



Vancouver Island North Communities & Top Wilderness Gateway Destinations

Alert Bay: Located on Cormorant Island, a scenic 45-minute [BC Ferries](#) ride from Port McNeill, the colourful fishing village of Alert Bay is known as the “Home of the Killer Whale.” Disembark and walk to see thousands of years of First Nations history still clearly visible throughout this community from the elaborate totem poles – including the 53 m (173 ft) world’s tallest totem carved in two parts by six First Nations artists – to the world famous Potlatch Collections at the [U’mista Cultural Centre](#). Visitors are welcome to share in the living culture of the ‘N̓amgis people at the award-winning, interactive [Culture Shock Gallery](#). Alert Bay is also a gateway to kayak tours, whale-watching, grizzly bear viewing and fishing in Knight Inlet, Kingcome Inlet and the Broughton Archipelago. Other attractions include the quaint Christ Church dating back to 1879, the Alert Bay Library-Museum with 6,500 First Nations historic photographs, and incredible bird watching along the boardwalks and trails at the Alert Bay Ecological Park (also known as Gator Gardens). www.alertbay.ca; www.hellobc.com/en-CA/RegionsCities/AlertBay.htm



Coal Harbour: Located just 20 minutes from Port Hardy, this former mining town, military base and whaling station is now a Vancouver Island marine hub providing access to the fertile fishing grounds of Quatsino Sound. A 6 m (20 ft) jawbone of a blue whale, the largest found in the world, is on display in Coal Harbour and a reminder of the city’s history as Canada’s last whaling station. Today, Coal Harbour is a launch point for fishing charters, boaters, kayakers and campers heading into the scenic coastal waters and old-growth forests of Vancouver Island North wilderness areas like [Quatsino Provincial Park](#). Quatsino First Nations operate a Marina that has serviced moorage, public washrooms, showers and a Laundromat. The Whale’s Reach, a small community store, is also open. www.coalharbour.cc

Holberg: The tiny village of Holberg sits on the shores of Holberg Inlet near Quatsino Narrows, 50 km (31 mi) along a gravel logging road from Port Hardy. Danish settlers were first in the area, starting out as farmers and then turning to coal mining. Later the village became a floating camp for forestry workers in the area. Completely land-based today, Holberg is the last village for backpackers about to tackle the [Cape Scott Trail](#) and the new [North Coast Trail](#). An attraction near Holberg is one of its most famous; [Ronning’s Garden](#),



an exotic three-acre collection of bamboos, rhododendrons and Japanese maples, (including two of North America’s largest Monkey Puzzle Trees), was carved out of the rainforest in 1910 by original owner Bernt Ronning. The garden is maintained today by friendly Holberg locals Ron and Julia Moe, who charge no admission, but do welcome contributions to the donation box outside. Stop to see the [Shoe Tree](#) outside Holberg, at the eastern end of Kains Lake, where some say exhausted hikers discard their worn shoes after returning from rugged Cape Scott.

Port Alice: The pretty logging and mill town of Port Alice is built on a mountainside affording excellent views of Neroutsos Inlet from every vantage point. It's been the home since 1917 of the longest running mill in BC. The town's boat launch offers full facilities for kayakers, fishing charters and sightseers to then head off for the islets of Quatsino Sound or [Lawn Point Provincial Park](#), with its spectacular views of nearby [Brooks Peninsula](#). There's excellent hiking in the area and, for cavers, ancient Quatsino karst and limestone formations like Devil's Bath, Eternal Foundation and Vanishing River. Golfers will enjoy the beautiful scenery at the nine-hole Port Alice Golf & Country Club. Port Alice has its own orchid hybrid officially listed with the Royal Horticultural Society in London, England. www.portalice.ca

Port Hardy: Ripe with opportunities for outdoor adventure, Port Hardy is a town that offers it all: kayaking, marine activities, First Nations culture, numerous West Coast artists and phenomenal, abundant wildlife. Black bears are a common sight along the highway as they feast on sweet grass in the summer months. In spring, summer and fall, grizzly bear viewing tours depart by boat or floatplane from Port Hardy to mainland regions of the Great Bear Rainforest and whale-watching tours to explore the Johnstone Strait marine bio-reserves. Land shuttle service leaves from Port Hardy to the trailhead of [Cape Scott Provincial Park](#), with access to the North Coast Trail, beginning at the San Josef Bay parking lot. Park access can also be gained by water taxi from Port Hardy, which will bring visitors to the Shushartie Bay trailhead of the North Coast Trail. You can also rent equipment here to scuba dive at [God's Pocket Provincial Park](#) or to [surf at Raft Cove](#). Picnic at nearby Storey's Beach and spot bald eagles along the [Quatse River Trail](#). Stroll the town to see colourful murals painted on downtown buildings and to snap pictures of the local chainsaw art at Carrot Park in Hardy Bay. Visit the [Port Hardy Museum & Archives](#) to see 8,000 year old native artifacts and a recreation of a Danish settler's cottage. BC Ferries links Port Hardy to Prince Rupert on the [Inside Passage](#) route and to Bella Coola on the [Discovery Coast Passage](#) route. www.porthardy.travel/; <http://www.ph-chamber.bc.ca/Visitors.html>; www.porthardy.ca/; www.hellobc.com/en-CA/RegionsCities/PortHardy.htm



Port McNeill: The scenic coastal community of Port McNeill proudly co-exists with the rich natural resources of the land and sea. This affinity with nature has made Port McNeill an excellent centre for adventure tourism of every kind. Salt and fresh water fishing and charters, hiking the town's Broughton Loop trail, whale watching tours, air tours via seaplane or helicopter, kayaking and biking are all accessible from the centre of town. The full service recreational and commercial harbour facility is within walking distance to all necessities for boaters. It's also the popular tourism gateway to the Broughton Archipelago and site of the [BC Ferries terminal](#) to Alert Bay and Sointula. Visit the [Just Art Gallery](#) for authentic Native American artworks carved in red cedar, yellow cedar and alder by local First Nations artists, and [Henschel Fine Arts](#) for gorgeous watercolours of local scenes by Gordon Henschel. www.town.portmcneill.bc.ca; www.portmcneill.net; www.hellobc.com/en-CA/RegionsCities/PortMcNeill.htm

Telegraph Cove: A multicoloured cluster of buildings and homes clings to the rocky shores around this marina and eco-tourism launch point that began as a one-room telegraph station in 1912. Telegraph Cove is situated in a sheltered inlet at the northern end of the Johnstone Strait, across from the Broughton Archipelago and near the famous orca rubbing beaches of the Robson Bight Ecological Reserve. Walk the waterfront boardwalk past the resort – whose historic buildings were once a lumber mill and salmon saltery – to the [Whale Interpretive Centre](#) to see the skeletons of orcas, dolphins, sea lions and a fin whale, the world's second largest animal species. Arrange guided sea kayaking, whale-watching excursions and grizzly bear viewing tours through [North Island Kayaks](#), [Stubbs Island Whale Watching](#) and [Tide Rip Grizzly Tours](#). www.hellobc.com/en-CA/RegionsCities/TelegraphCove.htm



Sointula: This laid-back community of 800 on Malcolm Island is accessible by a 25-minute [BC Ferries](#) ride from Port McNeill. Sointula (pronounced Soy-n-too-la) means “Place of Harmony” in Finnish, appropriate since this is where a group of Vancouver Island coal-mining Finns attempted to start a utopian socialist community where all property was communal. While their dreams did not come to fruition as planned, their descendents remain in the area today and the 100-year old Sointula Co-op grocery store, BC’s oldest, remains the social hub of island life. You can still see the settlers’ old homes, saunas and boatsheds along the waterfront. Other reasons to visit here include camping at Bere Point, hiking through stunning rainforest on the Beautiful Bay Trail, exploring the site of an early 1900s homestead on the Mateoja Heritage Trail and visiting Sointula Museum to explore the local Finnish history. www.sointulainfo.ca



Wilderness Lodges: Along with covering the northern third of Vancouver Island, the Regional District of Mount Waddington also includes large portions of the adjacent mainland wilderness areas. Much of this land is within the Great Bear Rainforest and offers several remote wilderness adventure resorts. You can learn to kayak on a fully catered holiday at Broughton Archipelago Paddler’s Inn in Simoom Sound. Pierre’s at Echo Bay Lodge & Marina is a rustic, family owned and operated resort that is accessible only by plane or boat. Sullivan Bay BC Marine Resort is a popular destination for boaters and wildlife enthusiasts, as well as the location of a colourful village of private floating homes. Another popular stop during the summer cruising season, Jennis Bay Extreme Expeditions offers stable moorage and activities from geo-cache treasure hunts to cold water diving, along with a gift shop and guest cabin. For guests of eco-friendly Nimmo Bay Resort in McKenzie Sound, helicopters are the means of transport on wilderness adventures from sustainable catch-and-release fishing to heli-hiking, glacier-trekking and heli-rafting. Great Bear Nature Tours transports guests by seaplane from Port Hardy to their floating lodge in the Great Bear Rainforest. There are two guided grizzly bear viewing tours a day conducted by a wildlife biologist, as well as natural history presentations, capped by gourmet food and wine served amid spectacular wilderness scenery. www.paddlersinn.ca;



www.pierresbay.com; www.sullivanbay.com; www.jennisbay.com; www.nimmobay.com; www.greatbeartours.com

Winter Harbour: A sheltered haven for sailing ships in the 1800s, the historic fishing village of Winter Harbour is closer to Japan and China than any other North American settlement. Known for professional guided saltwater fishing charters for salmon and halibut in Quatsino Sound, Winter Harbour is also a stop on the biennial [Van Isle 360 International Yacht Race](#). It offers the only stationary fuelling facility on Quatsino Sound and safe year-round anchorage for pleasure craft and West Coast commercial fishing boats. From the village, visitors can walk to sand beaches along a seaside boardwalk, observing sea otters, bald eagles and other intertidal wildlife along the way. [Cape Scott Provincial Park](#) and [Raft Cove](#) are both nearby. Beachcombing is a popular pastime close by on the white sand of Grant Bay and at rugged Hecht Beach, an ideal spot for winter storm-watching. www.winterharbour.ca

Woss: Woss sits at the heart of the Nimpkish Valley. This small, friendly logging community of about 400 people is 129 km (80 mi) from Campbell River. It is home to the only current railroad logging operation in Canada; with over 122 kilometres (76 miles) of track, it is the largest logging railroad in North America. Steam Locomotive 113, built in 1920 for rail logging, resides locally and is a historic treasure that honours the past of this community. Boating, wilderness camping, mountaineering and hiking are popular at [Woss Lake Provincial Park](#), prime habitat for Canada’s most endangered species, the Vancouver Island marmot. Lakes, glaciers and Roosevelt elk are part of the spectacular scenery at [Schoen Lake Provincial Park](#), one of the Island’s most beautiful parks. Only minutes from the turn off to [Mount Cain](#) ski hill, Woss is the perfect place for skiers and boarders to stop to refuel, have a meal or spend the night on their North Island ski trip.

Images courtesy Tourism Vancouver Island - Boomer Jerritt, ChrisCheadle.com