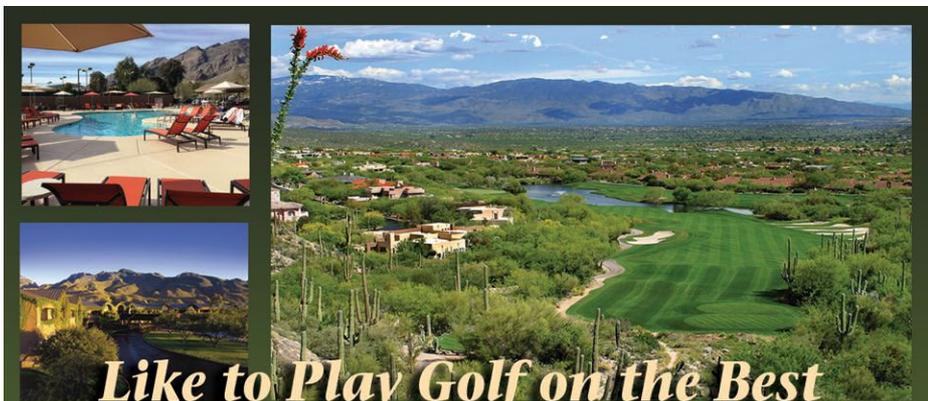
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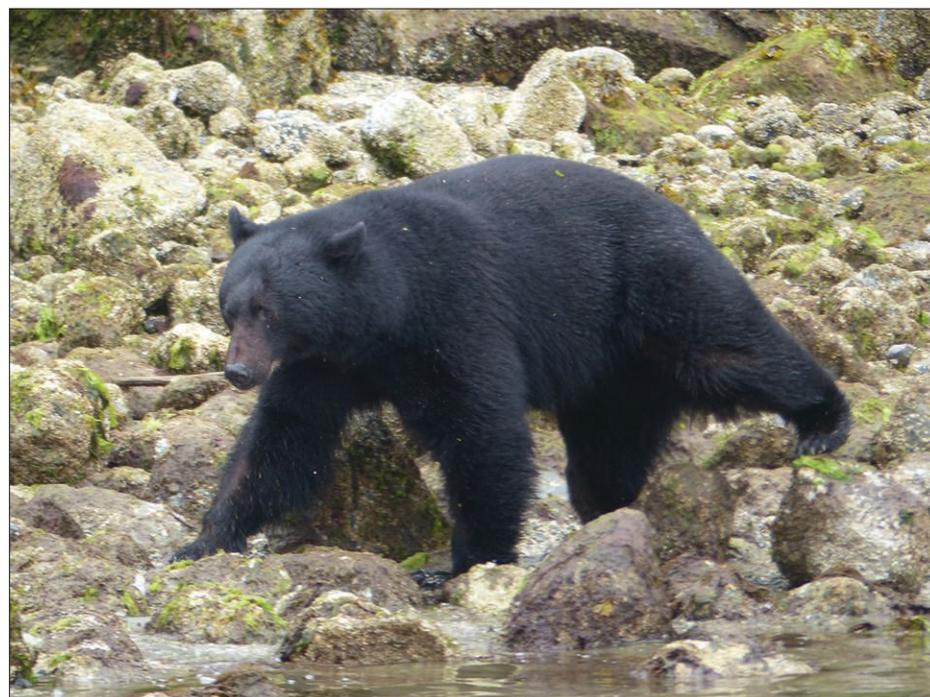
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## Great Escape



A black bear was spotted seeking a meal.

# The Spectacular Wild West Coast of Vancouver Island

Story and Photography by Mary Peachin

I gazed out the bedroom window of my Pacific Sands Beach Resort cabin, mesmerized by the gorgeous view. Surfers on Cox Bay were riding waves, dog walkers were ambling, and people were lounging on the beach. It felt as if I were adrift in the Pacific Ocean.

The wide sandy beach at Pacific Sands is part of the 25-mile corridor between Tofino and Ucluelet (pronounced you-KLEW-let), two Vancouver Island villages separated, in part, by the Long Beach Unit of Canada's Pacific Rim National Park Reserve. The reserve is comprised of three units: Long Beach, Broken Group Islands, and West Coast Trail.

All units of the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve offer a cultural experience in the form of interpretive walks, storytelling, and interactive displays hosted by descendants of its original inhabitants, the Nuuchahnulth First Nations.

Tofino was formerly an enclave for Vietnam War draft dodgers. Today the area is a tourist and surfer destination, offering a number of upscale resorts and fine restaurants. But, it's hard to beat the fresh and tasty fish tacos served from the Tacofino food cart, located in a parking lot along the Pacific Rim Highway. There is usually a line of people waiting to order—

rain or shine.

Situated on a scenic peninsula alongside Clayoquot Sound, Tofino offers easy access to year-round surfing. Summer activities in the area include black bear watching, kayaking, hiking, and salmon fishing. During winter, visitors may come just to watch the infamous winter storms crash on the area's rocky and sandy shorelines.

Mike White's *Browning Passage* isn't the fastest boat around, but what his two-story boat lacks in speed Mike makes up for with his longtime knowledge, interesting stories, and expertise about Clayoquot Sound. Aboard his boat early in the summer season, I have observed black bear mothers with cubs. In late summer, during low tides, I've watched bears feasting on spawning salmon. Last summer I saw bald eagles and sea lions, as well as black bears. It was the best wildlife viewing I've had on the *Browning Passage*.

A 1.5-hour boat tour from Tofino to Hot Springs Cove offers the oppor-



Landing a salmon in Barkley Sound, south of Ucluelet



Cox Bay is the featured view from the Pacific Sands cabin.

tunity, if you are lucky, to view humpback and orca whales. The hot springs, cascading through seven geothermal pools, are accessed by a mile-long boardwalk through old-growth forest.

On the south end of the Long Beach Unit, "Oyster Jim" Martin had a vision to build a trail to follow the beachless shoreline of Ucluelet. The former oyster farmer built the 4-mile Wild Pacific Trail by hand with the help of local volunteers. It was with great pride that he introduced my husband and me to his trail a dozen years ago. Hiking it has become a tradition for us. Family and pet friendly, the trail traces the dramatic beauty of ocean reefs. It's a great destination for photographers, storm watchers, bird-watchers, and hikers of all abilities.

South of Ucluelet, Barkley Sound covers an area of approximately 300 square miles and is home to another unit of the reserve, Broken Group Islands. These islands, explored by and named in 1787 by Captain Charles William Barkley aboard the *Imperial Eagle*, a British trading vessel, are popular with paddlers, anglers, and boaters. Boats wind among hundreds of islands, some as small as one square mile. The best paddling is from April to October. Sea kayakers often opt to reach the Broken Group Islands, aboard the *MV Frances Barkley*, from Port Alberni.

While archaeological evidence indicates the presence of First Nations habitation more than 4,300 years ago,

*continued on next page*

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A boat takes tourists out on Clayoquot Sound to enjoy wildlife sightings.

Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, which was established as the West Coast Trail Unit. The trail, which runs between the villages of Bam-

field and Port Renfrew, follows an old telegraph route and served as a survival route for shipwreck victims. European fur sealers began settling in the Barkley Sound area in 1870. Present-day recreational activities include surfing, fishing, whale watching, kayaking, camping, hiking, storm watching, biking, and beachcombing. Wolves are occasionally sighted swimming between islands to hunt deer, mink, and rabbit.

Our visit always includes a day of salmon fishing near Great Bear Island. We typically charter one of Dave Murphy's 26-foot Pursuit boats. Murphy is a Vancouver Island fishing legend. On our last trip, guide Kevin Barabash trolled for Chinook salmon, using downriggers lowered to a depth of 100 feet. It was early in the season, and we released small, 2- to 3-pound Chinook and a canary rockfish.

Hardcore hikers might want to tackle the 46-mile West Coast Trail, which passes through old-growth forests and wide-open beaches, and crosses suspension bridges spanning rivers and streams. The backpacking trail is located in the southernmost section of the

field and Port Renfrew, follows an old telegraph route and served as a survival route for shipwreck victims.

Although it is possible to take scheduled and chartered flights from Victoria as well as from points along the west coast of Canada and the US to Tofino-Long Beach Airport, ground-sea travel from the mainland to the west coast of Vancouver Island usually involves a ride aboard a ferry, and then a long, curvy, two-lane, mountainous drive (custom shuttle and scheduled bus options available) across Vancouver Island. The drive is long but scenic and well worth the time.

For more information about how to find your way to Tofino and the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve area, visit [tourismtofino.com](http://tourismtofino.com) and [pc.gc.ca/en/pnnp/bc/pacificrim](http://pc.gc.ca/en/pnnp/bc/pacificrim).

**DL**

*Mary L. Peachin is a local freelance writer. Comments for publication should be addressed to [letters@desertleaf.com](mailto:letters@desertleaf.com).*

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