

WESTERN LIVING

Inside!

Easy
Garden Party
Recipes

Plus

Sustainable Design

A North Vancouver Home
That's Green and Gorgeous

Beautiful Cabins
and Lakeside
Retreats That
Celebrate Summer

LAI-D-BACK LIVING

SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE

CAMPBELL RIVER

QUALICUM BEACH

PARKSVILLE

NANAIMO

DUNCAN

VICTORIA



Why let Victoria and Tofino have all the fun?
This summer, we're taking a tour of hidden gems on the east side of Vancouver
Island—think **Nanaimo, Parksville, Qualicum Beach, Duncan** and
Campbell River. These serene seaside towns with top-notch restaurants,
spas and outdoor wonders have all the makings for a magical local getaway.
No fairy godmother required... just a ferry.

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THE NEXT BIG THING

With a swanky new resort, growing restaurant scene and a wealth of outdoorsy fun, could **Campbell River** be coming for Tofino's crown? By Stacey McLachlan

Sitting down for the first-ever meal at Naturally Pacific Resort's sun-dappled outdoor long table, overlooking rolling golf greens and snowcapped mountains, I take a bracing sip of crisp white wine and turn to the well-dressed man sitting next to me. There is no polite way to say it, but I try my best: "Why... here?"

"Here" being Campbell River, a former mill town of 35,000 on the east coast of Vancouver Island that, until this weekend, had not been the sort of place you would find a luxury hotel. For more than three decades I've been travelling here to visit family—my paternal grandparents, aunt and cousins. We catch the ferry from Horseshoe Bay, drive 90 minutes from Nanaimo, and hang around the green-shag-carpeted, wood-paneled split-level Nana and Papa have called home for 35 years. There's a pub down the road, and a hospital, and a Tim Hortons. A big outing on our visits would be to go down to the dock for ice cream.

But according to the dapper Justin Stevens, my dinner companion and the general manager of Naturally Pacific, I've been doing Campbell all wrong this whole time.

"It's Vancouver Island's greatest outdoor playground," he insists. "It's a paradise." He's the kind of person who would know—he comes to the gig by way of the Four Seasons Serengeti, and has the kind of hospitality career that involves stories both about naming baby baboons and shopping trips to Dubai. While it boggles my mind that someone with such an exotic resumé would be happy here, he's genuinely stoked about the opportunity.

Land and Sea

Campbell River features one of the most extensive paddling and boating routes on Vancouver Island (above and bottom), but there's plenty to do on dry land, too—like a few rounds at the Campbell River Golf Club (centre).



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Orcas/kayak/river/Destination Campbell River; map: iStock/Andrea Hill; Naturally Pacific Resort: Michael Vananey

GETAWAYS VANCOUVER ISLAND'S EAST COAST



"Campbell River isn't so different from Tofino 25 years ago," he points out. A scrappy seaside city, ready for a new identity—it's the sort of underdog story that's pretty irresistible. And if that scrappy seaside city happens to have a luxe new resort to stay in while that story unfolds? All the better.

Naturally Pacific owner Amanda Mailman is a born-and-bred Campbell girl, part of a developer dynasty. With this project, she's ready to make her own mark on her hometown, and present it to the world in a whole new light. "I went to the Galapagos Islands and looked around and thought, this isn't so different from where I grew up," she says. Sure, the wildlife may not look the same, but this is also a place where nature thrives. And (unbeknownst to me as I sat gabbing with my Aunt Marnie at my grandma's kitchen table all these years) it's a place where that nature is accessible in countless ways.

There's hiking galore here (locals love the Ripple Rock climb) and world-class fishing. You can hop onto a whale-watching expedition any day of the week, or, if that's too ordinary, catch a grizzly-scouting tour with Indigenous tour operator Homalco. It's a hot spot for freediving, and just a quick drive from great mountain biking trails in Cumberland and ski hills on Mount Washington. More manicured access to the great outdoors is readily available, too: the hotel itself backs onto the 18-hole Campbell River Golf Club.

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To suddenly see this familiar place through fresh eyes is a revelation. I'd been visiting a Pacific Northwest wonderland this whole time and didn't even know it.

But do I spend part of my weekend in Campbell doing any of these soul-enriching outdoor activities? No. Unlike with any other trip I've ever had here, there is simply too much to do: a muscle-melting aromatherapy massage at Naturally's serene and sumptuous Immersion spa; a visit to European bakery-cafe Freyja on the downtown main street to sample artful, decadent croissants (the passionfruit mango pastry is a flaky, flavour-packed indulgence); a stop at kitchen-taproom-fitness-studio Sessions for wood-fired pizza and a (delightfully incongruous) bougie spin class.

I guess I'll just have to explore the Campbell River I never knew—its old-growth forests and breezy beaches—next time. Consider this a warning, Nana and Papa. You'll be seeing a lot more of me this summer... and probably a lot more of the outdoor playground you call home, too.

Naturally Pacific Resort: Michael Vanarey, Carve Kitchen: Leila Kwok



Living Large

The swanky new Naturally Pacific Resort offers more than just a luxurious spot to rest your head: there's a sumptuous spa (above) and the indulgent Carve Kitchen and Meatery (right and below).





Fore by the Forest

The Campbell River Golf Club (above) sits right behind the new resort, surrounded by towering trees and mountain views. Inside, the rooms and lobby of Naturally Pacific (left, below) offer their own serene beauty.



WHERE TO EAT

BETWEEN YOUR OUTDOOR ADVENTURES



1 DATE NIGHT

Chef Ryan Watson is at the helm of **Carve Kitchen and Meatery** (the restaurant at Naturally Pacific), and he brings experience from the infamously intricate Fairmont Banff kitchen to play. Expect a small but expertly executed menu focused on locally sourced proteins (think citrus-brined pork loin or 16-oz striploin) and playful cocktails (pop the bubble atop the tequila-based Golden Hour to start your sipping). 700 Petersen Rd., naturallypacific.ca/dine/carve

2 CRUST OR BUST

Everyone in Campbell River will tell you that **Session Taproom and Kitchen** is the place to go for wood-fired pizza. What they won't tell you is that the restaurant shares space with a spin studio. But whether you're diving into a pie post-sweat sesh or carbo-loading for a fitness class you may or may not get to, the hype is real: the crust is made from flour milled just down the highway at True Grain Bakery in Cowichan, and finished with toppings like Rosstown Farms chicken or Two Rivers chorizo. 926 Island Hwy., sessioncr.com



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3 FLAKE OUT

Emese and Géza Tóth-Haraszto immigrated from Hungary during COVID with a dream of a new life and the recipes from their favourite croissant spot in their pocket. The **Freyja bakery** is that dream come true: a bright and welcoming space serving up decadent, flaky pastries with creative flair. Sample lemon curd and meringue croissants topped with candied peel and rose petals, or the Persian Love fleur, filled with creamy, nutty pistachio frangipane. 1080 Shoppers Rv., freyjacroissant.ca **WL**

