

2017
SORENTO
MADE FOR [STAYING ATOP THE
LEADERBOARD]



LEARN MORE



[Home](#) > [Golf Blogs](#) > [TRAX](#)

ISLAND RIDES

By Andrew Penner Created: August 17, 2017



The Valley Course at Bear Mountain is the softer of the resort's two beauties.

 ANDREW PENNER

Adventures on the golf course on Vancouver Island are just as exhilarating and memorable as those off of it.

ON APPROXIMATELY THE 15TH LAP around the newly minted Vancouver Island Motorsport Circuit, driving a Porsche 911, the speed increased to white-knuckle levels. Tires started squealing. Rubber started burning. And my sweet little roadster began drifting around the hairpin corners. Yes, similar to my round of golf at Bear Mountain, I was on the red line, hanging on for dear life around every dip and dive, every dogleg on the track.



Indeed, driving cars and driving golf balls on Vancouver Island can produce some hair-raising moments. Some high stakes drama. And regardless of your skill behind the wheel (or with a club), a golf getaway here is bound to get your adrenaline flowing. On my most recent trip, swerving and slicing was par for the course. And, in spite of the dizzy spells, I enjoyed every second of the ride.

Vancouver Island is, without a doubt, one of Canada's most enticing golf destinations. There are at least a dozen excellent courses worth playing. Meandering through ancient fir-and-cedar forests, skirting the salty sea, and parading up and down mountainsides, the golf courses are typically wild and rugged. There is a raw, West Coast beauty that seems to envelop all of them. Throw in the added attractions — the wildlife tours, the salmon fishing, the micro-breweries and, yes, the motorsport circuits — and you've got a golf destination that will appeal to thrill seekers of every make and model. Thanks to the creation of the Vancouver Island Golf Trail, the Island is a diverse, road-trip friendly destination that incorporates a number of distinct regions. The four main ones -Victoria, Cowichan, Nanaimo Parksville & Qualicum Beach and North Island — all have multiple courses, multiple experiences and their own distinct character.



It doesn't get prettier when it comes to Canadian cities than Victoria.

📷 ANDREW PENNER

With its old-city charms and beautiful harbour setting, Victoria, the capital city of British Columbia, is the most obvious starting point for an Island golf getaway. Without a doubt, it's a gorgeous city (especially the Inner Harbour) and exploring its nooks and crannies — i.e. brewpubs, historic Chinatown and eclectic shops and restaurants — is highly recommended. Harbour front hotels, such as the Delta Ocean Pointe and the Fairmont Empress, are prime locations to settle in for a few days of golf and sightseeing. Of course, if you want to stay course-side, it doesn't get any better than the Westin Bear Mountain Golf Resort & Spa. Located 20 minutes from the Inner Harbour in Langford, Bear Mountain is the trump card when it comes to public golf in the Victoria area. Featuring two outstanding Nicklaus-designed courses — the original Mountain Course and the newer Valley Course — the polished tracks at Bear Mountain are high on both drama and difficulty.



Crown Isle is a lovely test that annually hosts a PGA Tour Canada-Mackenzie Tour qualifying school.

 CROWN ISLE

The Mountain Course — host to the best senior golfers on the planet during the PGA Tour Champions' Pacific Links Championship — features a number of forced carries, devilishly deep bunkers, water-surrounded greens, up-hill holes and wildly undulating greens. It's not for the faint of heart.

Not feeling all that confident with your driving? The Valley Course, opened in 2009, might be a better choice. It features wider playing corridors, shorter holes and plenty of downhill tee shots that will aid the average player. Regardless of the course you play, the upscale golf at Bear Mountain will not disappoint. Nor will the hotel itself, which boasts exceptional dining options, a world-class spa, awesome hiking and mountain biking trails and the type of service you'd expect from a PGA Tour host facility.



Scenic Olympic View, and its trademark par-4 17th hole, once hosted a young Tiger Woods.

OLYMPIC VIEW

Although it hasn't welcomed the PGA Tour, nearby Olympic View has definitely serviced some of the world's best players. A high-school-aged Tiger Woods once stomped around Olympic View (one of only three Canadian courses Woods has played in competition) and there's plenty of YouTube video to prove it. (Tiger was 18 but looked about 12). With tight holes that twist through towering trees and stunning water features (the waterfall on the par-4 17th is a trademark), Olympic View is one of the most popular courses on the Island.

While Victoria is a stand-alone golf destination that makes for a perfect getaway, an extended journey "up Island" to experience more of the Vancouver Island Golf Trail, is definitely the best course of action.

In the Cowichan Valley for example, located 45 minutes from Victoria over the mountainous Malahat Highway, a whole new world of pastoral golf, wine touring, luxurious hotels and, yes, unforgettable sports car driving experiences, are at your fingertips.



Looking for luxury? Book into the sensational Villa Eyrie Resort in the Cowichan Valley.

 VILLA EYLRIE RESORT

Near the top of the Malahat Summit, a stop at The Villa Eyrie Resort, a luxurious mountainside enclave with jaw-dropping views and five-star dining, will deliver an unforgettable experience. One of the benefits here is the resort's affiliation with the aforementioned Vancouver Island Motorsports Circuit in Duncan. A state-of-the-art facility (the twisty, 2.3-kilometre, 19-turn circuit was designed by Hermann Tilke, a legend in the racing world) that caters to high-end automobile manufacturers, local car dealerships, racing enthusiasts from around the world, professional race car drivers (and wannabes), the Vancouver Island Motorsports Circuit was definitely one of the highlights of my trip.

After touring the facility it didn't take long before the engines were revving and the powerful BMWs and Porsches were ready in the pit. Thankfully, we started slow (a pace car with a professional driving instructor sets the speed as you cruise around the track, switching vehicles every four or five laps), so our team of four amateur drivers could get used to the cornering and handling. However, near the end of the experience (\$1,500 gets you VIP access and the full-meal deal), the speeds and intense cornering were everything for which an amateur driver like me could hope. Not surprisingly, given the fact I can't drive anything very straight, I was left with a whole new perspective on high-end sports cars and performance driving techniques.

In terms of driving golf balls, perhaps the best tests on the Vancouver Island Golf Trail (the entire trail extends 250 km from Victoria to Campbell River) are found in the Nanaimo Parksville Qualicum and North Island regions.



Morningstar is a must play if you venture up Island to Parksville.

📷 ANDREW PENNER

In Parksville, an area dubbed Canada's Riviera due to its amazing sandy beaches, courses such as Morningstar (it features six open links-style holes and 12 holes routed through woodlands), Fairwinds, and a new course on the trail, the Nanaimo Golf & Country Club, put an emphasis on laser-straight tee shots and good handling around tricky green complexes.



Fairwinds, tucked away on the north shore of Nanōose Bay, is another excellent Vancouver Island course.

📷 FAIRWINDS

If you can pry yourself away from the beautiful seaside resorts in Parksville (Tigh-Na-Mara, which boasts the famed Grotto Spa, voted the best in Canada by Spas of America, is the cream of the crop), a grand finale in the North Island region can be the cherry-on-top on your Vancouver Island Golf Trail crusade.



Storey Creek is a great bang for your buck, coming in fifth on SCOREGolf's Top 59 Best Value list.

 STOREY CREEK

Thanks to super-scenic courses at Crown Isle, a Graham Cooke design that rambles through parkland just minutes from the Comox Valley Airport, and Storey Creek in Campbell River, a Les Furber layout cut through the wilderness, the North Island is one of the treasures of the trail.

Of course, with plenty of ball-hungry hazards and dense forests lining many of the holes, straight driving is the name of the game. The secret to staying on track, I'm told, is relaxing, taking deep breaths, and avoiding a death grip on whatever club or car you're trying to steer.

Tags:

TRAX

Bear Mountain - Valley

Bear Mountain - Mountain

Magazine Feature

TRAX

Golf Blogs

COMMENTS 

ANDREW PENNER

Andrew Penner is a frequent contributor to SCOREGolf Magazine and a member of SCOREGolf's course rating panel.