
May 1, 2007

BC TOUR

Did you know that Vancouver Island is bigger than the province of Prince Edward Island? There's no Anne of Green Gables on our big BC Island, but there are lots of other things to see and do.

The news flash in Victoria is the *Titanic Exhibition*, which runs until mid-October at the Royal BC Museum. This popular traveling exhibition features some 280 artifacts – recovered from the Titanic's resting place 3,800 metres down in the North Atlantic – in a series of galleries that trace the life of the 'unsinkable ship' from design and construction to discovery and recovery.

As you go up the gangplank, boaring pass in hand, you become immersed in the passenger experience. Authentically recreated staterooms and a cafe are appointed with artificats recovered from the shipwreck site. For info & tickets, visit royalbcmuseum.bc.ca.

And from the deep frigid waters of the Atlantic, a legend has risen. Some say 15,000 bottles of stout were lost when the Titanic sank nearly a century ago. So Canada's oldest Brewpub (now a gastro brewpub), Spinnaker's (a 20-minute hike across the drawbridge from downtown Victoria), is promoting the Titanic show.

"We're doing this for fun, and as a part of community support for the project the museum is doing," says publican (and architect) Paul Hadfield.

Located on a rocky outcrop overlooking the harbour, Spinnaker's is frequently voted Victoria's best pub and has fabulous food as well. Be sure to try some of the Titanic specials like the Vanilla Iceberg which is a chunk of ice cream floating in stoat. I was skeptical, but it actually tastes good.

The Westin Bear Mountain Golf Resort & Spa (and condo complex), situated on 1,300 acres of mountainside 20 minutes northwest of Victoria (off Highway 1), features Canada's only 36-hole Nicklaus-designed golf course, medical and traditional aesthetics at the Sante Spa, an athletic club, and world-class restaurants. The lovely indoor/out-door lounge reminiscent of tropical climes, overlooks the golf course and is a great spot to relax and refresh. For more info, visit bearmountain.ca or call 888-533-BEAR.

Kick up your heels at an old fashioned barn dance, Friday June 15th at Providence Farm near Duncan. This working organic farm provides innovative education and employment through Horticultural Therapy and vocational training. Guests enjoy a great dinner, both silent and live

auctions followed by music and dancing. Tickets cost \$60 per person; funds raised help support the great programs offered at the farm. Visit providence.bc.ca or call 250-746-4204.

It's been a quarter of a century since the first mural was painted on a building in Chemainus. *'The Little Town That Did'* fast became a model for arts-and-culture tourism. To celebrate, Chemainus has a variety of events planned through the rest of the year. Visit chemainusmurals25th.ca or call 250-246-3944.

In downtown Nanaimo, Fridays 10am-2pm through til October, vendors sell local fresh produce and local crafts on Pioneer Plaza along the waterfront. Other nearby markets include the Gabriola Farmers' Saturday Market 10am to noon and the Cedar Farmers' Market in the gardens of the Crow & Gate Pub along Yellow Point Road (10am-2pm). Visit nanaimofarmersmarket.com

Nanaimo's lovely harbour will be abuzz June 1st-3rd with the Third Annual Floating Boat & Marine Trade Show. Explore, check out boat demos, and collect giveaways from local businesses. Visit npa.ca or call 250-754-5053.

The annual Seaside Cruizers Father's Day Show n' Shine in Qualicum Beach, June 15th-17th, has been mentioned on Oprah's 'Top 10 Things To Do On Father's Day'. The show includes 700 classic and custom cars, big rigs, motorcycles and cool fire trucks. The weekend begins Friday eve at the Parksville A&W, where you can swing to golden oldies and sneak a peek at wheeled beauties as they ready for their evening cruise. Put on your blue suede shoes for the Saturday night street dance. If you rock around the clock, you can catch the Sunday Shriner's pancake breakfast beginning at 8am. Stroll along the car-lined streets to admire rubber-tired wonders from ages past. Visit seasidecruizers.com or call 250-248-9851.

For more than a century, the village of Cumberland (near Courtney) has been celebrating Empire Days during the Victoria long weekend (May 19th-21 this year). Festivities include sports tournaments, roving pipers, a big parade and a Saturday market. Tour the old Chinatown Marsh, hike the neighboring forest trails or see the Cumberland Museum and Archives. For more info call 866-301-4636.

The Shellfish Festival, June 4th-10th, in Comox Marine Park, is billed as a show-and-tell of the local sea-to-table story. Entertainment, education, and song and dance accompany adventurous shellfish tastings. Visit comoxvalleyshellfishfestival.ca or call 250-897-2599.

The Kitty Coleman Woodland Gardens, 15 minutes north of Courney (off the Old island Highway), comprise 24 acres of forest heaven. This pocket of peace is home to 3,500 varieties of rhodies and other plants, along with an abundance of wildflowers and birds. On May 19th-21st, rain or shine, the gardens host the annual Art & Bloom Festival, featuring original works by painters, potters, sculptors, glass blowers and stained-glass designers, along with a variety of garden art. Visit woodlandgardens.ca.

Several golf courses around the island have fine fishing nearby. Advertised 'Fins & Skin' packages (prices run from \$225 per person) include a choice of:

1. Two nights at Victoria's Comfort Inn, plus a round of golf at Arbutus Ridge (a fine course) and five hours of fishing blue Pacific waters.
2. Two nights at the recently-renovated Oceanfront Grand Resort in Cowichan Bay, a round of golf at the Cowichan Golf & Country Club and four hours of fishing.
3. Two nights at the Schooner Cove Hotel & Marina, a round of golf at the scenic Fairwinds Golf & Country Club and four hours of fishing Oceanside waters.
4. Two nights at Painter's Lodge (a full-service fishing lodge back-dropped by sea, sky and mountains), a round of golf on the Les Furber-designed Storey Creek Golf Course, and four hours of fishing in Campbell River, the 'Salmon Capital of the World'.

Visit golfvancouverisland.ca or call them at 888-465-3239.

Whether you're going Up Island or Down (north or south) or visiting the Inside or Outside (Georgia Straight side or Pacific) Vancouver Island welcomes you back like a lover's embrace; comforting, familiar, yet always exciting.