

VANCOUVER ISLAND

# The tides are changing in Ucluelet

## Ukee emerges from the shadows of tourism-savvy Tofino

SHANNON MELNKY  
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Once a quiet fishing village on Vancouver Island's coast, Ucluelet is coming into its own just 40 minutes away from Tofino, its more popular neighbour. Located just outside Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, the rugged coastal views, unique lodgings, equally engaging adventure sports and the local coastal cuisine — not to mention the colourful characters you'll meet — all make what is affectionately known as Ukee's eclectic offerings worth discovering.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Ditch a hotel scene and opt for a front-row ocean seat and a little aboriginal hospitality as you take in secluded coves and rock pools. Ucluelet First Nation hosts guests at Wya Point Resort, located on a former village site with exclusive views and walk-on beach access at Ucluth Beach.

All guests enjoy the private beach treatment, and can choose from luxurious post and beam lodges complete with fireplaces and modern kitchens, rustic eco-yurts or family-friendly campgrounds.

Be sure to ask your hosts to point you in the direction of the blow-hole, a spectacular discovery on the shores of their



PHOTOS: WYA POINT RESORT

The lodges at Wya Point Resort in Ucluelet offer gorgeous coastal views and a distinct First Nations flair.

ancestral lands. For details, check out wyapoint.com.

EATS

In the heart of Ucluelet, you won't miss the giant stainless

steel sculpture of the Raven-Lady in all her aphrodisiac glory at RavenLady Oyster Forte, the food truck with freshly shucked oysters made to order. The menu aptly divides items into foreplay, consumption and pillow talk. The po' boy proves popular — panko-fried oysters served with baguette, coleslaw, chimichurri and pickled watermelon.

Also get your hands on Hanks Untraditional BBQ, where fare is sourced locally, made from scratch and the curing is done in-house. Try the rind-on pork belly with maple glaze and throw in some mac and cheese.

International afternoon tea is a treat at the ethically sourced and master-blended Thay Tea.

It might take some time to make up your mind — chocolate blueberry, summer merlot, butterscotch puerh and Canadian maple are but just a few varieties. Of all the tea lattes, Ukee fogs, smoothies and milkshakes, a winner was found in the hazelnut honeybush latte with coconut milk.

A comfort food feast can be found at Zoe's Bakery and Cafe right on Main Street: crepes and rhubarb tarts could be an indulgent breakfast or an after-surf nosh.

ADVENTURES

If you're staying at Wya Point, the surf comes to you. The Wya Point surf shop has surf and paddle boards at the ready right outside your door, complete with suits and instructors.

Some of the best sea kayaking on the coast can be found in Ucluelet, where Majestic Ocean Kayaking will take you on a three-hour tour along the



Ucluelet's rugged beaches are great for surfing and kayaking.

harbour and beyond to explore the beaches, bears, seals and eagles along the way. If it's whales you're after, hop on a Zodiac with Subtidal Adventures and be camera-ready for humpbacks, orcas and maybe even a cheeky sea lion or two.

For a more up-close-and-personal experience with the sea life, give the Ucluelet Aquarium a visit, where you can touch a lot of the creatures in their tanks. It's the first catch-and-release aquarium in the world and a great way to learn about octopus, sea stars and rock fish in a conservation-friendly environment.

Hikers will know no bounds with plenty of old-growth cedar-hemlock forests to choose from.

Try the Willowbrae Trail that takes you to Halfmoon Bay or check out the spectacular views from the Wild Pacific Trail.

You might even bump into a friendly resident Ukees call Oyster Jim, a literal trailblazer who built much of the path with his bare hands.

All that fresh air might call for a night in at Howler's Family Restaurant and Bowling Alley. The new reno is a hit with locals and visitors alike, who want blow off some West Coast steam and have a good old family meal and a game or two.

The writer was a guest of Destination BC. They did not approve of or read this article before publication.

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With the majority of the cruise ships soon arriving in Florida for the winter, you'd think that there would be loads of unbelievable bargains — but with higher than normal demand this year, finding the super deal on a desirable sailing is harder. The good news is that we do have a few. One is aboard the ms Osterdam with the 10 day southern cruise departing on November 27. I love this itinerary as it ports in their gorgeous private island in the Bahamas, as well as Turks and Caicos, Dominican Republic, Bonaire, Curacao and Aruba. \$2399 CAD per person includes roundtrip Vancouver air (you'll fly to Fort Lauderdale on Nov 26), one night pre cruise in a 4 star hotel, a \$50 per person onboard credit and all taxes — and this is for a high category balcony stateroom. Ask about insides/outside and special pricing on suites too!

Another option is a 15 night (back to back) cruise departing on November 22 aboard the ms Eurodam. This means you get 2 days (always weather permitting) in Half Moon Cay, plus Jamaica, Cayman Islands, Key West, Dominica, USVI, St. Kitts and Puerto Rico. Space is getting limited on this sailing, but high category balcony staterooms, one night in Florida, a \$50 pp onboard credit, roundtrip Vancouver air (fly on Nov 21) and all taxes is a deal at \$2799 CAD pp.

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