

OakBayNEWS

Ucluelet - for all reasons, for all seasons

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What makes a community livable? Retain its sense of self in changing times? The citizens of Ucluelet seem to know, and have been recognized internationally for their achievements and success in planning Ucluelet's future. They have built a path for future growth while maintaining the natural beauty and small town atmosphere of their village. And while Ucluelet's amenities grow, it retains its vital individual character. No matter what the season, or the reason, a visit to the western edge of Vancouver Island, Ucluelet is poised to charm.

Getting there

Before you even arrive, the scenery along Highway 4 will take your breath away. You'll marvel that there are such massive mountains on Vancouver Island, and after the first snow, you'd think you're travelling through the Rockies.

When you first catch a glimpse of Kennedy Lake, just a few kilometers from the village, you'll think you've reached the ocean because of its size. But it will be the tell-tale craggy treetops against the sky that will give away that you're nearing the open ocean and your destination.

Mother Nature the Drama Queen

Mother Nature can be quite a drama queen in the "off" season. Rolling fog, tempest-tossed seas and giant migrating sea creatures are just a few of the treats she brings out between October and April on the Wild West Coast of Vancouver Island. And there is no cozier viewing platform for her theatrics than the village of Ucluelet.

The Pineapple Express (tropical gales from Hawaii pushed along the jet stream) regularly hits Vancouver Island's exposed coast in the form of 120 km (75 mile) winds and 12 m (36 feet) waves. Add in the rain of the rainforest and you have a first-class storm-watching location.

Few communities are so well poised to comfortably view and experience some of the wildest storms in Mother Nature's arsenal than Ucluelet. The village of 1,800 is surrounded by verdant forest, islands and vast stretches of pebbly shore. And there are plenty of cozy places where you can snuggle up, drink a cup of tea (or a glass of wine) in front of a roaring fire, and watch the winter waves pound the surf and the rain lash the windows.

Cozy cabins on

the coast

Ucluelet is gaining the reputation of being the cottage country of the west. With more than 50 fully-equipped cabins with ocean frontage or nestled in the rainforest it's no wonder. The town also offers everything from great B"Bs and luxury resorts to intimate motels. Dining facilities range from coffee shops to restaurants with gourmet menus. More hotels, lodges and eateries are currently under construction, with even more planned including a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf resort.

And when that

fog-horn blows

Each season brings its own delights. Come in autumn and Ucluelet and its environs become a mystical place. You feel a different type of energy in the fresh, salt air. Rocky out-croppings and millennium old cedars shrouded in fog give an ancient ambiance to the area. The low bleats of fog-horns will accompany you on your walks around town or along Ucluelet's Wild Pacific Trail.

The Wild Pacific Trail is the town's pride and joy. It hugs the rugged shoreline around Ucluelet and offers incredible views of the Barclay Sound, the Broken Group Islands and the open Pacific Ocean. The first four phases have been completed and include 8.5 km of paths which wind past Amphitrite Point Lighthouse, He-Tin-Kis Park, and end at Big Beach Park.

An endless wave

of whales

By mid-March, the storms abate in time for the procession of an estimated 19,000 migrating gray whales from Baja California on their way to the summer feeding grounds of the northern Pacific. While the migration starts in March, resident whales are in the area until late in the fall.

Ucluelet and the surrounding area celebrate the whale's return with the week-long Pacific Rim Whale Festival, also in March. Local whale-watching tour operators in Ucluelet take visitors out to see the whales throughout the season. But a hike along the Wild Pacific Trail may also bring sightings.

Wildlife is plentiful in the region and spring is an excellent viewing season. It is a good location for bird watching with over 250 species of birds. Bald eagles, osprey, herons, oyster catchers and ducks circle in the sky, forage on the beach and dive in the water. Sea lions and seals bellow while basking on the rocks, and otters and minks scamper through the brush.

Doing the right thing

The International Awards for Livable Communities, (LivCom), are a worldwide competition for communities that focus on environmental management and the creation of livable communities. Their objective is to encourage innovation and leadership by towns and cities when creating communities that are vibrant, environmentally sustainable, and, most importantly, livable.

Ucluelet was recently rewarded with high placements in several categories at the International Awards for Livable Communities in Hangzhou, China. Ucluelet received a Gold Award for their Official Community Plan; a Silver Award and 2nd Place for the Most Livable Community below 20,000 populations; and the Winner's Trophy for The Most Sustainable Community.

The locals call their town Ukee, like an old friend, and are very proud of their once-rough logging and fishing town turned year-round visitor destination.

Ultimately it's that intimate sense of caring residents express for their community that permeates a visit to Ucluelet. It's reflected in their relationship to the outdoors and wildlife; the numbers, types and style of businesses offered, in the recognition that they indeed have a special place and a determination to not spoil that gift.

IF YOU GO:

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