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*Potato-crust oyster dish at Wolf in the Fog. Photo by Joy Pecknold.*

## Tofino in Summer

*Hanging tuff.*

STORY: Joy Pecknold

There are a couple of theories on how Tofino got its “Tough City,” or alternately spelled “Tuff City,” nickname. One, that it’s a truncated version of its local pronunciation, “Tuf-fino,” and the other, that in its earlier life as an isolated trading town, even the heartiest settlers found its long, wet, wild winters taxing.

While those shortest days of the year remain tempestuous, the toughest challenge for its roughly 1,800 present day, year-round residents seems to be finding and keeping reasonable housing. But for the hundreds of thousands of holiday-ers that come here, the only real difficulty is deciding which beachfront resort to book, and, perhaps, how to get from prostrate to upright on a moving surfboard.

For the seasonal crowd, more than a sufficient solution to the first obstacle is to stay at Pacific Sands Beach Resort. On 40 acres facing Cox Bay, where many first-time surfers take their spills for the thrill of standing for a few seconds, the resort has grown from a 17-unit cottage-motel in the 1970s to a 77-room property. The three-level beach houses are the finest in its suite, kitted out with fully-equipped kitchens, double decks, floor-to-ceiling windows framing the ocean, and towering trees out front. This July, they opened the Surf Shack in partnership with Surf Sister Surf School to provide on-site rentals and lessons.

There are other, less trying boards to try, as well. On the calmer waters of Mackenzie Beach, [Tofino Paddle Surf](#) offers stand-up paddle boarding, said to be the fastest-growing water sport in the world. Lifelong local and Canadian national surf champion Catherine Bruhwiler runs the operation. With a voice nearly as deep as her tan, her strong, svelte figure is a testament to the benefits of routine board-om. If the basics (standing, paddling, three-point turns) prove too easy, paddle surfing, yoga, or fishing atop the foam floaters can be arranged.

Charcuterie boards are even easier to manage. Procuring finer meats and cheeses in the seaside town used to be like trying to land a last-minute provincial campsite on a long weekend, but the opening of [Picnic Charcuterie](#) has altered that. The tiny shop turns out pepper lonza, pancetta, hunter sausage, salty sweet bacon, and more. Freckled and presently platinum blonde, Ottawa transplant Tina Windsor makes those from scratch using primarily local ingredients—pork from Port Alberni and Qualicum Beach, salt from Cobble Hill—along with preserves such as wild Nootka rose jelly and pickled sea asparagus. There are some cheeses from B.C., but some travel farther: Quebecois goat, Spanish blue, and French brie. Wrapped in paper packages, they make perfect fare for, well, a picnic.

Up the street is Picnic's nearest supplier, [Tofino Brewing Co.](#), which provides Kelp Stout for a beer- and brown sugar-brined ham. Opened in 2011, the brewery's first beer, Tuff Session Ale, toasted the city and surf culture, and since then its portfolio has grown tenfold. That extends to real estate, with the addition of a 25-ft. tasting bar last year. Their beers are now available across the Island and Lower Mainland, as well as the [Okanagan Valley](#), but somehow still taste best when served up by Jeff Spicoli's doppelganger, co-owner Dave McConnell, or taken to-go in a growler and consumed fireside at sunset.



*Wolf in the Fog kitchen pass-through.*

With happy hour taken care of, it's onto dinner, and for a small town, Tofino is teeming with world-class cuisine. One of the newest kids on the block is Wolf in the Fog. Above a surf school on downtown's main drag, the restaurant swiftly took down a big accolade within its first six months when it was named the best new restaurant in Canada by *enRoute*. The fact that many of the chefs and managers are expats of The Pointe Restaurant at the Wickaninnish Inn certainly has something to do with the breakneck buzz, and many menu items warrant the worship. The potato-crustured oysters and charred Humboldt squid are reliably mouth-watering.

There's nothing forgettable about a visit to Hot Springs Cove, or the trip up there: 26 nautical miles northwest, which offers the possibility of spotting an actual wolf in the fog. The natural thermal springs are only accessible by boat or plane, and Jamie's Whaling Station and Adventure Centres offers a combination of the two to take tourists back and forth. Sea lions and cetaceans are more common sightings, but even if the sideline wildlife doesn't deliver, the final destination does. In Maquinna Marine Provincial Park, a forested boardwalk terminates at a rocky shoreline where steam rises then dissipates and 41°C waters pool before slowly slipping back into the Pacific Ocean. Shoulder-deep in the drink, a wedge of sky, sea, and windblown trees beyond, it becomes apparent that leaving is the toughest thing to do.

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