



Vancouver Island North: *Escape Into Nature*



Vancouver Island North is a region of natural and cultural wealth. It's where some of the world's greatest predators – cougars, wolves, bears and killer whales – maintain ecological balance in pristine waters and vast rainforests. It's where First Nations people and their culture still thrive after 8,000 years. You can see traditional big houses and the world's tallest totem poles here, watch native carvers at work and weave a cedar bracelet at a First Nations cultural gallery. It's where intrepid European settlers first began arriving in the 1800s, building fishing villages, clearing farmland and seeking to fulfil utopian dreams.

The spectacular [North Island](#) area, under the jurisdiction of the [Regional District of Mount Waddington](#), covers the northern third of Vancouver Island and large tracts of the adjacent mainland, where several remote luxury wilderness resorts can be reached by boat and floatplane. Eco-adventure in Vancouver Island's wild North is like nowhere else in the world. You can kayak in waters abundant with sea life, including orcas and humpback whales, take a [grizzly bear viewing](#) expedition to the Great Bear Rainforest, fish for record-breaking salmon, ski the Island's deepest powder and hike the new North Coast Trail. Friendly communities – including Port Hardy, Port McNeill, Port Alice, Alert Bay and Telegraph Cove – offer cafes and bistros, shopping, museums and art galleries, and accommodation from waterfront hotels and cozy B&Bs to the latest in eco-lodging.

Designation: Forest Capital of British Columbia 2010

Population: Approximately [12,000](#). Largest communities: [Port Hardy](#) (3,800), [Port McNeill](#) (2,600) and Cormorant Island, including [Alert Bay](#) (1,300).

Weather: Vancouver Island North has a temperate coastal climate with a lush spring season that comes as early as the end of February and mild, dry summers with average temperatures in the 17°C (63°F) range. Fall is crisp and cool, still ideal for outdoor activities, while winters are wet, but moderate, with seasonal temperature averaging 4°C (39°F).

Economic Drivers: Fishing, logging and mining have been the traditional mainstays of the Vancouver Island North economy. The region is among Canada's largest timber producers and is home to one of only a few specialty cellulose mills in North America. Other major industries include commercial fishing, aquaculture and tourism.

Claims to Fame:

- Old-growth Sitka spruce and 115 km (71 mi) of remote oceanfront at [Cape Scott Provincial Park](#)
- The new [North Coast Trail](#), a 43.1 km (26.5 mi) addition to the 17 km (10.5 mi) Cape Scott Trail
- Boat-access only [Broughton Archipelago Marine Provincial Park](#), BC's largest marine park
- The whale sanctuary of [Robson Bight \(Michael Bigg\) Ecological Reserve](#) in the Johnstone Strait
- About 200 [northern resident orcas](#) famous for rubbing their bellies on the smooth pebble beaches
- Scenic gateway to the Haida Gwaii and Prince Rupert on the [BC Ferries](#) Inside Passage Route
- [Mount Cain](#) ski resort, the best powder skiing on Vancouver Island
- Elaborately carved totem poles, including the world's tallest, in [Alert Bay](#)
- [U'mista](#) in Alert Bay, Canada's longest running First Nations museum and cultural centre
- The world's largest burl, up to 30 tons and 350 years old, in downtown [Port McNeill](#)
- Finnish history brought to life in [Sointula](#), home of BC's oldest Co-op grocery store
- Canada's last remaining stronghold of [Roosevelt elk](#), the world's largest species of elk

Best Beaches: The 30 km (18.5 mi) of tranquil sand beaches in Cape Scott Provincial Park, including: San Josef Bay, Nels Bight, Experiment Bight and Guise Bay. Other Vancouver Island North beaches: Storey's Beach (Port Hardy), Raft Cove (access via Holberg), and Mitchell Bay and Bere Point (Malcolm Island).

Major Attractions:

- Black [bears](#) eating sweet grass along "bear alley," the highway leading into Port Hardy
- The [Copper Maker Gallery](#), totems and big house on the Fort Rupert Reserve
- Marine wildlife in [Cormorant Channel](#) and [Broughton Archipelago](#) Marine Provincial Parks
- Record-breaking salmon fishing from April to September and halibut from April to October
- The skeleton of a giant fin whale at the Telegraph Cove [Whale Interpretive Centre](#)
- [Grizzly bear viewing](#) trips to the floating [Great Bear Lodge](#) in the Great Bear Rainforest
- [Ronning's Garden](#), a 1910 exotic wilderness garden near Holberg, complete with Monkey Trees
- The 6 m (20 ft) tall jawbone of a [blue whale](#), the largest ever found, in Coal Harbour
- Sink holes, canyons, limestone arches and wild caves at [Little Huson Regional Park Caves](#)
- The magnificent beaches, islets and carved seas stacks at [San Josef Bay](#)
- Cold-water scuba diving in the Browning Pass near [God's Pocket Marine Provincial Park](#)
- Surfing at [Raft Cove Provincial Park](#), with board [rentals and lessons](#) available in Port Hardy
- "Heli-ventures" and freshwater salmon and trout heli-fishing at luxury fly-in [Nimmo Bay Resort](#)

Arts & Culture:

First Nations art, culture and history flourish in the region. Alert Bay on Cormorant Island is home of the outstanding [Potlatch Collection](#) at U'mista Cultural Centre and of [Culture Shock](#), an interactive gallery and winner of a 2009 Aboriginal Tourism of BC (ATBC) award for its unique hands-on cultural experiences. At the Copper Maker Gallery on the Fort Rupert Reserve, First Nations carver [Calvin Hunt](#) has gained international fame. Port McNeill's [Just Art Gallery](#) specializes in fine Native American works by talented local First Nations artists.

The [Sointula Museum](#) on Malcolm Island documents the early life of the idealistic Finns who settled here in the 19th century looking for a new socialist order. In Port Hardy, visitors can browse the [West Coast Community Craft Shop](#), an expressive showcase for West Coast artisans. The [Port Hardy Museum & Archives](#) is a wonderful place to relive the colourful history of the early North Island settlers, including pioneering Danes who built dairy farms at rugged Cape Scott. The Port McNeill Heritage Museum, in a log house, pays tribute to the history of the local forestry industry.

Festivals & Events:

- [Alert Bay Seafest](#) in July
- [Filomi Days](#), each July in Port Hardy
- [Orca Fest](#), every August in Port McNeill
- [Coast to Coast Foot Roast](#) from Holberg in August
- Winterfest, held each November in Sointula

Transportation Links:

- [Port Hardy](#) is the last, most northerly stop along Vancouver Island's main highway, Highway 19. Vancouver Island North communities along the way include Sayward, Woss, Telegraph Cove and Port McNeill. Port Hardy is a 502 km drive from Victoria that takes approximately 6.5 hours, and is about five hours from Nanaimo and approximately 2.5 hours from Campbell River.
- [BC Ferries](#) routes from Port McNeill connect to Alert Bay on Cormorant Island (45 minutes) and to Sointula on Malcolm Island (25 minutes).
- The popular BC Ferries "circle tour" links Port Hardy to the highly remote and photogenic coastal villages of Bella Bella, Shearwater, Klemtu, Ocean Falls and Bella Coola on the [Discovery Coast Passage](#) route. The [Inside Passage](#) route is the equivalent of a spectacular 15-hour ocean cruise from Port Hardy to Prince Rupert.
- Pacific Coastal Airlines provides regularly scheduled flights between [Port Hardy Airport](#) (YZT) and [Vancouver International Airport](#) (YVR).
- Seaplane service is available between the communities of Port Hardy, Port McNeill and Alert Bay.
- Port McNeill Airport serves small private aircraft and West Coast Helicopters, the "supplier of choice" for [Nimmo Bay Resort](#).

