

Canadian surfing safari



Courtesy **INNER RHYTHM SURF CAMP**

Ross Mickelberg rides the waves that crash and pound on Wickaninnish Beach, just one of the many incredible beaches between BC's Ucluelet and Tofino townsites. Humpback whales like the one in this file photo right, are just one of several species who migrate along Vancouver's island coastline.

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Special to the Sun

I could see it coming out of the corner of my eye, this monstrosity of water heading straight for me. Being a snowboarder for 12 years, I thought I may have a knack for its liquid cousin, but as I discovered during a recent winter surf session on the west coast of Vancouver Island, I could use some schooling.

That little bird on my shoulder screamed "paddle" and I started to get my arms in motion. I could feel the velocity of my surf board starting to give'er and now came the interesting part - standing up. It was not looking good as the nose started heading into the bottom of the wave and I was still on my stomach.

Tucked along the west coast of Vancouver Island is the famed Pacific Rim National Park, home to some outstanding surf breaks and Inner Rhythm Surf Camps. Surf's up in Canada, but who knew.

Dean Montgomery, founder of Canada's only surf camp, found in the sea-

side town of Ucluelet, stepped into the liquid nine years ago and I couldn't have had a better instructor for my surf safari. Montgomery's known as the pioneer in establishing the Canadian west coast surf scene.

"The scene around here really took off about four years ago, but I've been riding these waves here for over 35," he said.

Washing machine

Back on the board I was headed right for the "washing machine." The undercurrent and turbulence waves can create an epic rush, however it can also cause another kind of ride off the board.

Flipped tush over tea kettle, I found myself locked underneath this watery giant, being pulled in all directions and the Maytag Man no where to be found to help me out.

Thousands flock to this neck of the woods each year, both winter and summer, to catch some waves, enjoy both the outstanding surroundings and some of the world's top beaches.

"Between the 45 kms that bridge the towns of Ucluelet and Tofino, we have approximately 20 incredible surf breaks," said Montgomery.

"Surfing is a gradual sport, you get better with age," he explained as we worked through some drills on land to prepare me for what was next.

"It is as much a mental work out as it is physical. It's all about focus, you have to pay attention to the pitch and the wave, and the toughest thing about the sport is catching it."

That part really sunk in with me.

This amazing sport of island kings is well within our reach. A short hop on West Jet's new direct Edmonton-to-Comox service gets you started and then it's an awesome three hour drive to the wide open west coast.

Or if you have the time, make it a leisurely road trip from Edmonton complete with a ferry ride across the Strait of Georgia.

As we were suiting up for our day Montgomery started giving me the gears, "You'll probably quit snowboarding



and move out here after today." I am not going to lie to you, I was pretty close.

The landscape on the West Coast is simply stunning and, in my opinion, there is no better way to experience it than from the deck of a surf board.

Bobbing around in the ocean, your feet dangling in the water, eagles flying over head, a rather deserted beach laid out before you - perfect.

Whale of a time

And starting this month you will be able to see whales swimming off shore as you wait for your next wave to come in - how killer is that?

Ucluelet's annual Pacific Rim Whale Festival continues through this weekend, welcoming over 20,000 whales who migrate north from the Mexican Baja and make these waters their home for the summer.

Montgomery's has turned out to be a thriving business in sharing the Canadian Aloha spirit which welcomes both adults and teens through surf camps.

These three-day or week long water safaris allows visitors to experience the power of the ocean in a very adventurous way

Camps feature accommodations, food, gear rentals and, of course, top notch instruction. Through his tips I

was up riding high; well maybe it wasn't the nine footers, but you can have some great times in the shorter white water waves closer to shore too!

Parents, ship your teenage son or daughter off for a week long surf camp this summer and have them not only learn how to ride the waves in some of Canada's premier wilderness but also encounter the science of the ocean.

"It was simple for me; I've been surfing since I was a kid and wanted to share," said Montgomery.

Discover your own inner rhythm, surf into www.innerhythm.ca 'cause the surf's up, eh!