

# Explore Southern Vancouver Island's small communities

JANE MUNDY, VANCOUVER SUN 07.08.2016 |



0709 trav isl Renfrew / *VANCOUVER SUN*

Whether you're planning a luxurious trip with spas and gourmet dining or camping with the family, Southern Vancouver Island appeals to everyone and all budgets. While there are dozens of communities worth visiting — not to mention Victoria — here are a few places that may be under your radar, but not to be missed:

Sidney

significance. There are campsites, too (reservations required). If you're a bibliophile addict, poke along Beacon Avenue in Sidney, Canada's bookstore capital. Beacon Books, spread over 3,600 square feet, is Canada's answer to Portland's Powell's Books.

## Sooke

If you want to bypass Victoria, get on Highway 1 (the Trans-Canada Highway) and take exit 14 to Sooke. Rush Adventures provides electric bicycles so you can ride the Galloping Goose Trail for three hours (stopping at the Sooke Pot Holes — pack your bathing suit) and back without breaking a sweat. For a square meal and square deal, Mom's cafe will make you feel at home. So, too, will the world-famous Sooke Harbour House, where many items on the menu grow in their gardens. Take a tour with the resident gardener and a glass of bubbly. Splurge and book a spa treatment in your spacious room, many of which have a wood-burning fireplace and stunning view of Whiffen Spit. Go for the tasting menu, each course perfectly paired with B.C. wines. Nearby is Point No Point (reserve ahead for a charming rustic cabin), where smoked oyster chowder spiked with house-cured bacon has been a staple for 20 years. Campgrounds abound, from forest sanctuaries to beach and river sites.

The Pacific Marine Circle Route, from Sooke to Port Renfrew to the Cowichan Valley, covers spectacular coastlines, provincial parks and pastoral landscapes, wineries and restaurants and luxurious Inns. Driving through Juan de Fuca Provincial Park, surfers stop at Jordan River and China Beach. Watch for the roadside signs and stroll pristine Sombrio, Mystic and French beaches.

## Port Renfrew

Anglers from around the world come to Port Renfrew to chase trophy-size salmon, and most sport fishers bag their limit with time to snag a halibut that likely weighs more than you.

Botanical Beach, however, is the jewel: Poke around during low tide and wander the Pacedahdt White Sand Beach at Port Renfrew anytime.

This area is so diverse that the first marine research station in the Pacific Northwest was installed here in 1901.

If you're fond of big trees, Avatar Grove has the largest known Douglas fir standing and nearby is the 68-metre-tall San Juan Spruce, the second-largest in the world.

Soule Creek Lodge is perched so high above the tree line you can only hear the hummingbirds.

After soaking in the hot tub, join guests for a three-course dinner. Since 1927, The Port Renfrew Pub and Hotel has been the watering hole for locals, fishermen and loggers. With recent cabin renovations and new pub menu, Port Renfrew isn't just for fishermen and loggers anymore.

## Cowichan Valley

Basking in a maritime Mediterranean climate, no wonder the Cowichan Valley is known as Canada's Provence. Cowichan Lake is the biggest freshwater lake on Vancouver Island.

When you aren't on the lake boating or paddleboarding, hike up Bald Mountain or Riverwalk Loop, bike to the Kinsol Trestle or to Duncan. For families and the more laid back, tubing the Cowichan River is a blast. Sun Lotus tubing company in Duncan is minutes before one start point for Cowichan River tubing.

The Cowichan Valley welcomes country music lovers at Sunfest at Laketown Ranch in Cowichan Lake — its new permanent home. And folk music lovers flock to the 32nd Island Festival (July 22-24) at Providence Farm in Duncan.

If it's Saturday, stock up at the Duncan Farmer's Market, one of the biggest in B.C.

Stock up at Blue Grouse Estate Winery for its Pinot Gris and Vigneti Zanatta Winery for the bubbly.

And the end of Merridale Ciderworks apple orchard it's 'faerie central' and kids will be mesmerized. Also near the apple orchard are yurts for humans. (Early risers might want to stop first at True Grain Bread & Mill in Cowichan Bay, the Merridale bistro opens at 10 a.m.)

Adults and kids alike love feeding the water buffalo at Fairburn Farm. This B&B in a sprawling 19th-century farmhouse is surrounded by farmland and green rolling acres. On the breakfast menu is water buffalo yogurt (they are raised for dairy only).

Neighbour Bill Jones at Deerholme Farm offers hands-on cooking classes and foraging expeditions, along with entertaining and delicious lunches or dinners.

Avoid the Malahat and catch the ferry from Mill Bay to Brentwood Bay — close to the Swartz Bay ferry terminal. If it's Thursday and you have a few hours to spare before the last ferry ride to Vancouver and your wallet isn't empty, check out Sidney's Street Market — the main street is closed to traffic. One last festivity for the road ...

## Comments

We encourage all readers to share their views on our articles and blog posts. We are committed to maintaining a lively but civil forum for discussion, so we ask you to avoid personal attacks, and please keep your comments relevant and respectful. If you encounter a comment that is abusive, click the "X" in the upper right corner of the comment box to report spam or abuse. We are using Facebook commenting. [Visit our FAQ page for more information.](#)

<http://domain.com/news/story.html?id=7195492>

([HTTP://WWW.POSTMEDIA.COM](http://www.postmedia.com))

© 2016 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.