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Magic and more

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on the Sunshine Coast

A story in every sip

A new chapter at
Ailm Estate winery

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April/May 2025 | Volume 25 | Number 2



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Jackson Bay: Oceanfront lodge property, private estate or group purchase opportunity! **33.7 acres** on the **BC** mainland coast in **Johnstone Strait**. Multiple dwellings, workshop, moorage and substantial infrastructure in place, zoned for residential and commercial use. Beautiful views in this appealing coastal location with easy access to miles of Crown land to explore. **\$1,345,000**



Quatsino Oceanfront Acreage: Lots of possibilities on this attractive oceanfront acreage on the NW coast of **Vancouver Island**! **7.7 acres**, nicely treed, with approx. **270ft** of shoreline in protected **Hecate Cove**. There is BC Hydro electrical service and telephone service in the boat-access community of **Quatsino**. Amazing location with access to the **Pacific Ocean** and miles of inlets to explore. **\$350,000**



Port Alice Development Opportunity: **1.25 acre** oceanfront property offered by the **Village of Port Alice** for tourism/travel accommodation development. Mostly cleared lot with development-friendly topography, **140ft** walk-on beachfront, SW exposure. Popular area for fishing and outdoor recreation. Bring your ideas for this great opportunity on north-west **Vancouver Island**! **\$480,000**



Sointula Homestead property: **3.76 acres** across the frontage road from the beach. **1543sqft** **5-year-old** main residence, older **1367sqft** secondary residence, studio, garage/workshop. Expansive ocean views. Forested area, artesian spring water, BC hydro and solar power. **\$999,000**



Rupert Inlet, Kenny Point: Recreational retreat acreage with stunning views over **Rupert Inlet** in **Quatsino Sound**! Semi-oceanfront **99 acre** property, state of the art off-grid infrastructure, quality-built and attractive one bedroom cabin with power, plumbing and wood finishing throughout. Very private property on northern **Vancouver Island**. **\$1,150,000**



Haida Gwaii Home: Attractive **1960sqft** **3 bed/2bath** home on a level half acre property in **Sandspit**. Recent updates include new windows and roof. Mature gardens, large deck, greenhouse with power and water, **1280sqft** shop. Short walk to beaches, golf course, and just minutes to town and airport. Great residential opportunity in this beautiful coastal region of BC! **\$619,900**

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Photo courtesy Sunshine Coast Tourism.

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Photo courtesy Ailm Estate Winery.

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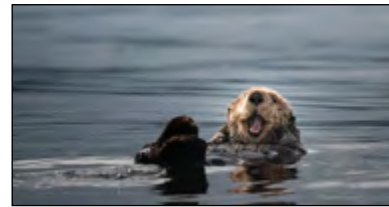


Photo courtesy Coastal Rainforest Safaris

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SPRING MILESTONES AND CHARITY GOLF

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Spring has finally arrived! First and foremost, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of you for welcoming the advent of another season with us. I hope this spring brings unforgettable experiences and plenty of spontaneous adventures. May this season blossom with life for all of us.

For Pacific Coastal Airlines (PCA), this spring is especially significant. April 3 marks the 25th anniversary of our Campbell River (YBL) and Comox (YQQ) bases! This milestone highlights our long-standing commitment to providing air service to the region and to the strong community relationships we've built, which continue to thrive and improve each day.

Additionally, May 2 will commemorate the 20th anniversary of our Masset (ZMT) base, followed by Victoria's (YYJ) 25th anniversary on May 10. These milestone achievements are a testament to your support! All our passengers hold a special place in our hearts and they are the driving force behind our airline's success.

I'm also excited to announce our 31st Memorial Charity Golf Tournament, scheduled for May 29. Each year, PCA hosts this event to raise funds for British Columbian charities and scholarships. This year, we are proud to support The Source Club Society in Powell River, which is dedicated to creating work opportunities for individuals with mental health challenges. We will also be supporting Hope Air, our long-time partner and Canada's national charity that provides free travel assistance for Canadians in financial need,

who must access medical care far from home. For the third year, we will also fund three \$10,000 scholarships for Indigenous youth and BC students pursuing careers in the aviation and aerospace sectors. To register, donate or learn more about our golf tournament visit pacificcoastal.com/golf or scan the QR code at the bottom of the page.

Spring is making a triumphant entrance, setting a joyful tone for the season. As always, I want to express my sincere gratitude for your unwavering support and trust in us. Pacific Coastal Airlines would not be here without our valued passengers. I look forward to celebrating even more milestones with all of you, and I can't wait to see you on your next journey with us! ✈️

Warm regards,

Quentin Smith



SCAN ME

to register, donate
or learn more about
our golf tournament.

kamloops

Top 5 spring activities

1

Mountain biking thrills

Cruise through flowy berms, rip down singletracks, and weave through those classic sagebrush hills. Adventure starts here.

2

Spring swing

Whether you're teeing off with dramatic canyon views or playing alongside Kamloops Lake, the terrain keeps things interesting.

3

Crafted sips

Sample bold local brews, crisp ciders, smooth spirits, and wines that bottle up the essence of the Thompson Valley. Every sip tells a story.

4

Art in bloom

Check out fresh exhibitions, wander past eye-catching murals downtown, and soak up outdoor performances that bring the city's creative energy to life.

5

Patio season

From downtown hot spots to North Shore favourites, Kamloops serves up big flavours in the fresh air. Global bites, local gems, and good vibes—dig in!



Kamloops Bike Ranch
Andrew Snucins



GreenTee Country Club Tobiano
Mary Putnam



Kamloops Bike Ranch
Royce Silhis



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MAP OUT YOUR NEXT SPRING ESCAPE



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NORTH

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Fly direct with Pacific Coastal Airlines and step into a world of adventure, relaxation, and renewal. Whether you're cycling through vineyard valleys, paddling quiet inlets, exploring local markets, or hiking windswept shorelines, each region has its own story to share. Let the journey unfold at your own pace, in your own way.

VANCOUVER ISLAND NORTH

Spot wildlife in their natural habitat, wander secluded beaches, and take in the coastal beauty at nature's pace.

COMOX VALLEY

Made for play. Hike, bike or ski mountain trails, paddle calm waters, and savour fresh, local flavours. Experience vibrant arts, endless outdoor adventures and welcoming communities.

UCLUELET

Tucked between the rainforest and the ocean, find a community shaped by the sea, where storytellers, artisans, and ocean lovers invite you to slow down and explore.

COWICHAN REGION

Spring means cycling past vineyards, paddling quiet waters, and wandering local farmers' markets. We invite you to go with the slow and experience the generous spirit of Cowichan.

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SPRING on Vancouver Island is a season of renewal — where ocean mist meets lush forests, and every path leads to discovery. From the vineyard-lined valleys of **COWICHAN** to the rugged shores of **UCLUELET**, the adventure-ready landscapes of **COMOX VALLEY**, and the pristine beauty of **VANCOUVER ISLAND NORTH**, each region offers something distinct.

Whether you're **CYCLING SCENIC BACKROADS**, **KAYAKING QUIET COVES**, **WANDERING LOCAL MARKETS**, or simply **UNWINDING FIRESIDE**, this is your invitation to experience Vancouver Island at its best—**NATURALLY**.



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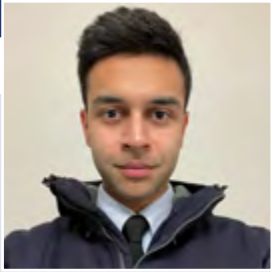
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COWICHAN

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MEET A PACIFIC COASTAL EMPLOYEE: BASIT ALI



Position: Customer Service Agent

Location: Vancouver, BC

Time with PCA: Close to 3 years

Job description: Assisting passengers with their check-in needs and flight inquiries. Helping passengers board their flights and greeting them when they arrive in YVR.

Where were you born and raised?

I was born and raised in Faisalabad, Pakistan. I moved to Canada in 2016.

What path did you take to get to this job?

Flying has always been a dream, and I love being around the airplanes. This job gave me a perfect opportunity to learn from the ground up, while also finishing my flight training. I look forward to one day flying one of our amazing airplanes.

What do you like best about this job?

It's an opportunity to see people while they embark on their journeys to fun-filled destinations. I love working with my co-workers, who always make every day exciting and more special.

What do you love to do in your city?

Our beautiful BC is a whole vacation spot on its own. I love the fact that living in the Lower Mainland gives me an opportunity to explore and cherish nature at any time of the day, whether it's at a quiet beach, atop a mountain or just walking through a park.

Anything else you'd like to share?

I would like to thank Pacific Coastal Airlines for letting me be a part of this family, where I have met some amazing people with their own inspiring stories, motivating me every day.

PCA BRIEFS

More than miles

Pacific Coastal Airlines celebrates 25 years of service in Comox and Campbell River



Comox Valley Airport Area Manager Cathy Holland, right, is with fellow long-time PCA employee Patti-Lee Marsh, base supervisor at the Campbell River Airport.

The hum of a propeller overhead, the sight of a blue, white and orange-tipped aircraft landing against the backdrop of coastal mountains—these moments have become familiar in the Comox Valley and Campbell River regions. For 25 years, Pacific Coastal Airlines (PCA) has been more than just an airline in these areas; it's been a thread weaving together communities, a bridge over vast stretches of water and a constant in a region shaped by change.

From daily flights connecting travelers to bustling city hubs to providing a vital link for families, businesses and medical travel, the airline's presence has left a lasting mark on Vancouver Island's airways.

As PCA celebrates a quarter-century of service from its Comox Valley (YQQ) and Campbell River (YBL) bases, it's not just a milestone—it's a story of connection, growth and commitment to the people and places that make coastal British Columbia so remarkable.

Cathy Holland, area manager at YQQ, remembers well the early days of opening the Comox and Campbell River

bases.

"March 6, 2000 marked my first day with PCA. We worked quickly to build incredible teams in both Campbell River and Comox in preparation for our first day of operations. As April 3, 2000 approached, we all felt a mix of excitement, nerves and anticipation," she recalls.

The first flight from each base marked the beginning of a new chapter for both the airline and the communities.


"I'll never forget that first flight," Holland says. "It was the start of building strong relationships with our communities. We knew every day would bring new opportunities and challenges."

Born from a need to connect remote communities, PCA began in Bella Coola. Daryl Smith, a truck logger with a passion for aviation, saw the challenges of travel in BC's rugged landscape. He earned his pilot's licence, bought a sea-plane and made it easier for workers to travel to and from remote camps. What started as a practical solution grew into a full-fledged airline, serving some of the province's most hard-to-reach places.

Today, Daryl's son, Quentin Smith, carries on the family legacy as PCA's



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president. Guided by a commitment to safety, reliability and community, the Smith family's vision has shaped the airline into one of BC's most trusted regional carriers. Yet, at its core, the mission remains unchanged: connecting people and places. And the Comox and Campbell River bases play pivotal roles in that journey.

The opening of these two bases in 2000 coincided with significant growth in both the Comox Valley and Campbell River. At the time, Comox had just over 56,000 residents, and Campbell River's population stood at around 28,000. Today, Comox boasts more than 71,000 residents, while Campbell River's population has grown to 37,000.

This growth mirrors the broader expansion of Vancouver Island, whose population has surged from roughly 663,000 in 2001 to around 900,000 today.

For Holland, watching this growth unfold over the past 25 years has been one of the most rewarding parts of her work.

"Seeing how much the communities have grown has been incredibly fulfilling. We've helped connect people and businesses in new ways, becoming a crucial part of the region's infrastructure," Holland says. "We're not just getting people from point A to point B; we're supporting the community by ensuring access to what they need—whether for work, family or adventure."

Operating on BC's west coast presents challenges, particularly with the region's unpredictable weather. Coastal fog, heavy rain and winter storms are a constant threat. Yet, PCA has built a reputation for reliability.

"The weather is always a factor, but we've learned to adapt," Holland explains. "Whether it's thick fog or a sudden storm, our team is ready for anything. Our commitment to safety and reliability sets us apart."

Beyond operations and logistics, it's the personal connections that have made Holland's 25 years at PCA so meaningful.

"There are so many stories that stand out over the years," she reflects. "But when I think about the incredible people I've worked with—past and present—it's the relationships that truly make this journey special."

As Pacific Coastal Airlines celebrates its 25th anniversary in Comox and Campbell River, Holland looks ahead with excitement.

"It's hard to believe we're celebrating 25 years in these two communities. It feels like just yesterday we were starting out. So much has changed—our operations, technology and how we serve our passengers. But one thing remains constant: our commitment to safety and service."

Looking to the next 25 years, PCA is ready to continue evolving. New technologies, enhanced passenger experiences and a dedication to safety and service will shape the airline's future, building on the strong foundation laid over the last 25 years.

"For a quarter of a century, PCA has been honoured to serve the Comox and Campbell River areas," says Johnathan Richardson, VP of commercial at PCA. "We deeply appreciate the support from our passengers, airport partners and the communities, and we look forward to strengthening these relationships in the years to come." 🇨🇦

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"Well, I liked all
the forest animals
but fishing was
the best part."

Brody



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Magic and more



Photo by Dolf Vermeulen, courtesy Sunshine Coast Tourism

Awakening the senses on the Sunshine Coast

By Susan Lundy

Getting there is the first bit of magic. Suitcases in tow, we pass under a huge, Japanese-style stone gateway and step onto a boardwalk that winds through the forest and then hugs the shoreline rocks as we climb up, down and around, weaving past clusters of canvas-sided cabins perched above and below us—each facing the expanse of big blue ocean to our right. After close to 10 minutes of walking, we take the final steps down to our Tenthouse Suite—and the second bit of magic occurs.

My husband Bruce and I enter the space and soak in the sights: first, the lavish interior, and second, the stunning view from the windows. Inside, there's everything needed for a comfortable stay: a cosy-looking king bed, an enclosed toilet

room, a shower, fireplace, fridge and, the best sight of all, a massive, two-person tub that—with a pull of a cord on the canvas flaps—reveals a stunning water's-edge view.

Outside, a wood-planked walkway leads to a deck under the outstretched limbs of an arbutus tree. The only sound is the lap of the ocean on the rocks below us; it's mesmerizing, and we can't wait to fall asleep to the soothing sound. Being this close to the water has a way of slowing down your heart rate and opening your senses. It feels like we are at the edge of the world.

Rockwater Secret Cove Resort is located 20 minutes north of Sechelt on BC's beautiful Sunshine Coast. It has oceanside cabins, ocean-view rooms and—the crème de la crème—these exquisite, luxury Tenthouse Suites. There's

also the Rockwater Spa, where treatments take place in either a rustic spa cabin or a one-of-a-kind spa tent, depending on the season; a paddling centre, where you can rent kayaks to explore the nooks and crannies of this rugged coastline; and a swimming pool with a spacious deck for sun-soaked lounging. A recent addition is TuBird, an on-site restaurant that wasn't quite finished when we visited last year, but now offers a menu inspired by "old world food and drink."

This is our second visit to the Sunshine Coast, which, tucked into the southwest corner of mainland BC, is a 180-kilometre stretch of sea-hugging paradise. We arrived early this afternoon, landing in the seaside village of Gibsons after taking the ferry from Horseshoe Bay, not far from Vancouver. But you can also fly to the Sunshine Coast, landing in the Pacific Coastal Airlines destination of Powell River and driving south.

Our first stop was Gibsons Public Market to pick up supplies for a beach picnic. But first, we toured the Nicholas Sonntag TidePools Aquarium, which, located inside the market, is stacked with humming, colour-rich tanks, showcasing more than 30 habitats and 70 species of local marine life, all collected locally via a "catch-and-release" program. There are sea-life "touch tanks" and volunteer interpreters to answer any questions.

A conundrum presented itself as we wandered around the market, looking for our picnic snacks. Emelle's Catering Market Bistro, with its eat-in or takeout menu, sits on the market's top floor, while a collection of food merchants anchors the lower level, offering everything from prepared meals to bakery goods, cheese and charcuterie. Ultimately, Bruce settled for a platter of Asian-style food, I picked up spring rolls stuffed with seafood, and we shared a mushroom soup and a cup of prawns.

Gibsons Public Market aims to "create a vibrant hub of coastal life," and that includes bringing people together for festivals, fairs, outdoor markets and events such as cooking classes. It's a fun place to visit.

We drove a short way along the coast, parked at the edge of a rocky beach and found a picnic-perfect log. The combination of great food, fresh sea air and the hint of a bright spring sun behind a puff of cloud created an ideal picnic setting.

From here we took the 25-minute drive to Sechelt and spent a few hours exploring. One of the great things about both Gibsons and Sechelt is their easy access to the waterfront. In Gibsons, you can walk a 1.2-kilometre shoreline path, while exploring a large pier with quirky-looking businesses or meandering past the marina and public market. There's a smaller pier at Sechelt and, here, the waterfront pathway weaves between the beach on one side and a line of little stores and restaurants on the other.

Before driving to Rockwater, we stopped at Shift Kitchen & Bar for an early dinner. This little restaurant may be nondescript on the outside, but it opens to a beautiful, intimate and cheerful interior, and a menu flush with gluten-free and vegan options. We sat at the bar and...feasted. The food, the atmosphere and the service were top-notch.

Then it was back to Rockwater, and here we sit now, watching night fall, a soft breeze on our faces and the sound of water lapping gently beneath us. Lights start to dot the land mass



Photo by Susan Lundy

on the horizon, and we realize we're looking directly across the strait to Parksville—a familiar spot on Vancouver Island, which, right now, seems a world away.

It's day two, and after a leisurely morning in our cosy suite, we drive back to Sechelt and hike through the magical, mossy trails of the 170-acre Hidden Groves Park. The sun shines through the trees, setting aglow branch-born lichen and creating a sun-dappled canopy above us.

We have lunch at Lighthouse Pub, sitting at the edge of a bustling marina, and then drive up the inlet to the end of the road to find Pedals & Paddles—our "gateway to adventure."

Choices abound at this family-run business, where a huge beach-side shack sits filled with kayaks, canoes and paddleboards, and patrons can set out on their own with a rental or hop on a tour. We have chosen a two-hour guided kayaking tour and, after gearing up and listening to an orientation and safety talk, Bruce and I climb into a double kayak. With our guide and one other paddler—a visitor from the southern US—we head out onto the ocean and paddle along the coast, the nearby Tetrahedron mountains rising above us as we glide by. Our guide points out landmarks, regales us with anecdotes and we see seals and eagles. On our way back, we pass a group of paddlers, heading up the inlet to a secluded camping spot. Their paddles swish as they drift by, the sound magnified by the water.

This is my first time kayaking and I can't help but think, "Ohhh. Now I get it."

The only sound is the lap of ocean on rocks; it's mesmerizing, and we can't wait to fall asleep to the soothing sound. Being this close to the water has a way of slowing down your heart rate and opening your senses. It feels like we are at the edge of the world.

After our excursion on the water, we drive back to Rockwater, rest, change our clothes and prepare for dinner at the astounding El Segundo restaurant. Here, the interior, with its bold colours, tropical prints and plants, hanging baskets and a collection of glowing lamps suspended from exposed piping, is as mesmerizing as the menu. This is a unique dining experience—and we're all in.

The menu includes a blend of tropical fusion fare with influences from California, Hawaii, Mexico and Southeast Asia. It's next to impossible to decide what

to select because everything looks so tasty—and unique. (Sadly, El Segundo recently announced a business "pivot," closing down the current restaurant, and opening a new brunch venture. If El Segundo is any indication of quality, I expect the new restaurant will also be a must-visit spot.)

We linger here, enjoying the food and the setting, before heading back to

Rockwater for our final night at the edge of the world.

As the sun sets, we toast the day, agreeing that this has been an exceptional experience: a soul-soothing time amid a glorious, sometimes surprising, nature-rich setting, which has—like magic—awakened our senses in the most wonderful ways. 🌊

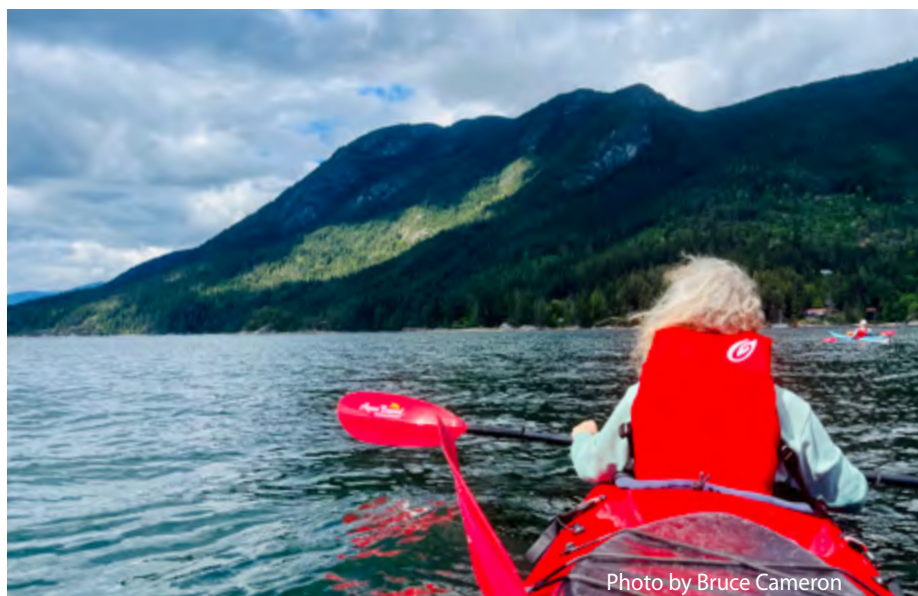


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A story in every sip

A new chapter in wine-making at
South Kelowna's Ailm Estate

By Natalie Bruckner





Photo by Nina Dombowsky / Photographed on location at missiongroup.ca/own/aqua.

Wine, much like language, evolves over time, telling stories rich in history, culture and character. Each vintage whispers a narrative, echoing the land, the legacy of its makers and the promise of moments and memories yet to come. In this ever-evolving landscape of stories, Ailm Estate, a new winery in South Kelowna, emerges as a fresh voice in Canada's most renowned wine region.

This stunning valley, known for its arid climate and diverse terroirs, has produced some of the country's most acclaimed wines, making it an ideal home for such an ambitious undertaking. The 200-acre estate, with deep roots in the Stewart legacy, marks a bold new chapter for a name long synonymous with the region.

"Ailm Estate is about the spirit of family—honouring our roots and traditions as well as those of the community," explains Rowan Stewart, family member and winemaker, vineyard operations.

Ailm Estate's journey began beneath the watchful gaze of a solitary

pine tree—an enduring symbol of the land's history as a nursery. A letter in the ancient Celtic Ogham alphabet, "Ailm" pays homage to this mighty pine and the estate's Irish heritage. For generations, it has stood on the estate's land as a living monument, intertwined with the Stewart family's legacy in the Okanagan Valley.

The story of Ailm Estate is as rich as the wine it produces, tracing back to 1908 when Richard Stewart Sr. crossed the ocean from Ireland, driven by a passion for horticulture. His vision grew into Stewart Brothers Nurseries, a family-run business that thrived for decades. Today, Ailm Estate honours that history, blending the past with the vibrant future of Okanagan winemaking.

The search for the perfect name led the Stewarts back to their Irish roots and the nursery's history, giving the winery a deeper sense of meaning. The estate has been in the family since 1950, and its transformation from a tree nursery to a vineyard is a nod to the family's long-standing ties to the land.

"This has taken years of experimentation, and throughout the process, we've realized that we always gather to mark everyday occasions. So, I suppose our vision is to inspire others to do the same—particularly as our Kelowna community grows," says Rowan.

Ailm Estate is not only a tribute to the past, but also a bold venture into the future. The estate's challenging conditions—higher altitudes and cooler temperatures—create a suitable environment for grapes used in traditional method sparkling wines.

"This is a tough environment, but that's what makes it work for sparkling wine," explains Rowan.

While winemaking regions around the world have centuries of tradition behind them, the Okanagan Valley—and Ailm Estate—is just starting to write its story.

"We've been working with this land for nine years and are still getting to know it," says Angela Lyons, VP sales and marketing, BACAS Family Wines. "It's a journey of discovery."



Photo by Aaron DeSilva.

The estate's unique terroir presents challenges, but these very conditions have the potential to produce extraordinary wines. The family is just beginning to understand what will thrive on this land, as plans to replant varietals take shape. Fourth-generation family members are now stepping into the spotlight, bringing fresh perspectives and a commitment to the family's values of heritage, sustainability and innovation.

Ailm Estate's focus on "traditional method" wines is a labour of love. Every step—from hand-harvested grapes to delicate fermentation—is carefully orchestrated to create wines of exceptional quality. Currently, Ailm offers three wines: the 2020 Okanagan Valley Reserve Brut, a vibrant and elegant sparkling wine; the 2021 Okanagan Valley Connemara, a Bordeaux-inspired blend; and the 2021 Okanagan Valley Blanc de Blanc is a pure expression of a sparkling Chardonnay.

The release of the 2020 Reserve Brut, aged for 40 months, marks a significant milestone for Ailm Estate. This wine represents the culmination of a long journey, signaling just the beginning

of the estate's future endeavours. As they continue to explore the land and refine their winemaking techniques, the Stewart family remains focused on growth and new opportunities. Some unexpected varietals have thrived in the vineyard, hinting at the estate's evolving story; there are already plans for further developments. While no construction has started yet for Ailm Estate, there are plans to develop the site, which include a restaurant and tasting room.

Rowan says: "Our family's long-term goals are to let the story evolve as we continue our journey working with the land, ensuring we pause to celebrate families—both the history that shapes them and the futures they're building."

At Ailm Estate, wine serves as a bridge between generations, fostering connection and shared experiences. The wines spark moments of togetherness, creating a sense of community that transcends time. Each glass will tell a story—one where the richness of the past flows seamlessly into the promise of the future. 🍷



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A BC wildlife safari

Head to these five
PCA destinations for
your nature-based
adventure

By Lauren Kramer

Photo courtesy Spirit Bear Lodge.

While Africa gets the limelight for its wildlife safaris, BC is home to a diverse array of creatures that make for compelling nature-based adventures.

Sightings can be unpredictable given the vast, mountainous geography of the province and the movement of animals across large swaths of land and water. But venture out by car or on tours and you could see any combination of bears, moose, caribou, wolves and whales. You might call these BC's "big five," but there are many more species you'll likely encounter along the way, from sea otters and dolphins to coyotes, puffins, mule deer and lynx. Pack some patience and brace yourself for incomparable beauty.

Here some spectacular wildlife tours

you'll find at Pacific Coastal Airlines destinations.

➔ PORT HARDY

Departing from northern Vancouver Island, Coastal Rainforest Safaris offers four wildlife excursions that range from day-long excursions to see sea otters, whales, puffins and pelagic birds, to two-day trips to see grizzly bears.

For the puffins, guests board boats to tour remote islands near the northern tip of Vancouver Island, where the ecologically rich waters provide fertile feeding grounds for these breeding seabirds. Bird-lovers looking for pelagic species like petrels, shearwaters, jaegers and albatross will want to venture out on the

company's tours to the undersea canyons off Quatsino Sound, near Vancouver Island's west coast. And for those seeking grizzly bears, these powerful omnivores are best seen on a multi-day excursion, during which boats take guests deep into the culturally rich territories of the Kwakwaka'wakw people.

Experienced guides educate visitors on the local Indigenous history and the First Nations' connection between the land and sea.

Info: coastalrainforestsafaris.com

➔ PRINCE GEORGE

Some 70 per cent of all the moose in BC reside in the province's northern parts, making Prince George a perfect

departure point for moose-watching. The best time to see these ungulates, which are typically solitary in nature, is in the late fall, during their rutting season. At this time of year, they gather in groups and lock horns. Cows emit a loud, moaning call to lure bulls, which can weigh up to 1,100 pounds and stand over six feet tall.

With their velvety antlers and impressive girth, moose are an unforgettable sighting— but they can be aggressive during rutting season, so exercise caution. Moose are most easily spotted in the early mornings, in clearings, valleys and marshy areas surrounding lakes. Drive Highway 97 from Pine Pass to Old Friend Creek or on Highway 16 from Prince George to Valemount in the southern Rocky Mountain Trench for the best odds of moose sightings, and keep your eyes peeled for bears, caribou and mule deer, too!

➔ TOFINO

Departing out of Tofino, Ahous Adventures takes visitors on day-long trips into the Clayoquot Sound, where wildlife viewing possibilities include bears, seals, otters and whales. Guests also have an option to bathe in the geothermic waters of Hot Springs Cove.

An eco- and cultural adventure tour company owned and operated by the Ahousaht Nation, these tours offer visitors insight into Ahousaht culture, language, history and storytelling. Info: ahousadventures.com

➔ WILLIAMS LAKE

For wolf and lynx sightings, head to the Cariboo Mountains in winter. Here, Ecotours-BC uses camouflage blinds, electronic calling systems and hand calls to entice these animals into open areas where they are more easily viewed by visitors. Guests head out in four-by-four vehicles or snowmobiles, and then on snowshoes, to experience the beauty of the boreal forest and listen for the spine-tingling howl of the timber wolf.

In the fall, when the salmon are spawning, Ecotours also leads Walk with the Grizzlies excursions, where guests hike up a river, watching closely for grizzlies fishing for their next meal as the salmon writhe in their final stages of life.

Info: ecotours-bc.com

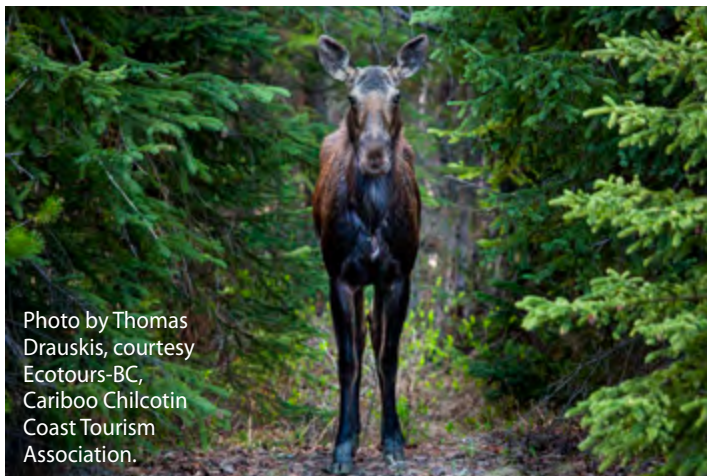


Photo by Thomas Drauskis, courtesy Ecotours-BC, Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association.

➔ BELLA BELLA

Visit Bella Bella and you're immersed in the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest. Here, Spirit Bear Lodge offers all-inclusive, multi-day adventures where guests can glimpse the wildlife and cultural experiences in the Kitasoo Xai'xais traditional territory. Depending on the season, expect to see sea otters, sea lions, humpback whales, grizzly bears and if you're lucky, the elusive spirit bear.

Info: spiritbear.com

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Happier holidays

10 tips to make your trips smoother

By Esther Morand, westcoasttraveller.com

Heading out on vacation this spring or summer? Here are 10 tips to ease your travels

1 Plan and book early

To avoid disappointment and secure the best deals, start planning and booking your trip well in advance. This includes flights, hotels, car rentals and any tours or activities you want to experience.

2 Create a budget

Having a clear budget helps you manage your expenses and avoid overspending. Consider all aspects of your trip, including transportation, accommodation, meals, activities and souvenirs. Setting a budget will also help you prioritize your spending and ensure you have enough funds for the entire trip.

3 Check travel restrictions and requirements

In the post-pandemic world, travel restrictions and requirements can change rapidly. Before you finalize your plans, check the latest travel advisories and entry requirements for your destination. This includes vaccination requirements, testing protocols, and any quarantine measures that might be in place.

4 Update travel documents

Ensure that your passport, driver's license and any other necessary travel documents are up to date. Many countries require that your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your planned return date. If you need a visa, apply for it well in advance to avoid any last-minute issues.

5 Purchase travel insurance

Travel insurance is a crucial safety net that can protect you from unforeseen events such as trip cancellations, medical emergencies and lost luggage. Choose a policy that covers your specific needs and provides adequate coverage for your destination.

6 Pack smart

Make a packing list to ensure you don't forget any essentials. Consider the climate and activities at your destination to pack appropriate clothing and gear. Don't forget important items like travel-sized toiletries, medications, chargers and travel documents. Packing light can also save you time and stress at the airport.

7 Prepare your home

Before you leave, take steps to secure your home. Arrange for someone to collect your mail, water your plants and keep an eye on your property. Unplug unnecessary electronics, set timers for lights and ensure all windows and doors are securely locked.


8 Plan for health and safety

Pack a travel health kit with essentials like Band-Aids, pain relievers and any prescription medications you may need. Additionally, familiarize yourself with the local healthcare facilities and emergency numbers, just in case.

9 Organize your itinerary

While it's great to leave room for spontaneity, having a rough itinerary helps you make the most of your trip. Plan your must-see attractions and activities and allow for some flexibility in case plans change. Keep a copy of your itinerary, including important addresses and contact numbers, both digitally and on paper.

10 Stay connected

Ensure your phone plan covers international travel or consider purchasing a local SIM card or an international plan. Staying connected will allow you to navigate unfamiliar areas, stay in touch with loved ones and access important travel information. 

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