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# GOLF VACATIONS

MAY 2013

**VANCOUVER  
ISLAND GOLF TRAIL**

**HIGH SIERRA  
ULTIMATE GOLF**

**Plus: RESORT REPORT | FLORIDA'S INNISBROOK**



Victoria Orca Jumping



## VANCOUVER ISLAND GOLF TRAIL: — *Great Golf and a Lot More* — by Terry Ross

When the golf season gets fully underway in late spring and summer and vacationers look for enticing places to get away, relax, play and enjoy themselves, Vancouver Island, British Columbia seems to always make its way towards the top of the list.

Rated as the #1 Island vacation spot for the United States and Canada by Travel & Leisure's 2012 World's Best Awards readers' survey, this 300-mile long Island only 30 miles west of the City of Vancouver across the Straights of Georgia is not only home to some of the most scenic and enjoyable golf courses on the continent, it also affords travelers an array of experiences away from the links that are really the essence of any enjoyable trip.

If your tastes also include experiencing nature, whale watching, fishing, hiking, shopping, festivals, sightseeing and even wine tasting, this island has it all. There is enough to fill the itinerary on more than one trip. Vancouver Island is environmentally sustainable and famous for its fresh-farmed food and fish that is locally grown and heartily supported by those that live there.

From May through September, there really isn't a bad time to visit Vancouver Island when it comes to weather, even though golf is pretty much played there year around. As one of the more temperate spots in North America to play during the spring, summer and fall, the climate there can be a welcome relief for those coming from the Southern US regions.

Golf Vancouver Island, a consortium of 10 of the key golf destinations and more than 15 hotels that comprise the Vancouver Island Golf Trail is an excellent starting point for planning a vacation on the island. It is a one-stop-shop for booking golf vacations and other activities and is owned and operated by the golf courses themselves. Under the guid-

ance of Central Reservations Manager Patrick Meagher, this organization lets travelers save time and money, and provides complimentary information, vacation planning, assistance and reservations for Vancouver Island golf vacations.

A great way to start a Vancouver Island golf excursion is to embark from the capital city of the province—Victoria—at the southern end of the island. This city has a great blend of old and new world experiences that include The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, the Royal British Columbia Museum, Market Square, Chinatown and Butchart Gardens, not to mention the many breweries and brewpubs in the city.

Just north of the city, the Bear Mountain Resort stands as a singular property on the southern end of the island as the one of the largest resort developments in Western Canada covering 1300 acres and boasting Canada's first and only 36-hole Nicklaus designed golf offering. This lush mountainside community features a montage of residential and vacation real estate homes, as well as The Westin Bear Mountain Golf Resort & Spa, featuring the west coast aesthetics at the Santé Spa, a dining mecca with eclectic and world-class restaurants. Bella Montagne is their signature restaurant and is a must-visit. It was rated as Victoria's #1 New Restaurant for 2011.

The two golf courses designed by Nicklaus—the Mountain Course, which opened in 2003 and the Valley Course, which made its debut in 2009, offer two distinct experiences that should not be missed when visiting this part of the world.

The Mountain Course, open for a decade, was host of the 2010 TELUS World Skins Game. This 18-hole masterpiece that offers spectacular views of the city of Victoria and the harbor over a challenging 7,212-yard par-72 layout meanders through the mountains and offers a



Arbutus Ridge



Bear Mountain





great variety of holes.

It has immaculate greens and some blind shots that the GPS on the carts help in making it a very enjoyable course to play, despite its length. You can feel the breezes blowing in from the harbor and the deer from the forests are in abundance along the course.

The Valley Course at Bear Mountain offers a different experience in its par 71, 6,807 yard-design that is at a lower elevation than the Mountain Course, but boasts the same spectacular west coast rock and water features for which Bear Mountain has become very popular in the area. The greens on these 18 holes are a little more challenging, to be sure, but the company you get along the way definitely lets you know why they call it Bear Mountain.

Members of the professional staff note that the bears you see from time to time along the course are so tame and domesticated that they seem like spectators at times watching the golfers. They are one of the larger spectators, for sure. One reported teeing off with a 700-pound black bear only a few meters away—a real different feeling. At the other end of the spectrum, the Red-Legged Frog might stop and rest on your golf club.

Not far from Bear Mountain, the newest member of the Vancouver Island Golf Trail is Highland Pacific Golf Club. Carved from the Highland wilderness in Victoria, Highland Pacific's lush bent grass fairways thread through a majestic landscape of west coast forest, rock, fescue and natural water features, boasting panoramic views of the city of Victoria, Olympic Mountains, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Bear Mountain and Thetis Lake Park.

This is a very playable course with some subtle elevation changes where a lot of locals play, but a good many tourists and visitors will find this a really fun track. It has generous fairways where you can use driver

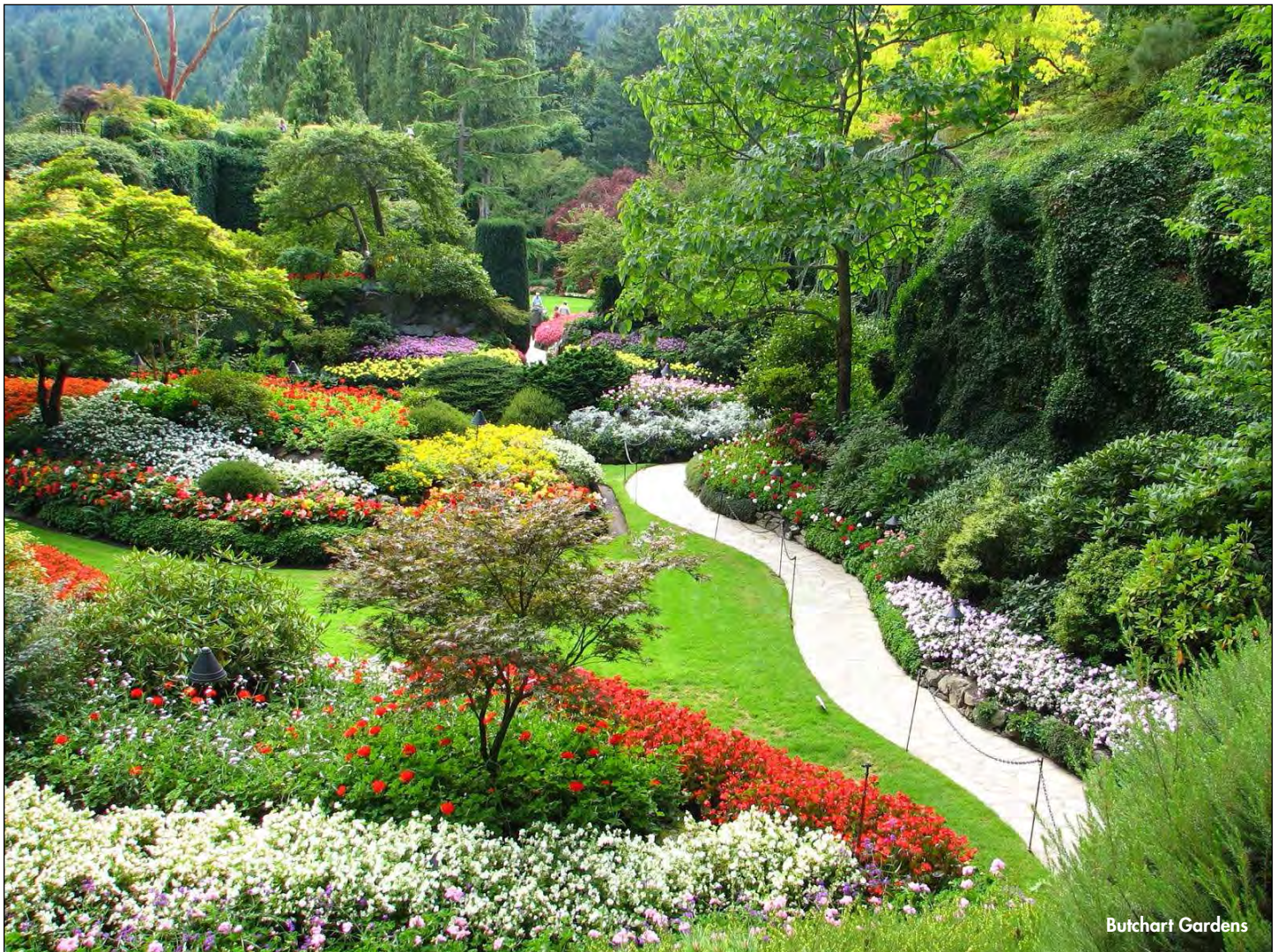
on most holes, but can be challenging from the back tees that measure 6,600 yards at a par 71.

There are no homes or hotels around this course that was built by a local family and is still operated by them. You get a chance to use all the shots with this nice variety of holes, and most people will find it a very enjoyable course and a fine new addition to the trail.

No more than a 30-minute scenic drive north from Highland Pacific up Highway 1 is the quaint water front village of Cowichan Bay. The village is a fascinating blend of sail and fishing boats, piers, wharves and floating homes, constantly active and full of independent, creative characters living and working on the water. Up the hill are some of the nicest vineyards to be found.

This area, once primarily devoted to farming, has found new life producing some of the best wines around. Visiting in the fall during the Cowichan Wine and Culinary Festival is a real treat with the many wineries in the area involved during this celebration of wine and food. For wine connoisseurs who like to play golf, you can't beat this experience with events such as the wine tasting at Cherry Point Estate Vineyards and the Winemaker's Dinner—the Battle of the Pinot's—as part of the festival. Vancouver Island has emerged as one of the top wine regions in North America because of the good growing climate and the proliferation of top-notch growers in the area.

Cowichan Bay is also the ideal base for visitors interested in boating, kayaking, diving, and the experience of a genuine working marine community with a waterfront village, so you can sail all day on a twin masted ship, race across the waves in a Zodiac to go whale watching, rent a boat and take a picnic to a deserted beach, dive deep to see the creatures of the sea or go kayaking as the sun sets. On land you can play tennis on



Butchart Gardens





the second oldest active lawn tennis court in the world next to Wimbledon, ride a horse, hike a trail or go for a bike ride.

The Oceanfront Suites at Cowichan Bay is an all-suites hotel on the water in the village with scenic, serene views of the Straights of Georgia and the Coastal Mountain Range behind. It takes you back in time to a more relaxed, easier day with very friendly people and a casual lifestyle that is refreshing. Excellent local fare is available in the hotel's Terrain Regional Kitchen—a place where you can find fresh seasonal food, carefully sourced and thoughtfully prepared with the same care it was farmed, caught and raised.

In addition to wine, this area of Vancouver Island is also known for Arbutus Ridge Golf Club, with some of the most stunning views on the island and rated one of the Top 10 courses in Canada by WestJet airlines Up! Magazine. A very walkable course, Arbutus Ridge is a beautifully manicured course with an interesting layout designed by Bill Robinson. The large greens can be tricky to navigate, but this is a very playable course even with its challenging aspects.

The course gets a lot of local play, but tourists are finding it a hidden gem among the island's many choices. Don't let the yardage on the card fool you—at least until you have played the course a few times—since it is probably best for most players to try the 5,800-yard tees. The back tees are only 6,100 yards—but it plays longer with uphill carries and local knowledge really helps here. Using a little more club on many approach shots is a smart move here, and be very conscious of the elevations. The par 3 16th hole is very challenging with a semi island green. And the par five 10th is a dog leg that can be reached in two.

Arbutus Ridge winds through the seaside community of Cobble Hill in the Cowichan Valley. This is a fun golf course with an excellent pace of play and a friendly staff led by General Manager Jason Lowe. The Satellite Lounge has excellent food and with nine wineries directly surrounding the course you can sample some of the local vino product after your round or over an evening meal—such as the tasty buffalo—along

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with an outstanding view of the countryside.

If you journey further north up Vancouver Island yet more adventures await along the Trail. Campbell River is world renowned as one of the top salmon fishing areas on the continent and Painter's Lodge has a storied past of hosting celebrities like Bob Hope, Glenn Ford, John Wayne, Curt Russell and Goldie Hawn who have journeyed to this secluded outpost for fishing, enjoying nature and just relaxing for weeks on end. Originally built in the 1920s, Painter's Lodge burnt down during a fire in 1985 and was rebuilt to continue its colorful history that continues to this day.

Painter's Lodge offers not only world-class salmon fishing, wildlife and nature tours combined with breathtaking scenery; it also has all the amenities you would expect from a traditional resort. The accommodations are reminiscent of the state rooms on a ship in the main house that overlook the Straights of Georgia and Quadra Island for some of the most picturesque scenery on the island.

The lodge is usually open from May until early October during the height of the fishing season. The staff, under General Manager Christine Fleming, does a great job of creating a home-style feel with excellent fresh catch in the Legends dining room, not to mention a host of fun activities.

An early morning fishing trip from the docks adjoining the resort is a real treat and a must while on the island. One of the local fishing guides—Russ—even works at the local salmon hatchery during the off season—replenishing the supply that he helps the guests catch during the warmer months!

For golf in the Painter's Lodge area, Storey Creek offers an outstanding natural layout with its tree-line fairways that give a sense of solitude and a true wilderness feel. This 6,669-yard layout meanders inside a dense forest and is a fun track to walk or ride.

A little south of Painters Lodge is Crown Isle, a high-end residential community and resort that has much the same feel as Bear Mountain





when it comes to a luxury clubhouse and a big, challenging golf course. It is readily accessible from many points in Canada and the U.S. via the Comox airport just five minutes down the road.

An expansive layout that stretches to 7,024 yards from the black tees, Crown Isle has gorgeous views of the Comox Valley with the Beaufort Mountains in the background.

If you decide to stay in close proximity to the Comox Airport, the Westerly Hotel and Convention Centre is an excellent choice that is also convenient while playing the Courtney and Comox courses like

Crown Isle and Morningstar. The rooms all have kitchenettes and the atmosphere at the pub on site is very accommodating. A friendly and knowledgeable staff makes this an excellent place to spend a few days in the heart of downtown Courtenay.

The golf and fun activities on a visit to Vancouver Island never get old—probably because there are so many reasons to come back and try new things.

For more information on the Vancouver Island Golf Trail visit: [www.golfvancouverisland.ca](http://www.golfvancouverisland.ca)

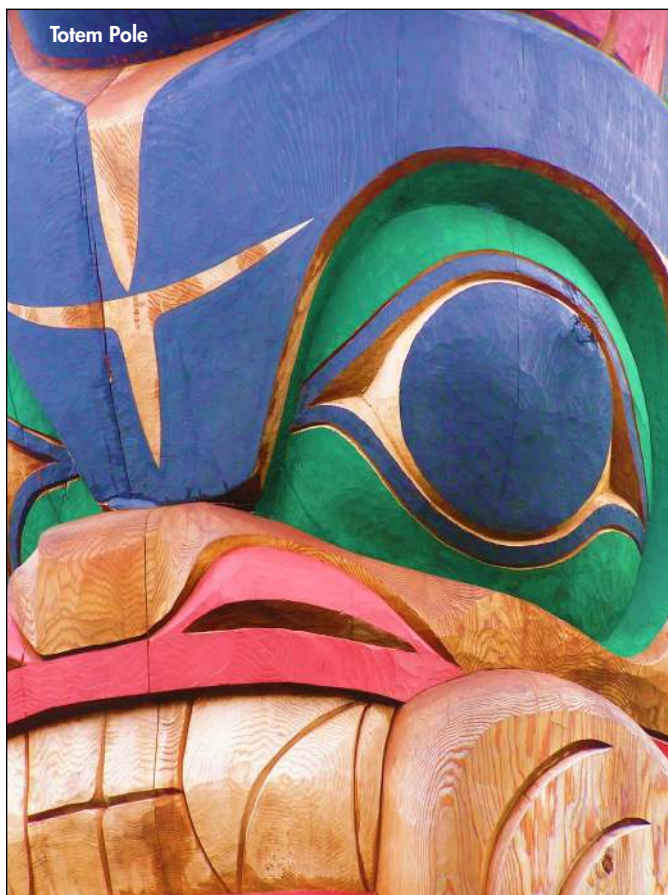
#### Victoria Harbor







Victoria Orca



Totem Pole

# VANCOUVER ISLAND Golf Trail Information

*The easiest way to plan a trip along Vancouver Island's Golf Trail is through Golf Vancouver Island or, by contacting these resorts and courses:*



Westin Bear Mountain

**Golf Vancouver Island**  
Victoria (888) 465-3239  
[www.golfvancouverisland.ca](http://www.golfvancouverisland.ca)

**The Westin Bear Mountain Golf Resort & Spa, Victoria**  
Victoria (250) 391-7160  
[www.bearmountain.ca](http://www.bearmountain.ca)

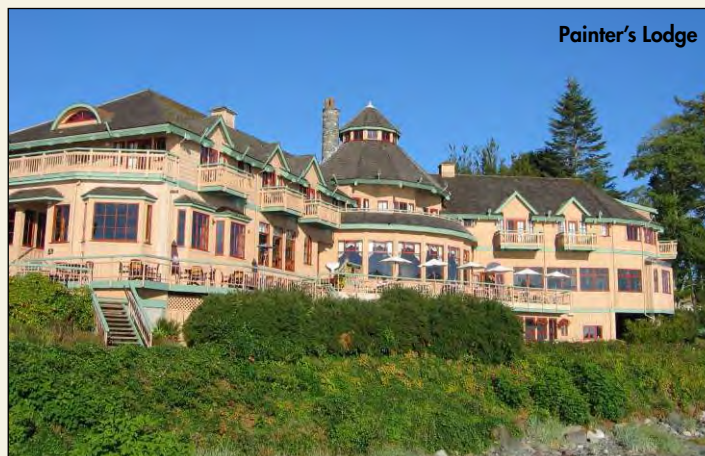
**Highland Pacific Golf Club**  
Victoria (250) 478-4653  
[www.highlandpacificgolf.com](http://www.highlandpacificgolf.com)

**Oceanfront Suites at Cowichan Bay**  
Cowichan Bay (250) 715-1000  
[www.oceanfrontcowichanbay.com](http://www.oceanfrontcowichanbay.com)

**Arbutus Ridge Golf Club**  
Cobble Hill (250) 743-5100  
[www.arbutusridgегolf.com](http://www.arbutusridgегolf.com)

**Painter's Lodge**  
Campbell River (250) 286-1102  
[www.painterslodge.com](http://www.painterslodge.com)

**The Westerly Hotel & Convention Centre**  
Courtenay (250) 339-7741  
[www.thewesterlyhotel.ca](http://www.thewesterlyhotel.ca)



Painter's Lodge