

## Fine Foods Match Vancouver Island's Spectacular Setting

APRIL 9, 2015



A rainy day on Chesterman Beach near Tofino. Jeremy Koreski for The New York Times

Tofino, an enclave on the western edge of [Vancouver Island](#) in Canada, has long been a draw for its spectacular setting between the Pacific Ocean, with its surfer-magnet waves, and the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve. Now, the growing number of restaurants is another reason to visit this British Columbia district, with a population of less than 1,900. The thriving culinary scene here is led by transplants who were attracted to the area's idyllic surroundings and easygoing way of life.

Outsiders might be driving the movement, but it began when a native, Charles McDiarmid, opened the [Wickaninnish Inn](#), a Relais & Châteaux property, and its upscale dining space, the Pointe, more than a decade ago.

Mr. McDiarmid, 58, grew up in town but left to attend the Cornell University School of Hotel Administration and worked at luxury hotels before returning home to create a high-end tourist experience like the 75-room Wickaninnish. "The stunning scenery and really great ingredients were always there, but there wasn't a nice environment to enjoy them in," he said.



Picnic Charcuterie, which is run by an Ontario native, Tina Windsor; and seafood plate for two at Wolf in the Fog. Jeremy Koreski for The New York Times

The restaurant continues to be at the top of high-end dining destinations in the area. The 85-seat space has floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the water, a gas fireplace and thick wood tables made from recycled Douglas fir trees. The 4,000-bottle wine list and frequently changing menu are also compelling. Selections rely mainly on local ingredients and might include seared albacore tuna with sweet pepper, fennel and honey water, or crisp pork belly with garlic snails in a mustard sauce.

Over the years, Mr. McDiarmid has recruited notable chefs to run the Pointe, several of whom have left to make their own local imprint. The latest is Nicholas Nutting, a 35-year-old Victoria native who opened [Wolf in the Fog](#) in June in Tofino. “My idea was a place where people can eat at a few times a week with food that uses the best ingredients I can find locally,” Mr. Nutting said.

Housed in a two-story former art gallery with cedar beams and windows that face the sea, the restaurant serves dishes ranging from a hamburger made with beef from a nearby farm to a seafood plate for two, which includes scallops, black cod and mixed shellfish in a saffron coconut curry, accompanied by a hunk of turmeric-flavored focaccia.

In this outdoorsy area, formal meals like these are only a small part of Tofino’s epicurean highlights. [Wildside Grill](#), for example, is a shack in a gravel parking lot about a mile outside of the main district where customers pick up seafood bites such as halibut tacos and oyster burgers with sweet chile mayo.



Jeff Mikus, a 43-year-old fisherman from Vancouver who co-owns the 200-square-foot space, had sold his catch to renowned restaurants in North America for several years but was looking for a way to keep more of it closer to home. He supplies the Wickaninnish Inn, for one.

Another grab-and-go option is [Picnic Charcuterie](#), where an Ontario native, Tina Windsor, 28, uses the island's meats, edible plants and herbs. Opened last June, her long and compact deli includes a small back room where she ages and smokes her creations, such as ham cured with a kelp stout from Tofino Brewing Company and pancetta cured with thyme and hemlock tips. A seven-foot-long counter at the entryway displays her dozen varieties.

Twice the size of her shop is the [Tofino Coffee Roasting Company](#), an 800-square-foot cafe that Michael Farrow, 45, opened in 2013 after living in Tofino for two decades and not finding a way to get his morning caffeine fix. "There was no one selling really good coffee so I decided to do it myself," he said.

A one-time photographer, he invested his life savings of \$35,000 into a professional roaster, hired an expert from Vancouver to teach him the craft and now sources mostly organic fair trade beans for his four blends, including the toffee- and chocolate-tasting Old Growth Medium Dark. His idea was an instant hit: He has served at least a few hundred customers a day ever since he opened, he said.

Individual establishments aside, the ideal snapshot of the gastronomy here might be found at [Feast Tofino](#), a monthlong festival that will enter its fifth year in May. Jay Gildenhuys, 48, a fisherman and owner of the casual restaurant [Shelter](#), started it as a way to celebrate the newfound culinary enthusiasm of this tiny seaside haven.

The more than 25 activities offered have consistently sold out, including the Dockside Festival, where many of the popular spots set up tasting stalls so visitors — about 700 last year — can sample a bit of everything.