

Quadra Island: Native Heritage and Natural Beauty

The west coast of Canada is a dense crazy-quilt of forested islands, the largest by far being 460 km/290 mile-long Vancouver Island. Travelling north along its east coast from Victoria or from Nanaimo where a ferry from Vancouver on the British Columbia mainland intercepts the four-lane highway, visitors arrive at Campbell River (pop. 35,000), more than half way up the east coast. From there, a 10-minute car ferry ride across Discovery Passage makes it easy to explore Quadra Island, one of the most travel-friendly and diverse of the entire crazy-quilt.



Named for a Spanish sea captain who explored and mapped the coastline between Peru and Alaska in the 1770s, that is as far as its Spanish connection goes. Today, Quadra Island is known for its impressive native heritage, its many natural assets and a strong connection to a diverse artistic community. Also not to be missed is a visit to SouthEnd Farm Vineyards, run by a talented young couple who admit they started their retirement dream thirty years early. Book a wine tasting, share their delightful story and take away some award-winning wines from this most northerly winery in British Columbia.

Although it is possible to do Quadra in a day, it is far more satisfying to make it headquarters for a deeper exploration, with plenty to do to justify several days or a week. Two very different but equally recommendable lodges, plus a clutch of smaller inns and B&Bs make a compelling argument for a longer immersion in this beautiful island setting. Both lodges attract a high percentage of guests from European countries and Britain.

Open from Spring to Fall, April Point Lodge & Spa (aprilpoint.com) is a heavily-forested property of rooms, suites and cabins that play host to five-star nature encounters from its waterfront peninsula

facing Discovery Passage. It also offers the finer elements of holiday living from a superb spa center to fine-dining experiences including jazz evenings. Making best use of its eco-nature center, guests may book guided fishing in waters that are arguably the salmon fishing capital of the world, Zodiac wildlife and whale watching tours around the local islands where marine mammals and sea birds abound, ocean kayaking, even a sunset cruise with canapés and wine to round off an eventful day.



An alternative water transport to the government-run car ferry is the small, step-on water taxi between April Point Lodge and its sister accommodation, Painter's Lodge, visible across Discovery Passage at Campbell River. Again it is a ten-minute ride, free of charge, and available to anyone, not just clients of the two lodges. Over 85,000 riders use it each season, both day and evening.

Open mid-April to mid-October, Tsa-Kwa-Luten Lodge (capemudgeresort.com) at the southern tip of Quadra Island offers a different view and a different story. Owned and operated by a First Nation (native) band with ancestral roots dating back more than 2,000 years, the lodge's name appropriately means "gathering place". Reflecting the golden warmth of Pacific Coast softwood and featuring the spectacular design of a Kwagiulth "Big House", its main foyer and lounge are awesome yet welcoming. The work of contemporary native artists is everywhere including the guest rooms and secluded beach cabins.

Even Tsa-Kwa-Luten's gourmet menu includes elements of native cuisine from local herbal seasonings and teas to special ways of cooking the ultra-fresh sea food so abundant in the waters just beyond the lodge. While walking well-maintained trails on the adjacent 1,100-acre aboriginal forest lands or along its driftwood-strewn beaches, bald eagles screech from the tree tops or swoop over the water to snatch up salmon with their talons, and whales spout their presence in the channel beyond.

Established in 1975 to facilitate the return of sacred masks and traditional regalia from European and North American museums, Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre (nuyumbalees.com) is an impressive collection that shares the rich culture and history of the local First Nations people. It is a must-see for all visitors interested in aboriginal culture, a place to take a guided tour, watch traditional

dancers and local artists at work, talk story or learn how to barbecue a salmon, native style.

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Bringing a car to the island provides complete freedom to explore this 35 km/22-mile-long piece of real estate at your own pace. With minimal traffic, roads are winding but in good shape and well marked. For those without wheels, guided tours are available to most natural or cultural highlights, arranged either through your lodging or with Quadra Island Tourism (quadraisland.ca/tourism). There is also an extensive network of trails for hiking and mountain biking.

In addition to seeing the work of painters, sculptors and weavers, visitors are welcome to visit studios of glass blowers, jewelers, stained glass and guitar makers. For those with a car and a Quadra Island Artists Map & Guide (available on the ferry and on the island), studio visits are a delightful lure to exploring different parts of the island. You may even discover a crazy-quilt maker!

By Alison Gardner

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