

HIDDEN CANADA: 2025 EDITION

WHERE TO NEXT?

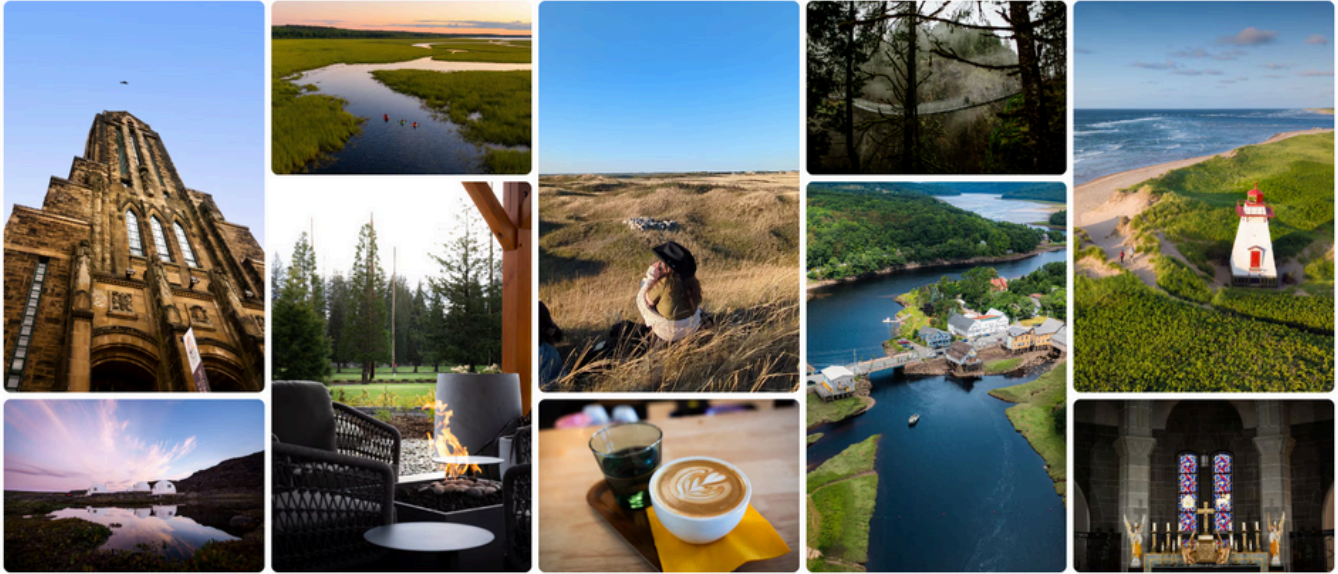
PUBLISHED MAY 13, 2025

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The **eighth edition** of The Globe's annual travel guide celebrates Canadian wanderlust with **10** new destinations

CAMPBELL RIVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

BY MARSHA LEDERMAN
THE GLOBE AND MAIL



Walk the suspension bridge in Elk Falls Park, just outside Campbell River.
BLUETREE PHOTOGRAPHY

Sometimes you have to venture very far from home to have a light bulb moment about it. Such was the case for Amanda Mailman, a lifelong resident of Campbell River, B.C., who was travelling in the Galápagos Islands when she had a revelation. “All of these international tourists are excited to see these seals,” she recalls. “I’m like, I sit in my front yard and look at these all day long.”

An idea was born.

During my few days in and near Campbell River (where I stayed at the hotel Mailman built after her epiphany) I saw seals, sea lions, bears, whales. Salmon jumping from the water. Eagles circling above.

Campbell River is on the east coast of Vancouver Island. On the 50th parallel (as a local monument announces), the city is a sort of gateway to the north island, and famously home to the island’s northernmost traffic light.



In the northeast of Vancouver Island, Campbell River is the gateway to the north island and all the beauty it has to offer.

JEROEN MIKKERS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Hardly overrun with tourists (yet), Campbell River is an ideal base for wildlife viewing and other outdoor adventures. It is world famous for its salmon fishing, I’m told. You can also kayak, bike and hike, including at nearby Strathcona Provincial Park. There are sandy beaches for exploring. You can even snorkel with the salmon, especially in peak season, late summer.

When I learned that the Great Bear Rainforest is reachable on a day trip by boat, I booked our tickets for what turned out to be a fruitful wildlife-seeing mission with Homalco Wildlife & Cultural Tours. Once we landed, we saw several grizzly bears sauntering down the river, hunting for salmon. We also saw all kinds of marine life from the boat, stopping to admire humpback whales – bobbing close enough that I could hear spurts from the blowhole.

At the end of the long day, we returned to our hotel. Naturally Pacific Resort opened last year – an upscale hotel on a golf course, with an indoor pool opening to the elements; an outdoor hot tub; first-class spa and a restaurant that uses produce grown on the property.

Not that most people would travel here for a swish hotel, but it's a nice place to land after a busy day exploring all that nature. And it could be a local-tourism game-changer.



Rooms at the Naturally Pacific Resort offer scenic views of the surrounding mountains.

MICHAEL VANAREY/NATURALLY PACIFIC RESORT



The resort, which is on a golf course, also has a pool, a first-class spa and restaurant on site.

MICHAEL VANAREY/NATURALLY PACIFIC RESORT

Previously a logging hub, this part of British Columbia experienced severe economic losses when the industry dried up. But other gains have resulted.

As we kayaked through the tranquil channels of the Campbell River estuary, my guide, Leah Hill, told me how, when she was growing up there, log booms on the river blocked out the sunlight, making the waters inhospitable for fish, seals and other wildlife. Salmon were literally jumping out of the water as she explained this. "When you let Mother Nature do her thing, she will care for us."

For something a little less wild but still sporty, the Velocity driving range next to the hotel was a huge hit with my teenager. We both became a little obsessed with TopTracer, an immersive golf game where you hit balls into the driving range as cameras track your shots, allowing you to see the results on screens.

There are urban experiences here too. I enjoyed the Campbell River Art Gallery (and its gift shop). Afterward, I visited Freyja Croissant Bakery & Coffee Shop for house-made pastries so good, they alone could entice me back to Campbell River. Not that I need a peaches & cream cruffin for that. But days of whale-watching, bear-spotting, kayaking, hiking, experience-showering and flailing at the driving range can sure work up an appetite.

If you go

HOW TO GET THERE

From Horseshoe Bay, take a B.C. Ferry to Nanaimo and drive north. Pacific Coastal Airlines flies to Campbell River. Air Canada and WestJet fly to the Comox Valley Airport.

WHERE TO STAY

The 100-room Naturally Pacific Resort, a short drive from the oceanfront, features hospitality offerings that rival any big-city property.

WHAT TO BRING

Bathing suit, watersports and hiking gear, golf clubs. Rainwear and sunscreen (welcome to B.C.).



THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: [OPENSTREETMAP](#)

The writer was the guest of Destination British Columbia and Naturally Pacific Resort. They did not review or approve this article.