



10 great Island day trips: Need something to do?; [Final Edition]

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Ran with fact box "Helpful Websites" which has been appended to the story.

Summer is upon us and many are planning their vacations. But you don't need plane tickets or a stuffed suitcase to enjoy your holidays.

Why not stay at home and enjoy the surrounding attractions of Nanaimo? Day-tripping is an enjoyable and affordable way to spend your holidays and there's plenty to see and do for the whole family.

Just pick a spot and either strap on some walking shoes, hop on your bike or pile the family into the car and get ready to explore what central Vancouver Island has to offer.

Here are some suggestions:

NEWCASTLE ISLAND

Newcastle Island Marine Provincial Park is rich in history and beautiful vistas -- and it's only a hop, skip and a jump from downtown Nanaimo. Take your own boat or hop on the ferry near Maffeo- Sutton Park for the 10-minute ride to the island.

Visitors can enjoy a quiet hike around the island and marvel at its steep sandstone ledges and stop at various historic points along the way. The island has hosted a fish-salting operation, a sandstone quarry and a shipyard over the years.

The Canadian Pacific Steamship Company bought the island in 1931 and it soon became a popular spot for company picnics and outings. Today, the park offers food services at the Newcastle Island Pavilion and -- if you really like it -- you can stay overnight at one of the many campsites.

GABRIOLA ISLAND

A short 20-minute ferry trip will land you on Gabriola Island. Parks, beaches, artist studios and galleries and more are waiting to be explored on the popular Gulf Island. Gabriola has three provincial parks, a regional park, plus many small community neighbourhood parks.

Sandy beaches with warm watering holes are waiting for cyclists and kayakers eager for a refreshing dip. Explore Gabriola's history and natural features at the island's museum. A series of sandstone formations carved by the surf into unusual caves and caverns, The Malaspina Galleries is one of the island's biggest natural attractions.

B.C. Ferries operates a vehicle and passenger ferry between Gabriola Island and Nanaimo.

LADYSMITH'S TRANSFER BEACH

It may only be 30 kilometres from Nanaimo, but Ladysmith's Transfer Beach will carry you thousands of kilometres away from all your worries and stresses.

Sand, driftwood and shells kiss the pristine shoreline as kayakers launch their vessels and visitors nosh on food from the concession. Don't forget your binoculars, you might spot an eagle or blue heron. If you kids get tired of playing in the water, the beach's park offers a terrific playground, sprawling green grass, and walking trails.

CHEMAINUS

Renowned for its series of outdoor murals, Chemainus is a must see and only a 30-minute drive south from Nanaimo. Visitors can follow the yellow footprints around town for a self-guided tour of Chemainus's history, or tour in a horse drawn carriage or simulated steam train. The Chemainus Theatre, which features professional stage productions, musicals and concerts is also a popular draw and visitors can treat themselves to dinner at the Playbill Dining Room. Seaside picnic spot Kin Park is just a short walk from old town Chemainus. Shopping, kayaking, and of course, ice-cream eating are just a few of the many pleasures offered in Chemainus.

DUNCAN

Nestled between Nanaimo and Victoria on the TransCanada Highway the city of Duncan has a lot to offer. Its biggest attraction are its totem poles, including the widest one in the world. There are free guided walking tours of the totems in the downtown area or you can do it yourself.

Visitors can check out one of Vancouver Island's largest farmer's markets in Duncan or learn more about forestry history and view a collection of logging and steam related artifacts at the B.C. Forest Discovery Centre. And don't forget about the world's largest hockey stick!

RATHTREVOR BEACH PROVINCIAL PARK

Looking for a place to soak up some surf and sun? Head to Rathtrevor Beach, three kilometres south of Parksville. The sea recedes almost a kilometre at low tide, creating a perfect exploration spot for the those curious about the shoreline. When the ocean comes back in, a wonderful and warm swimming spot is ready to be enjoyed. the park also has a large day-use area and concession. Those looking for a little exercise can walk through the wooded upland area of the park.

HORNE LAKE CAVES PROVINCIAL PARK

You don't have to travel far to do a little spelunking -- the **Horne Lake Caves** is about 60 kilometres north of Nanaimo and home to more than 1,000 caves. The park has two small caves visitors can check out on their own, while guides can show you

crystal formations and ancient fossils in the other caves. According to the B.C. Parks website, family tours are available in July and August. The park has a day-use picnic area with two picnic tables, but bring your own drinking water.

COOMBS

There's probably not another community in the world that has goats on a roof. Goats grazing on the rooftop of the Country Market is Coombs claim to fame -- but there's much more to see.

About nine kilometres west of Parksville, Coombs is home to heritage buildings, small gift and craft shops and antique stores. Rodeo lovers can hit Coombs in July for the Old West activities and the annual Coombs Rodeo. But don't forget the market and its goats. Shoppers will enjoy local produce, mouth-watering food choices and gift shopping galore.

ENGLISHMAN RIVER FALLS PROVINCIAL PARK

Grab your camera and swimsuit and head out to Englishman River Falls, about 13 kilometres southwest of Parksville. The camera is for capturing a picture of the two cascading waterfalls and the swimsuit is for the swimming hole at the end of the lower falls (when the river level is low).

The park has a day-use area and campground and several hiking trails that promise spectacular views. The park is located along the Englishman River, is 97 hectares big and sits among lush old-growth and second-growth forest of Douglas fir, cedar, hemlock and maple.

CATHEDRAL GROVE

Your spirit will definitely be moved at Cathedral Grove as you walk along trails that travel through stands of awesome Douglas fir trees.

Part of MacMillan Provincial Park, Cathedral Grove is home to towering ancient trees, some more than 800 years old. Western Hemlock, Grand Fir and Western Red Cedar can also be found in the park.

Bring your curiosity too -- diverse wildlife such as woodpeckers, owls, insects, deer and more live in Cathedral Grove.

MacMillan Provincial Park is located on both sides of Highway 4 on the shores of Cameron Lake, 25 kilometres west of Qualicum Beach.

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HELPFUL WEBSITES

Tourism and Locations:

- hellobc.com

- vancouverisland.travel
- vancouverisland.com
- tourismnanaimo.com
- oceansidetourism.com
- gabriolaisland.org
- chemainus.bc.ca
- city.duncan.bc.ca
- town.ladysmith.bc.ca
- city.parksville.bc.ca

Parks:

- env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks

Transportation:

- bcferries.com
- drivebc.ca