2020 VISITORS GUIDE

COWICHAN
SLOW DOWN. SAVOUR LIFE.

THE DEFINITIVE BUCKET LIST OF THINGS TO SEE AND DO IN COWICHAN.
Situated 45 minutes north of British Columbia’s capital is Cowichan, a region that’s as renowned for its natural beauty and breadth of activities as it is for its culture and friendly locals. Cowichan consists of a vast belt that extends all the way across Southern Vancouver Island and features a kaleidoscope of vistas, villages and opportunities for adventure. Cowichan takes its name from “Quw’utsun’,” an indigenous word that means “the warm land.” The favourable weather here and naturally rich soil are factors that have made Cowichan famous for its agricultural bounty and more recently, its sheer number of internationally acclaimed wineries.

Cowichan’s temperate climate also allows for all kinds of year-round outdoor fun like hiking, beachcombing, kayaking, golfing, fishing and more. But that’s just the beginning. In the next few pages we’re going to recommend more than a dozen “bucket list” experiences for you to consider while you’re here. Whether you experience some or all of them, you’ll be left with memories that last a lifetime.
cke, discover this thriving community just a few minutes east of the highway. Here you’ll find boutique stores, antiques, artisanal cafes, a professional live theatre, plus dozens of giant murals and art installations located throughout the town.

**Cobble Hill**
North of Shawnigan Lake is the rolling farmland that comprises the community of Cobble Hill. Within 2 km from the centre of town, you’ll find a number of wineries and B.C.’s first estate cidery.

**Cowichan Bay**
Once a bustling fishing village, Cowichan Bay remains one of the most scenic peaks of the region. The community now boasts renowned eateries, boutiques, eco-tours and more.

**Crofton**
Crofton not only looks directly across to Salt Spring Island, but is home to the ferry that will take you there. Make sure you stroll the seawalk that begins near the Old School House Museum.

**Duncan**
Duncan is Cowichan’s largest community. Make sure you visit the original city centre just west of the highway, where you’ll discover art galleries, bistros, clothing shops and more.

**Genoa Bay**
Located south along Genoa Bay Road is the hamlet of Genoa Bay. Once a sawmill town, Genoa Bay is now home to a large marina and an outstanding restaurant.

**Honeymoon Bay**
Honeymoon Bay is located on the west side of Cowichan Lake and is surrounded by mountains and forests. Make sure to include it in your trip to the town of Lake Cowichan.

**Ladysmith**
Founded at the turn of the century, this quaint town’s downtown core is home to a variety of shops, boutiques, bookstores, antique dealers and more eateries than you can shake a stick at.

**Lake Cowichan**
The Town of Lake Cowichan is home to the 34-kilometre long body of freshwater called Cowichan Lake. Central to the region, it has a considerable history and is a paradise all on its own.

**Malahat**
The spectacular Malahat Highway and its namesake mountain is the gateway to Cowichan from the south.

**Maple Bay**
Located 10 minutes east of Duncan, Maple Bay is a wonderful spot for canoeing, rowing, swimming, sailing, fishing, rowing and scuba diving. There are great dining options there too.

**Mill Bay**
Mill Bay is a quiet seaside community that has grown by leaps and bounds. Nowhere is that more apparent than at the Mill Bay Marina, home to a top-notch waterfront bistro and yacht marina.

**Oyster Bay**
Oyster Bay is located just north of Ladysmith, and is home to the newly-opened Micristol Inn & Suites.

**Saltair**
Nested between Ladysmith and Chemainus, Saltair is another one of Cowichan’s idyllic seaside communities.

**Shawinigan Lake**
Located just west of Mill Bay is Shawinigan Lake, a popular place for canoeing, rowing, swimming, and fishing. It’s also the gateway to the world-famous 546-foot high Kinsol Trestle.

**Yellow Point**
Cowichan’s northernmost community: a rugged, beautiful location that features long and winding country roads, various parks and beachfront accommodation.

**Youbou**
Youbou is a community situated 10 minutes north of the town of Lake Cowichan. Stop at Arbutus Park – a wonderful place to swim and picnic.

**Distance in Kilometres to Central Cowichan**

| From Vancouver | 132 | From Seattle | 232 |
| From Victoria | 60 | From Calgary | 1,100 |
| From Tofino | 256 | From Edmonton | 1,290 |
| From Nanaimo | 50 | From New York | 4,200 |

**Getting to the Cowichan Valley**
Discover all the ways you can get here on page 48.
WE'RE OFF THE BEATEN TRACK, BUT OUR FLAVOURS ARE CUTTING EDGE

SAWMILL TapHouse and Grill
3055 Oak St, Chemainus, BC
250-342-0222 | sawmilltaphouse.com

You’re so close to visiting Cowichan, you can almost taste it.

Fertile soil and a temperate climate, combined with some very gifted farmers have put Cowichan on the international foodie radar of late. So much so, renowned foodie, James Barber referred to Cowichan as “Canada’s Provence”.

Wineries, cideries, distilleries and breweries dot the landscape, all of which supply the growing number of fine restaurants, bistros and bakeries. From the informal to the five-star, there is something for everyone here. Start your day with fresh baking, gourmet coffee and a healthy serving of local gossip at one of the many mouth-watering bakeries, such as True Grain Bread in Cowichan Bay, Duncan Garage, or Old Town Bakery in Ladysmith. Beat the midday growlies with a handcrafted burger at Bridgemans Bistro in Mill Bay or brunch at Brunch on 3rd or the new Ironworks Cafe & Creperie in Duncan. If you’re looking for a lighter dali lunch with a French flair, Ma Maison in Chemainus is “magnifique”. Also in Chemainus is the “cutting edge eatery”, Sawmill TapHouse and Grill. And for divine local fish and chips, visit the Rock Cod Cafe in Cowichan Bay.

Cowichan is also famous for locavore cuisine, such as that found at Farm Table Inn located just east of Lake Cowichan, The Restaurant at Unsworth Vineyards in Cobble Hill and the Alderlea Farm and Cafe in Glenora. In Duncan there are a number of options including The Ainslie, Heritage Indian Cuisine and Hudson’s on First.

To cap off your perfect Cowichan evening, how about one of Jeff’s exceptionally creative craft cocktails at The Old Firehouse Wine & Cocktail Bar? Just down the street is the Craig Street Brew Pub, which features a lovely selection of craft beers made locally by Red Arrow Brewing Company – one of a number of locally-based craft breweries.

Run by Victor and Margit, Westholme Tea Farm on Richards Trail is Canada’s only tea farm. Margit is also a world class ceramicist.

Many chefs are internationally trained award-winners, who choose Cowichan over anywhere else in the world as their home.

TourismCowichan.com | 9
SAVOUR

Small town. Big fun.

Who'd have thought you could pack this much fun into a small town? We’ve got parades and concerts in the park, marine festivals and sogar sports. Canada Day celebrations and our amazing Transfer Beach. And that’s just at the bottom of the hill. Our parks, trails and recreational facilities are jam-packed with fun things to do on sunny days, rainy days, and all the days in between. Seriously. There’s big fun to be had in this small town.

SAWMILL TAPHOUSE

Vancouver Island’s and Cowichan’s famous destination Taphouse & Grill. 26 Pacific Northwest craft beers on tap. Wood fired pizza, in-house smoked ribs, amazing apps and brunch, elegant rustic ambiance. Open 7 days a week with brunch on weekends.

161 Kenneth St., Duncan | 250-597-3695

ROCK COD CAFE

Fresh OceanWise seafood and lots of it! One meal and you’ll be Hooked For Life. Featuring famous fish & chips, fish tacos and a host of other good fare to fill you up and keep you coming back for more.

1759 Cow Bay Road | 250-746-1550

www.rockcodcafe.com

TRUE GRAIN

True Grain is an old-world inspired European bakery where the craft of the miller and baker are honed and cherished. Our passion is creating fresh, local, organic, handcrafted bread and pastries.

1725 Cowichan Bay Road | 250-746-7664

www.truegrain.ca

MA MAISON

Owned and operated by Lauren Cartmel and her team, on Chemainus Road, in Saltair BC. Serving a curated mix of fresh baked goods and deli style breakfast and lunch menu. Sourcing the best local fare - farm to table style.

10445 Chemainus Road | 250-732-6069

SAWBOUR

PLACES TO EAT IN COWICHAN

THE AINSLIE

At the Ainslie, we’re all about promoting the bounty of produce and products from the Cowichan Valley, while creating a relaxed and comfortable environment in beautiful Downtown Duncan. Here people can enjoy food and drink made with the utmost care.

161 Kenneth St., Duncan | 250-597-3695

Thursdays 4-8pm Happy Hour, Thursday night music, 12-5pm BYOB (bring your own breakfast)

10, 305 Oak Street | 250-597-3695

www.theainsliecafe.com

Genoa Bay Cafe

Come Enjoy Casual Fine Dining Where MT TZOAHALEM MEETS THE OCEAN

5000 Genoa Bay Rd, Duncan, BC • 250.746.7621
www.GenoaBayCafe.com

MA MAISON

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10445 Chemainus Road | 250-732-6069

www.mamaisoncafe.com
In Cowichan, our markets are open and business is brisk.

Cowichan is interlaced with dozens of back roads that will introduce you to the most splendid vistas. In the north you can explore the oceanside towns of Ladysmith, Saltair, Crofton and Chemainus. In the interior, there’s Youbou, Honeymoon Bay, and Lake Cowichan. To the south, there’s Maple Bay, Duncan, Shawnigan Lake, Cowichan Bay, Cobble Hill and Mill Bay. No matter where you travel here, you’re bound to encounter many of the roadside stands that offer locally grown goods.

Fall is harvest season in Cowichan with many farm stands offering farm fresh chicken and duck eggs year round. In the spring and summer, roadside stands burst with fruit, flowers and just about any vegetable you can think of. If you’re staying at a place with a kitchenette, spend a day “farm stand foraging” – shopping at these local roadside stands.

We also have a number of dedicated farmers markets where local producers come together to produce one large, farm fresh cornucopia. These include the Duncan Farmers Market (year-round on Saturdays in Downtown Duncan) the Lake Cowichan Community Market, the Chemainus Wednesday Farmers Market, the Honeymoon Bay Outdoor Market and the Cobble Hill Farmers Market.

Other Cowichan enterprises that wave the local farm fresh banner include Damali Lavender & Winery, Cowichan Green Community and Farm Gate Foods – a catering company that sources its ingredients from more than a dozen local suppliers. Oh, and if you see Holstein cattle along Koksilah Road near Cowichan Station, chances are they provide milk for the independent and aptly named Cowichan Milk Company. For a downloadable map of locally produced food and drink here in Cowichan, visit www.cowichangreencommunity.org

The Duncan Farmers Market is the only year-long, outdoor market in Canada with over 150 vendors showcasing their goods every Saturday morning, rain or shine!

Because it has the longest growing season in all of Canada, Cowichan is home to more than 700 working farms.
How sweet is a visit to Cowichan?

If you have a sweet tooth, we have some very good news: in Cowichan we have a growing number of establishments where you can get your sweet fix. From Mill Bay to Ladysmith, there are sweet somethings just about everywhere you turn.

In Mill Bay you can enjoy ice cream on a deck at Mill Bay’s Rusticana Coffee. Farther north in Cowichan Bay is Original Udder Guys Ice Cream and Candy, which has become well known for its original ice cream flavours.

In Shawnigan Lake is Shawnigan House Coffee & Chocolate, a company that makes their chocolates in-house and uses locally roasted, fair trade coffee beans. In Downtown Duncan, there’s Chocolate Pearl, an independent chocolate shop renowned for their artisanal chocolates using many local ingredients, including coffee from Drumroaster Coffee, wine from Blue Grouse Estate Winery, and tea from Westholme Tea Farm. If you’re in Chemainus, be sure to visit Owl’s Nest Bakery Bistro, which features delicious homemade food and treats – many of which also include fresh local ingredients.

Also in Downtown Chemainus is Hansel and Gretel’s Candy Co. With a name like that, do we really need to explain the assortment of treats that they sell? Farther north, in the town of Ladysmith (location for the recently filmed Sonic the Hedgehog movie), there’s the legendary Old Town Bakery, known for their outrageously delicious cinnamon buns.

All of the chocolates at Duncan’s Chocolate Pearl are handcrafted. Many incorporate local ingredients such as lavender, tea, mint, ale and wine.

Original Udder Guys Ice Cream and Candy in Cowichan Bay has been serving up its original recipe, handmade ice cream, and nostalgia candy for 20 years.
THE DEFINITIVE BUCKET LIST
FOR FAMILIES

One of the reasons why Cowichan is such a popular vacation destination is because of its family friendly nature. Visitors are often surprised at the sheer breadth of things to see and do with the kids here. If you’re bringing your kids, here’s a list of things you shouldn’t miss.

1. Spend a day at BC Forestry Discovery Centre in Duncan.
   A fun place to learn about the past present and future of our logging industry. Also home to one of the few working steam engines in Canada.

2. Take a stroll along the Kinsol Trestle near Shawnigan Lake.
   Named for the short-lived “King Solomon Mine”, it is an engineering feat, even by today’s standards and remains one of the loftiest wooden railway trestles in the world.

3. See birds of prey at Pacific Northwest Raptors, north of Duncan. They offer daily flying demonstrations featuring majestic birds of prey, like eagles, owls and falcons.

4. Indulge in delicious ice cream at Original Udder Guys.
   Located in Cowichan Bay, Original Udder Guys Ice Cream and Candy features delicious artisanal ice cream that has no artificial additives, flavours or preservatives.

5. Go fish! There are kid-friendly spots all over Cowichan, including Chemainus Lake, Fuller Lake, Crofton Lake and many wharves along the oceanfront. If you don’t have gear, go see the experts at Bucky’s Sport Shop in Downtown Duncan.

TourismCowichan.com | 1716 | TourismCowichan.com
A DREAM VACATION

THAT INCLUDES
PLENTY OF SHOPPING

If you’re open to a unique shopping experience, we are too.

When Cowichan was first settled, it was dotted with specialty stores to supply the everyday needs of locals. These included general stores, apothecaries, haberdashers, milliners, chandlers and hatters, among others. Today, the storefronts and offerings have changed, but the ambiance, selection and country charm are just as they were back then.

Typifying this is the shopping experience you’ll discover in Chemainus, where so many shops are independent and run by hardworking folks who are passionate about their local offerings. Some of these include antique stores such as Highway Antique Emporium (Island Highway & Henry Road) and Willow Antique Mall on Willow Street. Also on Willow Street is the funky Beyond The Usual clothing store.

If you’re in Cowichan Bay, you can stroll the waterfront and discover a number of other independent merchants, including Wild Coast Perfumery (known for their exquisite, plant-based, artisanal perfumes) and Beachology (known for their beach inspired furniture, home decor, jewelry and apparel)

In Downtown Duncan, be sure to visit Resthouse Sleep Solutions, which has become well known for their quality, long-lasting natural and sustainable bedding products. While you’re downtown, make sure you ask for a map from the unmistakable red brick City Hall on Craig Street. In a three block radius you can visit a number of renowned shops, including Cardino Shoes, Wall Street Clothing, The Garment District, The Red Balloon Toyshop, Imagine That! (premier artisans cooperative), Fabrications (European-inspired clothing) and Volume One Bookstore. If you’re traveling north on Richards Trail, stop by and ask Margit Nellemann about her stunning handmade ceramics at Westholme Tea Farm. A bit father north in Ladysmith is Left Coast Fashions, another upstart independent that offers a unique selection of locally designed clothing, jewelry, soaps, candles and other handcrafted treasures.

Wild Coast Perfumery, based in Cowichan Bay, blends pure plant based, precious essential oils and wild harvested tinctures made from needles, leaves, flowers, lichen, fungi and moss from our forests.
Raise your expectations and your glass when you come to Cowichan.

Since the first commercial vineyard was planted here in the 1970s, Cowichan has exploded with an abundance of winemakers who craft their wines with traditional vinifera grapes such as Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer and Ortega, along with other varieties. Many of these wineries can be visited on your own, or perhaps more wisely, on a guided wine tour with a company such as Cheers Cowichan. Just as about every operation you visit here, you’ll get to chat with the proprietors themselves and learn firsthand what makes our terroir so ideal for making wine, spirits and beer.

From the south there’s the award-winning Unsworth Vineyards and Restaurant with its lovely pastoral views. Not far away is Enrico Winery on Telegraph Road, known for their divine ortega and Charme De L’ile. Just down the road is Damali Lavender and Winery, where you can discover a lovely selection of uniquely blended wines that incorporate lavender. At Cherry Point, there’s Cherry Point Estate Wines where Maria and Xavier have a fabulous bistro where you can sample their exquisite selection of wines.

Other wineries on your bucket list should include Glenterra Vineyards, Divino Estate Winery, Venturi-Schulze Vineyards, Rocky Creek Winery, Blue Grouse Estate Winery, Vigneti Zanatta, Alderlea Vineyards, Deol Estate Winery, Emandare Vineyard (named after proprietors Mike & Robin) and situated on the slopes of Mount Prevost, is Averill Creek Vineyard, home to a patio with an incomparable view.

Cowichan is a mostly dry region that seldom freezes, creating a long season that gives vintners a more extensive selection of grapes to choose from.

Cowichan has been called the “Napa of the North” and is the one of the largest wine regions in B.C. with fourteen independent wineries. Some of our vineyards date back to 1860.
And yet, those are just the wineries. Cowichan is also known for its fabulous craft beer from independents such as Red Arrow Brewing and Small Block Brewery in Duncan, and the feisty Riot Brewing in Chemainus. Cider, you say? Well, say no more, because we’re also home to two independent cideries: the well-known Merridale Cidery and Distillery in Cobble Hill and the emerging Valley Cider Company in Chemainus. Cider, you say? Well, say no more, because we’re also home to two independent cideries: the well-known Merridale Cidery and Distillery in Cobble Hill and the emerging Valley Cider Company in Chemainus.

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THE DEFINITIVE BUCKET LIST
FOR COUPLES

Cowichan is a natural destination for couples. The vast number of couples that come here are those that want to see Mother Nature at her best and revel in authentic experiences. There are countless things to do, from something as simple as skipping rocks on a quiet beach to dining by candlelight at a rural restaurant. Here are our top five bucket list items for couples.

1. Hike Stoney Hill Park. Located between Maple Bay and Genoa Bay is Stoney Hill Regional Park. From the trailhead on Stoney Hill Road is a 3.5 km loop trail that takes you past not one, but several spectacular vistas, including those of the Saanich Peninsula, Sansum Narrows and Salt Spring Island.

2. Kayak for two. Opportunities for kayaking the waters around Cowichan abound. It’s a well-known fact that Bing Crosby was a frequent visitor to the waters around Cowichan Bay. Legend has it that those who paddle the waters of Cowichan Bay when the moon is full hear Bing quietly singing in his distinctive warm voice.

3. Have a romantic meal at Genoa Bay Café. Located at the very end of Genoa Bay Road in the hamlet of the same name, The Genoa Bay Café has a lovely oceanfront patio. They feature local seafood such as Salt Spring Island mussels and seasonal specials such as fresh halibut.

4. Sleep beneath a billion stars. The word “romantic” doesn’t adequately describe what it’s like to fall asleep together in a rustic hideaway far away from the everyday. In Cowichan you have many options, including the yurts at Merridale Cidery and Distillery, “The Tractor Shed” at Emandare Vineyard, the “Grouse House” at Blue Grouse Estate Winery and the charming B&B at Farm Table Inn.

5. Check out the Duncan Farmers Market. Operated year round in Downtown Duncan, this famous local institution subscribes to a “you make it, you bake it, you grow it, you sell it” philosophy. Here, you’ll find fresh local fruits, vegetables, baking, jams, crafts, clothing and more!
THE BIKING IS BEYOND SPECTACULAR

Bring your bikes and a sense of adventure.

When it comes to mountain biking, Cowichan is naturally and beautifully endowed. As a valley, it is surrounded by forested mountains, many of which are now home to world class biking trails. In fact, Cowichan has more than 170 trails that make up approximately 180 kms of bike trails of varying difficulty. The lion’s share of these trails can be found on four local mountains: Maple Mountain, Mount Tzouhalem, Mount Prevost and Cobble Hill.

Located between Crofton and Duncan, Maple Mountain is home to no less than 29 trails from green to black diamond, plus a new 17.5 km loop that will give you a round trip, complete with spectacular views. Overlooking Cowichan Bay, Mount Tzouhalem has a great variety of trails from green to black diamond. The cherry on the top of this sundae may well be the view from the top. On a good day you can see Saanich to the south and Sahtlam to the west.

With trail names such as “Mr. T”, Adrenaline” and “Bubonic Chronic”, 2,600 foot high Mount Prevost offers only black to double black diamond trails – that’s why it’s favoured mainly by intermediate riders and pros. At the top you’ll see the 33 foot high white cairn built to honour those who fought in both world wars. Views from the summit are breathtaking and on clear days you can see the San Juan Islands in Washington State.

Located near the town of the same name, 1,100 foot high Cobble Hill has 28 trails suitable for beginner to intermediate riders. Near the trailhead is Cleasby Bike Park, a recreational area where bikers of all ages can practice their skills with the use of dirt jumps, a pump track and a skills section. The other draw for bikers here is the Cowichan Valley Trail, which is part of “The Great Trail”, a 24,000 km system of trails, roadways and waterways that spans our nation. The Cowichan section runs from the top of the Malahat, north to Shawnigan Lake, west to the Town of Lake Cowichan then north to Nanaimo. As much of the trail runs along former railway routes, most of it is wide and flat with gentle grades, making it suitable for family outings. Don’t have a bike, then contact the folks at Cycle Therapy in Downtown Duncan. For a guided bike tour of our rugged region, contact Alan at Next Level Riding.

The renowned and epic “BC Bike Race” has chosen Cowichan for its starting point. The route will include the internationally-acclaimed biking trails that exist on Maple Mountain and Mount Tzouhalem.

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Cowichan gives you the path, you create the journey.

Generally speaking, where one can go biking in Cowichan, one can also go hiking. That is to say, all the mountain biking hotspots mentioned in the previous section (Maple Mountain, Mount Tzouhalem, Mount Prevost, Cobble Hill and Cowichan Valley Trail) are great places for hiking. But there are also a myriad of other parks where the experience and scenery are just as spectacular.

Near the seaside hamlet of Saltair is Stocking Creek Park. The park features manicured trails, stairs and an idyllic waterfall. If you’re lucky, you might catch sight of owls, deer, eagles and herons. Skutz Falls Loop refers to the scenic 6.4 km trail located off Highway 18, 4 km west of Duncan. Most of the route follows the Cowichan River and at one point, crosses “66 Mile Trestle”.

Another option is the Cowichan River Footpath, an easy hike that follows the meandering banks of the Cowichan River. 20 km in length, it affords a leisurely daylong hike that will introduce you to immense old growth forest, soaring cliffs plus a wide array of local flora and fauna. Yet another great day hike is the Holland Creek Trail. Located just south of Ladysmith, this 6.5 km loop follows Holland Creek and features a cascading waterfall and a wonderful picnic spot that overlooks Ladysmith Harbour.

Located off Genoa Bay Road is Stoney Hill Regional Park with its famously-scenic 3 km loop trail. If you’ve seen scenic selfies taken in Cowichan, chances are many of them were taken from here.

Near the summit of Mount Tzouhalem is a 12 foot high white cross that can be seen for miles.

Where else can you hike up a mountain and see whales? Looking down towards Satellite Channel from the top of Maple Mountain, you just might spot pods of orcas.

Continued on the next page

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A little more extreme is the trail that leads up Old Baldy Mountain, located just south of the village of Shawnigan Lake. At 1,500 feet and fairly steep, it makes for a challenging hike to the top. But when you see the sweeping panoramic views at the summit, you’ll know it was worth it.

If you’re staying in or around Duncan, other short jaunts include the Somenos Marsh Conservation Area (a great spot for bird watching just north of Downtown), the romantic Crofton Seawalk (near the ferry terminal in Crofton), the Cowichan Estuary Trail (trailhead at Maple Grove Park at Cowichan Bay Road and Tzouhalem Road) and The Chemainus Lake Loop (a 2.5 km manicured trail that circles the reedy and rainbow trout -stocked, Chemainus Lake).

Atop Old Baldy Mountain is a dramatically-placed homemade swing that’s become the backdrop to countless selfies.
If you’re looking for a wild time, you’ll find it in Cowichan.

The vast swath known as Cowichan is bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Salish Sea to the east. In between are 3,500 square kilometres of largely untamed wilderness. With this in mind, it’s a given that no matter where you go, you’ll get to see much of our native flora and fauna.

In our local waters, you might see orcas, sea lions or harbour seals — for this, you might consider a kayaking adventure with Blue Dog Kayaking in Mill Bay, Wilderness Kayaking in Maple Bay, or Cowichan Bay Kayaking and Coastal Bliss Adventures in Cowichan Bay. For a little whale watching, there’s Ocean Ecoventures, also based in Cowichan Bay. While you’re in Cowichan Bay, be sure to visit the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre in Hecate Park where you can learn about the local waters through informative interactive exhibits and fun, hands-on activities.

In other parts of Cowichan, there’s a chance you’ll see blacktail deer, trumpeter swans, kingfishers, quail and occasionally, bears. To see many of our local birds of prey up close, including hawks, eagles and owls, make a point of visiting Pacific Northwest Raptors on Hard Road, just north of Duncan.

If you plan to go hiking in any of our many forested parks, keep an eye out for our local tree species, including fir, cedar, hemlock, maple, dogwood and the venerable Garry oak, which can live up to 400 years. And, If you decide to drive to the town of Lake Cowichan along Highway 18, watch your speed limit — not just because of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, but because of the wild herds of Roosevelt Elk that call this corridor home.

Every fall, the waters and docks of Cowichan Bay become home to hundreds of transient sea lions from California, Oregon and Washington.

When in Cowichan, chances are you’ll see eagles. They build their nests or “aeries” in the tops of trees such as the cedar. For Indigenous Peoples, the cedar tree is used for making houses, totem poles, canoes, plus mats, clothing, baskets and fishing lines.
Our many marinas are just more gateways to discovery.

The magnificent Cowichan coastline and its many surrounding islets, harbours, secluded bays (and lakes) are dotted with dozens of well-provisioned places to tie up, refresh and refuel – both you and your craft.

Many marinas have pubs and fine dining restaurants, which have become destinations for both boaters and the public at large. Notable stops include the Mill Bay Marina (home to Bridgeman’s Bistro), Cowichan Bay Marina, Pier 66 Marina, Dungeness Marina and Bluenose Marina in Cowichan Bay, Maple Bay Marina (home to Shipyard Restaurant & Pub), Genoa Bay Marina (home to Genoa Bay Café) and Ladysmith Marina (home to a beautifully curated maritime museum).

If freshwater boating is more your style and you find yourself on Cowichan Lake, look no further than Cowichan Lake Marina, where they have a boat launch, moorage and gas bar.

The first European explorer to drop anchor in our waters was Captain James Cook in 1778. Subsequent expeditions were conducted by explorers such as Galáno, Valdés and Prevost.

It’s very common to see harbour seals at most of our marinas. Less common is catching sight of river otters. They do hang around many of the marinas – they’re just a little more shy than our seals.
Three major rivers, an ocean and countless lakes: bring a bathing suit.

One of the things that defines us here in Cowichan is our sheer number of opportunities to get out on the water – whether that’s by way of our three major rivers (Cowichan, Koksilah and Chemainus), the ocean (Salish Sea) or any of our small to very large freshwater lakes.

Some of these include Fuller Lake in Chemainus, which has a lovely sandy beach and lifeguards in the summer. Not far away is Chemainus Lake, which has a great dock to cast for the resident rainbow trout. Other superb lakes include Shawnigan Lake just west of Mill Bay (popular for its canoeing, rowing, swimming and fishing), Mesachie Lake and nearby, the 30 km-long Cowichan Lake, which is famous for its houseboating, kayaking and fishing. A popular local pastime is “tubing” that involves reclining in large inflated inner tubes and gently going with the flow downstream. For this, you might consider the famous Cowichan River (spring and summer only). Speaking of lakes, Duncan’s Quamichan Lake was recently selected by Rowing Canada as the home for their permanent national training centre.

Along our oceanfront, there are dozens of quiet public beach accesses where you can picnic, swim and beachcomb. Among these are Mill Bay Nature Park, Cherry Point Beach, Maple Bay Beach, plus lovely spots in Crofton and Saltair. At Ladysmith’s Transfer Beach, not only is there beachfront and a super-sized spray park, but Sealegs Kayaking Adventures where you can rent kayaks and canoes by the hour. If you’re a scuba diver, you might consider exploring the world’s only artificial reef made from a decommissioned Boeing 737. It lies in 90 feet of water between Chemainus and Thetis Island.

The Cowichan River is known for its substantial runs of chinook, coho, chum and steelhead salmon. For this reason, this important ecosystem has been officially designated as a Canadian Heritage River System.

In the western region of Cowichan lies Nitinat Lake, an internationally acclaimed windsurfing and kiteboarding destination that’s home to Windfest, the Canadian National Kite Racing Championships.
THE DEFINITIVE BUCKET LIST
FOR THE ADVENTURER

Given that we’re talking about Cowichan, we could dedicate this entire publication to a bucket list for visiting outdoor enthusiasts. But since you only have so much time and we only have so many pages, here are the five outdoorsy activities you simply cannot miss when you come and stay with us in Cowichan.

1. Hike to the top of Old Baldy Mountain. Located south of the village of Shawnigan Lake, this 1,500 foot mountain, with its steep gradients, isn’t for the casual rambler. But there are rewards when you reach the top. Views of Sooke Lake, the Saanich Peninsula and Mount Baker in Washington State are some of them.

2. Bike Mount Tzouhalem. If you bring your bikes, you simply must experience the many biking trails that can be discovered on this scenic mountain that overlooks Cowichan Bay. “The Zoo’s” network of trails is vast, spanning the northern end from Kaspa Road to the southern edge, close to Genoa Bay.

3. Sunset paddle board at Cherry Point. “Hello, I can’t get to the phone right now, because I’m watching the sun set while paddle boarding off Cherry Point in Cowichan.” Yes, put your phone away and experience Mother Nature at her most glorious. If you don’t have your own paddle board, there are places where you can rent here.

4. Have a picnic with a view. From our many mountaintops and secluded beaches, there are countless places in Cowichan to enjoy a scenic picnic. How about throwing down a blanket atop Mount Tzouhalem or Maple Bay beach with a platter from Cure Artisan Meat and Cheese?

5. Take a guided hiking, kayaking or canoeing tour. Based in Cowichan Bay, Coastal Bliss Adventures can provide you with everything you need for a true West Coast adventure.
From rustic to resplendent, there are countless accommodation options in Cowichan.

The first question many visitors ask is, “Where do we stay?” Fortunately, Cowichan has a broad range of accommodation – from rustic to resplendent. How about some camping? Whether you drive a motor home, pack a tent or prefer a more rugged, hike-in experience, you’ll find plenty of public and private camping options.

There are numerous RV campsites throughout Cowichan, from Mill Bay to Cowichan Lake, one municipal campsite (Lakeview Park) and two provincial park sites (Gordon Bay and Cowichan River Campsite, between Duncan and Lake Cowichan). For all of these places, reservations are required in advance.

At Meridale Cidery & Distillery in Cobble Hill, you can experience “glamping” by staying in one of two lavish yurts. A “yurt” is a large circular tent once favoured by Asian nomads. But of course, Meridale has significantly glammed-up the experience – hence the term “glamping”. Also located in Cobble Hill is Xanadu Estate, which offers vacation rentals and luxury suites. They’re also conveniently located right next to Arbutus Ridge Golf Club – a scenic and challenging 18 hole gem.

How about spending a night or two in a vineyard? You can do this by booking the luxurious, 2-bedroom “Tractor Shed” at Duncan’s Emandare Vineyard or the 2-bedroom “Grouse House” at Blue Grouse Estate Winery. Equally well-appointed is Cowichan River Lodge, located east of Cowichan Lake along the Cowichan River. And with a name like Farm Table Inn, you know this wonderful bed and breakfast located off Highway 18 is going to provide you with some fabulous farm to table meals. Not far away, near Lake Cowichan is Beaver Lake Resort and Campground which is 11 km from Gordon Bay Provincial Park and Honeymoon Bay Ecological Reserve.

Continued on the next page...
If a 4-star resort is more your style, you might consider the elegant Villa Eyrie Resort, located near the summit of the Malahat. They feature picture-postcard views, exquisite dining and a full service spa. A little farther south on the Island Highway is Moon Water Lodge which also offers sweeping views of Finlayson Arm far below.

Other accommodation options include a Ramada Inn Duncan, Best Western Cowichan Valley Inn, in Duncan, Best Western Plus Chemainus Inn, the Oceanfront Suites, in Cowichan Bay, and in the town of Oyster Bay (just north of Ladysmith), the new Microtel Inn and Suites by Wyndham. Not far away in Ladysmith on Brantdon Page Road is the lovely, 12-room Kiwi Cove Lodge. To stay on the water in the true sense, you can even rent a houseboat. For this, there’s Island Houseboats in Lake Cowichan plus Airbnb options in Maple Bay.

If you decide to camp at Gordon Bay Provincial Campsite on the shores of Lake Cowichan, bring your fishing rod, as it’s a great spot to catch rainbow, cutthroat and Dolly Varden trout.
When you come to Cowichan, you’re in for a show.

The arts and culture scene here in Cowichan is an intricately woven tapestry comprised of many cultures. Foremost of these is that of the Indigenous Peoples, who have called Cowichan home for the last 5,000 years. Indigenous art is ubiquitous in Cowichan and it’s one of the reasons why our largest city, Duncan, is known as the “City of Totems”. One just needs to take the “Totem Tour” in Downtown Duncan to see how this name came to be.

Today, Cowichan is home to many other highly talented artisans whose works can be seen in home studios and galleries throughout Cowichan. Cowichan’s rich history can be discovered in our many museums including the Shawnigan Lake Museum (home to an exhibit featuring prominent B.C. artist, EJ Hughes). In Lake Cowichan, there’s the Kaatza Station Museum (housed in a restored railway station). In the centre of Cowichan Bay, there’s the Cowichan Bay Maritime Centre, which also conducts wooden boat building courses.

In Downtown Duncan, there’s the Cowichan Valley Museum (also housed in a restored railway station), and just north along the highway there’s the BC Forest Discovery Centre, where you can ride on a working steam train. In Crofton you’ll find the Old School House Museum and in Chemainus, be sure to check out the resplendent new Chemainus Valley Museum. To view and purchase more contemporary art, drop by the The Ou Gallery or the Aquamaris Art Gallery, both located in Downtown Duncan.

But museums and galleries are just the tip of the cultural iceberg here. In the summer, Cowichan comes alive with a number of live music festivals including the 39 Days of July Festival in Downtown Duncan, the Islands Folk Festival at Providence Farm, Chemainus Bluegrass Extravaganza and the internationally-acclaimed, Sunfest Country Music Festival at Laketown Ranch in Youbou. The headliner this year is country music superstar Keith Urban. If you like world class dinner theatre, book your seats early at the Chemainus Theatre Festival. And while you’re in Chemainus, be sure to check out the 63 amazing murals and various sculptures, which can all be viewed on foot, 365 days a year.

The acclaimed Cowichan Artisans is a group of 14 full-time professional artists whose spaces are open year round, by appointment. The group also stages open studio tours twice a year.
LIVING HISTORY

Discover a cultural history that’s existed from time immemorial.

A great deal of Cowichan’s identity consists of Indigenous culture. Truth be told, we are all guests here, as the Cowichan region is comprised of the traditional territories of the Coast Salish People.

How long have Indigenous Peoples lived here? Well, radio carbon dating of artifacts in Cowichan suggests people have been living here as early as the 25th century BC. However, it’s likely there were settlements here long before that. Today, Indigenous Peoples make up what are known as the Cowichan Tribes. With more than 4,900 members, Cowichan Tribes is the largest First Nations Band in British Columbia and one of the largest employers in the region.

One only needs to read some of the local place names to know how prevalent Indigenous culture is here. “Tzouhalem”, “Chemainus”, “Malahat”, “Sahali”, “Metasiche”, “Koksila” and “Shawinigan” are just some of the many names borrowed from the Indigenous languages that are spoken here.

Indigenous art can be discovered throughout Cowichan. You may have heard of the Duncan Totems and the Indigenous-themed murals in Chemainus, but there are many other places to experience Indigenous art first hand. For example, The Cowichan Valley Museum has many exhibits and art that relate to our First Peoples’ history. To see the works of master wood carver, Herb Rice, visit “Coast Salish Journey” at Whippletree Junction, just south of Duncan. While in Cowichan Bay, be sure to take in the Arthur Vickers Gallery. Arthur is an acclaimed artist accomplished in many media and in his gallery you can view and purchase artwork inspired by the people and natural beauty of Canada’s west coast. For a wide selection of other Salish art and crafts, visit The Judy Hill Gallery located in Downtown Duncan and Hill’s Native Art, located south of Duncan on the Island Highway.

The world famous Cowichan sweaters are made here by a group of dedicated knitters. Each sweater is painstakingly knitted by hand and each takes more than two days to complete.
**DRIVE**

Cowichan is located near the southern end of Vancouver Island. Most people bring their cars and if you do, the main artery that will get you here is the Trans Canada Highway. Often referred to as “The Island Highway”, it runs from Victoria, through many of our towns right up to the tip of Vancouver Island. Of course, once you’re in Cowichan there are countless backroads that are worth exploring too.

**FERRY**

Before you go driving anywhere in Cowichan, you have to get your car on to Vancouver Island. For this there are a number of ferry services. From Washington State, there’s the Anacortes ferry to Sidney or the MV Coho that sails between Port Angeles and Victoria. With the BC Ferries, the three main routes include Tsawwassen to Sidney, Tsawwassen to Duke Point and Horseshoe Bay to Nanaimo. See page 52 for the beautiful trip on the Brentwood Bay - Mill Bay Ferry.

**FLY**

You can get close to our neck of the woods by flying into one of our two main airports, Victoria International Airport (YYJ) or Nanaimo Airport (YCD). However, many people prefer to fly right to our back door by way of a floatplane. It’s a short hop, but the scenery alone is worth the price of a ticket. Flights are available from various carriers to Nanaimo, Victoria and Maple Bay.
THE MALAHAT
TAKE YOUR TIME
TO TAKE IT IN

From B.C.’s capital city of Victoria, the gateway to the Cowichan Valley is via the storied Malahat Highway, a winding and incredibly scenic 20 km stretch of the Trans Canada Highway that straddles the mountain of the same name between Goldstream, just north of Victoria) and the town of Mill Bay.

Completed in 1911, the highway is more than just a thoroughfare. Given that it’s 1,150 feet at its summit and overlooks ocean and land, it’s an attraction unto itself. If you’re driving this very scenic highway, there are a number of places to take in the vistas:

If you’re there at dusk and see a big, snow-capped mountain to the east, that’s Mount Baker, an active volcano located in Washington State.

The Malahat Mountain is regarded by Indigenous people as one of the most sacred places on southern Vancouver Island. The name Malahat means “the place of the black and yellow caterpillars”.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE
THE MALAHAT SKYWALK

Set to open in the Spring of 2021 is a spectacular new sightseeing destination. Located at the top of the Malahat Mountain, just 35 minutes north of Victoria, The Malahat Skywalk promises to be a wonderful addition to any visitor’s bucket list. The Skywalk will incorporate an accessible 2,130 foot treetop walk through an arbutus forest that leads to a gentle spiral ramp. At the top will be a lookout that will afford rare views of Finlayson Arm, Saanich Inlet and beyond.

Due to its unique setting on the traditional territory of the Malahat Nation, The Malahat Skywalk will also offer opportunities for local storytelling, cultural celebration and natural interpretive education. The Malahat Skywalk will be open to visitors in Spring 2021.

For more information please visit www.malahatskywalk.com.

The Malahat Skywalk was inspired by similar elevated forest walks in countries such as Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Germany.
**THE BRENTWOOD BAY – MILL BAY FERRY**

Another way to get to Cowichan from Victoria is via the Mill Bay Ferry, whose route has become known as Vancouver Island’s most beautiful shortcut.

This 26-vehicle ferry crosses Saanich Inlet between Brentwood Bay and Mill Bay daily. The journey isn’t just a 35-minute ferry ride, but more of a scenic extravaganza. With the towering Malahat on one side and the coves and countryside of the Saanich Peninsula on the other, it’s a splendid preview to your Cowichan experience. Visiting the world famous, Butchart Gardens? You’re just a short drive away from the Brentwood Bay Ferry terminal, located next to the iconic Brentwood Bay Resort and Spa.

Started in 1924 by two former naval officers, The Brentwood Bay – Mill Bay ferry is the oldest continuous ferry service on the coast of British Columbia.

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