

LONG WEEKEND GUIDE



Sandcut Beach is between French Beach Provincial Park and Jordan River, just 31 kilometres west of Sooke. It's just a 10-minute hike from the parking area along a rugged, wooded trail.

PERFECT FOR EVERYONE

B.C. beaches range from rocky and remote to white-sand balmy to inland lakes perfect for water-skiing



Long Beach in Pacific Rim National Park near Tofino is a great place to soak up raw, oceanside nature. *DESTINATION BC / RUSS HEINL*

Think of a beach in British Columbia, and you probably imagine the steady cadence of waves crashing against a rocky shoreline. What about warm water and white sand? Or urban gems that boast striking views of the city? In B.C., there's a beach that's perfect for everyone, from lazy sun lovers to active thrill seekers.

Few know the pull of the ocean like Charles McDiarmid. "My childhood was a bit like Huckleberry Finn's," says McDiarmid, who's spent most of his 50-plus years on one of British Columbia's iconic beaches. Long before there was a road across Vancouver Island to the west coast, he was building sand castles and beachcombing the endless strands outside Tofino. The McDiarmids went on to build the Wickaninnish Inn in 1996 on land that the family patriarch purchased on Chesterman Beach. "We especially loved winter storms, when the entertainment was compliments of Mother Nature."

At "the Wick," the McDiarmids created a Storm Watchers experience for getting up close and personal with winter's gale-force winds and thundering waves, as well as a drying space at the après-storm Driftwood Café, and a fireplace in — and sea view from — every room.

Those wild Pacific Ocean waves also prompted a surfing craze at Mystic Beach in Juan de Fuca Provincial Park, near Victoria on the Island's southern tip. A 2.5-kilometre (1.5-mile) hike through mossy rainforest and across a sus-

pension bridge ends at a dramatic, bluff-lined beach with caves, a rock arch and a magical waterfall plummeting right to the sand, perfect for a post-surfing shower.

Other B.C. beaches are almost tropical, with glittering turquoise waters and white sand. Tribune Bay on Hornby Island in the Gulf Islands, accessible by ferry from Vancouver Island's east coast, is nicknamed "Little Hawaii." In summer, it's sun-warmed to balmy temperatures, and only a five-minute walk to the island's funky village.

Another beach has — believe it or not — the warmest water north of Mexico. Savary Island, off the Sunshine Coast northwest of Vancouver, requires a short water taxi trip from the town of Lund. Foot passengers only, but take a bike or a kayak to explore the kilometre-wide and 7.5 kilometre-long island

with its forest roads, sand dunes, and meadows.

Often you'll have one of dozens of crystal-clear aquamarine beaches to yourself.

For those who prefer water-skiing and warmer water, the Thompson Okanagan region's many lakes are summer-vacation heaven.

Seymour Arm, part of Shuswap Lake with its 1,000-kilometre shoreline, features waterfalls that cascade through a spectacular series of pools behind Albas Beach in Shuswap Lake Marine Provincial Park.

It's a remote place, not easily accessible — after a two-hour boat trip from Sicamous (or a three-hour forestry-road drive from Salmon Arm), a three-kilometre loop trail leads to sandy Albas Beach, where a waterfall-cooled plunge awaits you.

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The Wickaninnish Inn is just metres from the shore on the west coast of Vancouver Island. It's calm in summer, but wind-whipped in winter. ADRIAN DORST, WICKANINNISH INN

CHOOSE FROM MILD TO WILD

BEACHES FROM II

For a more laid-back, warm-water playground, there's Osoyoos Lake, Canada's warmest fresh-water lake. Bathed in sunshine among the cactus, sagebrush and vineyards, it's near the town of Osoyoos in Canada's only true desert. At the Watermark Beach Resort, the whole family can have fun with everything from wakeboards and jet skis to sailboats and kayaks.

In south central B.C., the Kootenay Rockies offer lakes with beaches that boast mountain views. Pitch a tent alongside the sand at Kokanee Creek Provincial Park and finish the day with a soak at Ainsworth Hot Springs, a 20-minute drive away. To the southwest, Christina Lake Provincial Park's beach offers water sports, fishing and golf amid classic cottage country. It's right on the nationwide Trans Canada Trail, and boasts some of the province's warmest waters.

For people like Charles McDiarmid, though, the ultimate B.C. beach is a sandy shoreline with a rainforest backdrop of giant Sitka spruce and cedars. There are kilometres of such untouched beaches in the remote Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site Reserve on Northern B.C.'s Haida Gwaii islands. North Beach, at the northern tip of the archipelago, draws surfers and kite-surfers from around the world each November for the annual Expression Session surf competition.

For a mellower experience, beachcomb for rare Japanese glass floats, watch soaring bald eagles or walk or drive for miles along the beach. "There's nothing like experiencing raw nature on a wild stretch of beach," says McDiarmid. Maybe, but if you have a different picture of the perfect beach, you'll find it in this extraordinarily diverse province.

Story provided by Destination BC



Botanical Beach on the Juan de Fuca Trail near Fort Renfrew offers myriad tidal pools.