

The Best of Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands & the San Juan Islands

There's a geological reason, having to do with movement of the various layers of the earth's crust, that explains why these islands on the Northwest coast of the North American continent came into being. But to my mind, it is the words of one island resident that best describe this creation of nature: "When God made this continent, He finished up with Vancouver Island," he explains. "But there was a little material left, so God stood up, and brushed off His hands. The results are jewels in the water that we know today as the San Juans and the Gulf Islands."

However it happened, these islands in the Pacific Northwest are home to some of the most beautiful and pristine wilderness on earth today. An archipelago that stretches along the coastline of both sides of the 49th parallel, the islands number in the hundreds. Some are large enough to sustain small communities as diverse as the islands themselves, while others are no more than seagull perches that disappear at high tide.

Vancouver Island is the largest. Separated from the British Columbia mainland by the Georgia Strait, it offers the best of all worlds. In the south, the city of Victoria has the urban sophistication of a cosmopolitan center, and lies within easy reach of soft adventure activities such as hiking, whale-watching, and cycling. In the north, the countryside grows untamed, opening a door to exhilarating eco-adventures such as mountaineering, spelunking, surfing, and canoeing. This diversity consistently earns Vancouver Island high marks from leading travel publications.

The smaller Gulf Islands and San Juan Islands are equally appealing, and their communities reflect the isolation of their water-bound environments. Each has a different history and ambience, whether it is sleepy Lopez Island or eclectic Galiano Island. It's a sense of magic, though, that is their charm. Island residents prefer to live outside the mainstream: They are writers, artists, and craftspeople, city retirees looking for a sense of community, or specialty producers farming everything from llama and sheep to organic orchards and cottage dairies. They've chosen to live on "island time," an easygoing tempo that bewitches visitors the moment they set foot on the soil. Although visitors are certainly welcome (in summer they swell island populations tenfold), islanders like to keep outside influences at arm's length, lest they change that special way of life too dramatically. Islanders are self-professed stewards of the land, and as such, keepers of the island faith. When writer James Michener wanted to describe his love of islands, he made up a word for it: *nesomania*, from the Greek *neso* (island) and *mania* (extreme enthusiasm). Explore these islands, and you'll discover that nesomaniacs abound—you might even become one yourself!

1 THE BEST FAMILY EXPERIENCES

- **Visiting the Royal British Columbia Museum** (Victoria; ☎ 888/447-7977 or 250/356-7226): This place is so diverse and inspiring that kids may want to stay all afternoon. How often can you say *that* about a museum? See p. 88.
- **Actually enjoying having stick insects navigate their way up your arm at the Victoria Bug Zoo** (Victoria; ☎ 250/384-2847): The interaction with insects takes the creepy out of crawly. See p. 89.
- **Exploring at Horne Lake Caves Provincial Park** (near Qualicum Beach): Armed with flashlights, helmets, and good shoes, you feel like intrepid adventurers, even though the darkened path has been well scouted. One of the most accessible networks of caverns on the island, the caves can also accommodate extreme spelunkers. See p. 149.
- **Wading through minnows and searching out sand dollars at Rath Trevor Beach Provincial Park** (Parksville): This is one of the most family-friendly parks in British Columbia. The warm, ankle-deep waters seem to go on forever. So does the sand. See p. 147.
- **Exploring the sandstone-sculpted tide pools at Botanical Beach** (Port Renfrew): Discover hundreds of different species of intertidal life, including congregations of sea stars, chitons, anemones, purple sea urchins, barnacles, snails, and mussels. Ridges of shale and quartz jut through the black basalt cliffs, creating some of the most photogenic landscapes on the island. See p. 118.
- **Harnessing up to zip along cables from one Douglas fir to another at Wild Play at the Bungy Zone** (Nanaimo; ☎ 888/668-7874 or 250/714-7874): Zip trips can reach speeds of up to 100kmph (62 mph), and (unlike with bungee jumping) there's no age limit. See p. 136.
- **Playing with sea slugs and urchins at the Ucluelet Mini Aquarium** (Ucluelet; ☎ 604/987-6992): Students of marine biology share little-known facts and folklore about local underwater wildlife with infectious enthusiasm that will captivate youngsters and charm oldsters! See p. 161.
- **Digging for fossils with the Courtenay & District Museum and Palaeontology Centre** (Courtenay; ☎ 250/334-0686) along the Puntledge River: It's a dirty business (which kids love), and you get to keep any fossils you find. See p. 179.

2 THE BEST ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES

- **Kayaking through the Broken Group Islands** (Pacific Rim National Park; ☎ 250/726-3500): It's an oasis of calm waters, seal colonies, and other Pacific Ocean marine life. Better yet, travel there aboard the freighter MV *Lady Rose*. See p. 165.
- **Honing a new outdoor skill at Strathcona Park Lodge** (Strathcona Provincial Park; ☎ 250/286-3122): Everything from hiking to rappelling is on offer here, for both novice and extremist. See p. 182.
- **Learning to surf on Long Beach**: The waves just keep coming, and whether or not you manage to stand, it's a long and exhilarating ride to shore. See p. 163.

- **Exploring Broughton Inlet's narrow fjordic waterways** aboard the heritage vessel *Columbia III* (Port McNeil; ☎ 888/833-8887 or 250/202-3229): Paddle along two-kayak-wide channels

and coves by day; enjoy ship comforts by night. Expect to see whales, eagles, and sea lions just a few paddle-lengths away. See p. 205.

3 THE BEST LEISURE ACTIVITIES

- **Teeing off with kindred spirits at Crown Isle Resort** (Comox/Courtenay; ☎ 888/338-8439 or 250/703-5050) or at **Westin Bear Mountain Resort** (Victoria; ☎ 888/533-2327): Both resorts are deliciously golf-nutty. Bear Mountain has two Jack Nicklaus–designed courses, and Crown Isle is one of more than 20 courses you'll find in the Central Island. See p. 181 and 77.
- **Cruising on the *Aurora Explorer*** (Campbell River; ☎ 250/286-3347): This 12-passenger packet freighter works her way up and down some of the most beautiful coastal inlets in British Columbia. Although cargo is priority, passengers are a lucrative sideline. A casual, offbeat way to travel. See p. 189.
- **Angling for a Tyee in Campbell River:** In fact, angling for anything in these waters is sport-fishing at its best. See p. 188.
- **Scooting around San Juan Island in a Scootcar from Susie's Mopeds** (Friday Harbor; ☎ 800/532-0087 or 360/378-5244): A Scootcar is a hybrid vehicle that shuttles along at a low speed, giving you all the fun of a moped and the cover of a car. See p. 245.
- **Whale-watching on the bluffs at Lime Kiln Point State Park** (San Juan Island;

☎ 360/378-2044): This is the only park in the world dedicated to this purpose. Your chances of spotting orca, minke, or pilot whales are particularly good in late August and early September, during the salmon runs. See p. 249.

- **Storm-Watching** (Tofino/Ucluelet): Pick a spot from anywhere along Vancouver Island's westernmost coast that's open to the fury of the Pacific Ocean and get set for an OMNIMAX-style show. Suffice to say, it puts the movie *The Perfect Storm* into perspective. See chapter 7.
- **Wining (and dining) through the Cowichan Valley:** The wine scene has become as diverse as it is sophisticated. Include a visit to a cidery as a change of pace, and be sure to eat en route. Most menus feature local, organic, artisan foods. See p. 124.
- **Day sailing aboard *MV Uchuck III*** (Gold River; ☎ 250/283-2515): A day trip with this converted minesweeper takes you to some of Vancouver Island's most isolated (and picturesque) communities, from logging camps to water-bound hamlets. It's a great value cruise. Bring your binoculars. See p. 195.

4 THE BEST HIKING TRAILS

- **The boardwalks of the Wild Pacific Trail** (Ucluelet): You can make believe you're in training for the West Coast Trail or a trek to Cape Scott. Great for

8- and 80-year-olds alike, it has all the dramatic views with absolutely none of the true-grit challenges. See p. 161.

- **The West Coast Trail** (Pacific Rim National Park): This trek is one of the world's best to test the mettle of the hardest and most experienced hiker. Many don't make the grade. But if you do, you'll have bragging rights for years to come. You'll also have some of the most spectacular coastal scenery shots to prove it—just be sure your camera has waterproof protection, and travel with a stack of fully charged batteries. See p. 164.
- **The northernmost tip of Vancouver Island via the Cape Scott Trail:** A West Coast Trail alternative, this trail sees you through marshland, across beaches, and over suspension bridges, with turn-back points to suit your stamina level. The rain always turns this trail into a mucky quagmire. Choose the moderate 3-hour round trip to San Josef Bay or the full 8-hour trek to Cape Scott. There's also a new North Coast Trail that's a part of a larger plan to construct a trail all the way from Cape Scott to Port Hardy. When complete, it will be longer than the famous West Coast Trail. See p. 207.
- **The Juan de Fuca Trail** (Sooke-Port Renfrew): Here's another West Coast Trail alternative with (almost) equally impressive scenic beauty, wildlife viewing, and roaring surf crashing against the coast. Moderate 1-day hikes string together for a multi-day excursion that's a good rehearsal for more grueling expeditions. And all within an hour's drive of civilization. See p. 115.
- **Cathedral Grove** (Coombs-Port Alberni): This ancient stand of Douglas firs grows so close to the heavens, you feel you're in a medieval cathedral. The trails are easy—at the very least, pull into the parking lot to understand why tree-huggers fought so hard to save this area from logging. See p. 154.
- **Galloping Goose Trail** (Victoria-Sooke): A great trail for walking, and better still if you're on wheels—in-line skates or bicycle. The Goose is mostly graded, relatively level, and passes through some of Victoria's most picturesque neighborhoods and urban wilderness—all the way to Sooke. Allow a day if you're wanting to travel the whole Goose. See p. 90.
- **East Sooke Coast Trail** (Sooke): It can be challenging in places (think coastal rainforest to surf-beaten rocks), but this kind of wilderness hiking within a half-hour's drive of a major city is what makes Vancouver Island an eco-adventurer's dream destination. See p. 116.
- **Brookes Point bluff** (South Pender Island): If you're prepared to scramble up a small rock face from Gowland Point, you can walk through waist-high dried grasses, along the edge of the bluff, to Brookes Point. The views are stunning, making it an intimate spot for a romantic picnic. See p. 225.
- **The trail to Iceberg Point** (Lopez Island): Cutting through private property, this trail delivers you to a windy walk along the cliff's edge. Good walking shoes, and perhaps a picnic, are all anyone needs to enjoy the bluffly landscape. See p. 262.

5 THE MOST SCENIC DRIVES

- **Following the shoreline between Sooke and Port Renfrew:** The views are expansive, and the beaches along the way provide an excellent excuse to pull over and stretch your legs. If you can't make it all the way to Botanical Beach Provincial Park (well worth the effort), the restaurant at the **Point No Point**

- **Resort** (☎ 250/646-2020) is, well, a good point to regroup, refresh, and turn around. See chapter 6.
- **Driving the scenic route from Victoria to Swartz Bay:** Hwy. 17A runs along the western shores of the Saanich Peninsula. It's only about 42km (26 miles), but with wineries, U-Pick flower fields, and roadside stands selling produce, eggs, and homemade jams, the 45-minute drive can easily take hours, especially if you "do lunch" en route or spend half a day at Butchart Gardens. See chapter 6.
- **Taking Hwy. 4 across Vancouver Island from Parksville to Tofino:** Bisecting the island east to west is a topographical treasure. You'll pass through forests, rivers, and snow-capped mountains before hitting the wind-swept shores and beaches of the west coast. See chapter 7.
- **Leaving the main highway (Hwy. 19) and following the starfish signs along Hwy. 19A, the Oceanside Route:** Take any exit near Parksville and meander up to Campbell River through seaside communities overlooking the Georgia Strait, past artisan studios, and across lush farmlands. A sage farmer once said that if the cows are lying down, inclement weather is brewing. Keep an eye open, and check the theory out. See chapter 7.
- **Cruising the Coastal Circle Route:** The drive from Victoria to Courtenay, over the Malahat, takes you from urban charm to mountain vistas and then down into a valley of wineries. From Courtenay, take the car ferry across to Powell River for a drive down along coastal rainforest to more ferry connections heading for Horseshoe Bay and Vancouver. See chapter 8.

6 THE BEST WILDLIFE VIEWING

- **Spotting bald eagles at Goldstream Provincial Park** (Victoria): When the salmon run ends, thousands of eagles come to feast on the carcasses. From early December until late February, the park puts on many eagle-oriented programs, including a daily count that has reached as many as 276 sightings in one day. See p. 30.
- **Whale-watching at Robson Bight** (Port McNeil): There are many whale-watching opportunities throughout the islands, including a grey whale migration that passes by the West Coast. But nothing beats the orcas in Robson Bight, a one-of-a-kind ecological whale preserve. See p. 203.
- **Catching up with marmots** (Nanaimo): One of the most endangered species in the world, the marmot is found only on Vancouver Island. Take a hike into the wilds surrounding Nanaimo and you might get lucky and see these highly inquisitive creatures popping up from their underground burrows. See p. 144.
- **Hearing the breeding call of a bull Roosevelt elk** (San Juan River): It's a haunting refrain, heard every fall, as the bull searches out new females to add to his harem. Roosevelt elk are a formidable sight anytime of year, and finding their shed antlers is a fine reward for a hike. This species of elk is found only on Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands; herds hang out near Gold River, Jordan River Meadows, and in the Nanaimo Lake region. See p. 193.

7 THE BEST PLACES TO EXPERIENCE FIRST NATIONS CULTURE & HISTORY

- **Quw'utsun' Cultural Centre** (Duncan; ☎ 877/746-8119): Owned and operated by the Cowichan Band, the center shares the band's cultural heritage through live demonstrations, dance, Native food, and the knitting of its famous Cowichan sweater. See p. 124.
- **Eagle Aerie Gallery** (Tofino; ☎ 250/725-3235): Acclaimed artist Roy Vickers owns this stunningly moody and inspiring gallery, primarily a showcase for his own work, as well as a chosen few other artists. See p. 159. Henry Vickers, Roy's brother, is also an acclaimed artist with his Shipyard Gallery in Cowichan Bay. Both brothers are recipients of the Order of British Columbia, among other awards.
- **U'Mista Cultural Centre** (Alert Bay; ☎ 250/974-5403): Even if you're not an aficionado of aboriginal art, a guided tour around the center's collection provides an invaluable perspective on First Nations culture. See p. 203.
- **Eagle Feather Gallery** (Victoria; ☎ 250/388-4330): Although you'll find many small studios scattered throughout Vancouver Island, if you're staying south and you've only time for one stop, this shop carries some of the best jewelry, arts, and crafts. See p. 98.

8 THE BEST SPAS

- **The Ancient Cedars Spa** (The Wickaninnish Inn; ☎ 250/725-3100): This spa offers hot stone massages in a little cedar hut perched on the rocks as the Pacific Ocean crashes below. A very sensual experience. See p. 168.
- **Willow Stream Spa** (The Fairmont Empress; ☎ 250/384-8111): Regardless of what type of service you've booked, this spa throws in time in the steam room and in its mineral pool, so that you can turn a manicure into an afternoon event. See p. 101.
- **The Madrona del Mar Spa** (Galiano Inn; ☎ 250/539-3388): The concept of a healing sanctuary rises to new levels with private glass-and-marble steam rooms, a sea-flotation bath, and new guest rooms that even have a Murphy bed-style massage table for fireside treatments. See p. 231.
- **The Spa at Delta Victoria Ocean Pointe** (☎ 800/575-8882 or 250/360-5858): Prepare yourself for upscale pampering all the way, all the time, with a sauna, pool, and complete fitness facility thrown in for good measure. See p. 101.
- **The Grotto Spa** (Tigh-na-Mara Resort; ☎ 250/248-2072): British Columbia's largest resort spa features a sizeable cave-like mineral pool and two-story waterfall. See p. 151.
- **The Kingfisher Oceanside Spa** (Courtenay; ☎ 800/663-7929 or 250/338-1323): One of the first destination resort spas on the island, this is a great spot for group spa getaways. It offers the only Pacific Mist Hydropath in North America (a kind of "walking hydrotherapy") as well as tidal baths carved out of rock, mineral soaks, and a steam cave. See p. 182.
- **Essence of Life Spa** (Brentwood Bay Lodge; ☎ 888/544-2079 or 250/544-2079): The Couples Massage here is just one more great reason why you won't want to leave this contemporary, and very romantic, sanctuary. See p. 101.

- **Sante Spa** (Bear Mountain; ☎ 888/533-2327 or 250/391-7160): One of the island's top spa destinations, it's that rare breed of MediSpa where licensed

services include medical esthetics. So why not add a little Botox to your facial? See p. 101.

9 THE BEST HOTELS & RESORTS

- **The Fairmont Empress** (Victoria; ☎ 800/441-1414 or 250/384-8111): Like a grand old dowager, this magnificent hotel commands the Victoria Inner Harbour as her fiefdom, and beckons her audience inside. If you're going for broke, stay here; the experience is what North Americans think England is all about. See p. 69.
- **Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa** (Brentwood Bay; ☎ 888/544-2079): As British Columbia's only member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, this contemporary lodge boasts an oceanfront location and a service ratio nearing three staff per one guest room. Expect all the amenities of a five-star-rated resort. See p. 109.
- **Clayoquot Wilderness Resort** (Clayoquot Sound; ☎ 888/333-5405 or 250/725-2688): Accessible only by water, the resort is quite isolated, so you feel as if you're completely one with the wilderness. But it's the luxurious safari-style campsites that steal the show. See p. 166.
- **Wickaninnish Inn** (Tofino; ☎ 800/333-4604 or 250/725-3100): With only floor-to-ceiling triple-glazed windows standing between you and the churning Pacific Ocean, this place elevates storm-watching to an art. See p. 168.
- **Rosario Resort** (Orcas Island; ☎ 800/562-8820 or 360/376-2222): Situated on a peninsula, Rosario exudes an air of 1920s grace. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the beautifully refurbished resort has something

for everyone: elegant dining, spa services, a children's program, and a see-it-to-believe-it, 1,972-pipe Aeolian organ. Concerts nightly. See p. 257.

- **Sonora Resort** (Sonora Island; ☎ 888/576-6672 or 604/233-0460): Accessible only by air (the resort has its own state-of-the-art helicopter) or by boat, this resort makes getting there half the fun. Fishing is the number-one activity, though visiting the spa, hiking, and going on wildlife excursions are catching up quickly. The private lounge theater is like something made for reclusive movie moguls—and the popcorn's made to order. See p. 191.
- **Poets Cove** (Pender Island; ☎ 888/512-POET [7638] or 250/629-2100): This resort offers a wide variety of accommodations that beckons families (and boaters) in the summer and romantics at every other time of the year. It's so self-contained, you can eat, sleep, spa, and cocoon—all in one place. See p. 226.
- **Painter's Lodge Holiday & Fishing Resort** (Campbell River; ☎ 800/663-7090 or 250/286-1102): This is *the* place for fishing enthusiasts. These folks also own activity-oriented April Point Lodge & Spa across the channel, and because guest privileges flow from one to the other, it's almost like staying in two resorts for the price of one. See p. 191.

10 THE BEST BED-AND-BREAKFASTS & COUNTRY INNS

- **Abigail's Hotel** (Victoria; ☎ 800/561-6565 or 250/388-5363): This inn is the essence of old-world charm and hospitality in a phenomenal downtown Victoria location. See p. 73.
- **Hastings House** (Ganges, Salt Spring Island; ☎ 800/661-9255 or 250/537-2362): Everything you would want in an English country inn is here, but so much better—Hastings House is a member of the exclusive Relais & Châteaux network. Expect wonderful gardens, inspired guest rooms, and world-renowned cuisine. Catching your own crab dinner is *the* most fun eating experience. See p. 219.
- **Friday Harbor House** (Friday Harbor, San Juan Island; ☎ 360/378-8455): This is a modern, beautifully furnished inn sitting high above busy Friday Harbor. The views are outstanding. At night, the twinkling lights make the inn's restaurant a really romantic spot. See p. 250.
- **Inn at Swifts Bay** (Lopez Island; ☎ 800/375-5285 or 360/468-3636): Pull yourself away from the most sumptuously comfortable beds in the Northwest, and you'll find breakfasts that are more than an eye-opener. They're gastronomic adventures, island-renowned for being the best in the San Juans. See p. 262.
- **Oceanwood Country Inn** (Dinner Bay, Mayne Island; ☎ 250/539-5074): If you're lucky, from the dining room you'll see whales passing up Navy Channel. The inn offers a range of top-quality guest rooms (some more affordable than others), extravagant gardens, and lounges featuring heirloom furniture, antiques, and board games. See p. 236.
- **Woodstone Country Inn** (Galiano Island; ☎ 888/339-2022 or 250/539-2022): Tucked in between rainforest and rambling meadows, this lovely inn epitomizes the country inn. The ambience is one of casual elegance, with fireplaces, fresh flowers, and excellent home-cooked food. See p. 232.
- **Wildwood Manor B&B** (San Juan Island; ☎ 877/298-1144 or 360/378-3447): Staying here is like being an honored house guest. The proprietors' attention to detail is extraordinary, and hospitality is so genuine that you'll feel you've made lifetime friends. See p. 252.
- **Turtleback Farm Inn** (Orcas Island; ☎ 800/376-4914 or 360/376-4914): Set on a private 32 hectares (79 acres), this working farm has been cited in *1000 Places to See Before You Die*, and I agree with that assessment. The 1800s green clapboard farmhouse has been lovingly restored. The pastoral views lull you into a relaxed state of nirvana. See p. 259.
- **Villa Marco Polo** (Victoria; ☎ 877/601-1524): Lavish in style and hospitality, influences of Venetian traveler Marco Polo exude an exotic touch to this (not inexpensive) manor house. Definitely a place for special occasions. See p. 76.

11 THE BEST CULINARY INNS

- **Sooke Harbour House** (Vancouver Island; ☎ 800/889-9688 or 250/642-3421): Beyond its reputation as a hideaway for Hollywood's beautiful people, this place offers so much more. Many come for the Wine Spectator

Grand Award-winning wine cellar and the food—an epicurean feast of local and organic fare that seems to go on for as long as you can eat. Be prepared to make reservations at the restaurant, sometimes weeks in advance. See p. 120.

- **The Aerie** (Malahat, near Victoria; ☎ 800/518-1933 or 250/743-7115): Located on the Malahat Mountain, this lavish Mediterranean-style mansion has ocean views—and food that will take your breath away. Ingredients pay tribute to the region's diversity, from morels to asparagus to poultry and lamb, and change frequently as if on an edible journey through the seasons. See p. 126.

- **Coopers Cove** (Sooke; ☎ 877/642-5727 or 250/642-5727): *Oprah* has featured the Cove's ex-Olympiad chef Angelo Prosperi-Porta, who teams up with his guests to create mouth-watering interactive dinners. He claims you'll forge a "spiritual connection to the food you eat." However you interpret that, the results taste heaven-sent! See p. 118.
- **Fairburn Farm Culinary Retreat & Guesthouse** (Duncan; ☎ 250/746-4637): Part farm, part cooking school, and part country inn, Fairburn exemplifies what the Slow Food movement is all about. Chef Mara Jernigan creates a delicious experience that really raises your consciousness about foods of the land. See p. 126.

12 THE BEST RESTAURANTS

- **Blue Crab Bar & Grill** (Victoria; ☎ 250/480-1999): This restaurant serves the best seafood in Victoria, along with mouth-watering views of the harbor. See p. 78.
- **Smoken Bones Cookshack** (Victoria; ☎ 250/391-6328): Mouthwatering, finger-lickin'-delicious BBQ ribs and much more, done southern style in both taste and massive servings. See p. 86.
- **Amuse Bistro** (Victoria; ☎ 250/743-3667): Because the restaurant is in a former home, dining here is like being a member of an exclusive supper club, especially when everything on the menu is geared to amuse your *palate* with an amazing range of locally produced fare such as roasted venison, chanterelles with brandy and veal jus, and heritage carrots. See p. 128.
- **Deep Cove Chalet** (Saanich Inlet, near Victoria; ☎ 250/656-3541): This place makes the list for its caviar: Beluga, Ocietra, and Sevugra, from Russia, Iran,

and China, which helps make the elegant French menu a standout. The wine reserve of 18,000 bottles is remarkable too. See p. 112.

- **Fox & Hounds** (Nanaimo; ☎ 250/740-1000): Even the Brits would have to take their hats off to this pub-style drinking establishment. The steak and kidney pie is as good as it gets and the Guinness is just one of many British Isle imports, many of which you won't easily find elsewhere. See p. 141.
- **The Sushi Bar at the Inn at Tough City** (Tofino; ☎ 250/725-2021): Surrounded by the bounty of the sea, you would think there would be a proliferation of sushi restaurants on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Not so, which is why this tiny cafe at the Inn at Tough City is such a treat. See p. 172.
- **House Piccolo** (Ganges; ☎ 250/537-1844): The restaurant inside this tiny farmhouse is consistently recognized by the prestigious *Chaine des Rôtisseurs*, so you know the cuisine is top-notch.

Many dishes have a Scandinavian twist, as in spiced herring or scallop ceviche. The gorgonzola cheese tart with red onion marmalade is an example of Piccolo's creativity. See p. 226.

- **Pointe Restaurant** (Tofino; ☎ 250/725-3100): The eatery's food is as spectacular as its location, perched on a craggy bluff. This is where you come for an amazing multi-course, gourmet, culinary experience—albeit with gourmet prices to match. See p. 171.
- **Shelter Restaurant** (Tofino; ☎ 250/725-3353): This upbeat restaurant gives the Pointe a run for its money, only here you'll save a few dollars. Perhaps that's because there's no view. But with such

fresh and imaginatively blended flavors before you, you probably won't even notice. See p. 171.

- **Duck Soup Inn** (San Juan Island; ☎ 360/378-4878): The eclectic atmosphere of artsy decor and offbeat paraphernalia is second only to the ever-changing menu, which is created on the fly depending on what the garden is producing at any given moment. The results are imaginative pairings such as lamb with sour cherry port, homemade lemon linguini, and lavender-thyme roasted chicken, all served with spiced, herbed, or nutty breads. See p. 253.