

The Other Side of Vancouver Island

Oceanside in BC – When BC Ferries dumps its tourist payload on the shores of Nanaimo this summer, many visitors will immediately point their cars toward Tofino, on the west coast of Vancouver Island. It's a great drive – but a long haul. If your vacation days are dwindling, head north instead toward Nanoose Bay, Parksville and Qualicum Beach, where you'll find beaches and botanical beauty in droves, all within an hour's drive.

Retirees have long favoured this area, recently dubbed Oceanside, but as housing prices climb over higher in Vancouver and Victoria, there are more young families and empty-nesters relocating here and revitalizing the communities in the process. In the past few years, even long-established resorts such as the venerable Tigh-Na-Mara have reinvented themselves to appeal to a new demographic, now boasting deluxe suites, high-end spas and upscale dining.

From Nanaimo, take Highway 19 north and exit right at Northwest Bay Road for Nanoose Bay. Follow the scenic shoreline drive to Parksville, where a dip in Tigh-Na-Mara's grotto-like indoor mineral pool followed by a tapas luncheon in your spa robe is highly recommended. Twenty minutes farther down the Old Island Highway is quaint Qualicum Beach, with an abundance of charming antique stores and a really good bakery, Elena's. If you're staying the night, give over the rest of the day to strolling a nearby beach. If you're hurrying, head west along Memorial toward Coombs, where young and old alike will get a kick out of the goats grazing on the roof of the well-stocked farmer's market.

From there it's a half-hour drive south along Highway 4A back toward Nanaimo – but factor in a stop at Bamboozle (watch for signage), the funkiest home and garden shop this side of Manhattan and worth the drive all on its own.

For more information, visit www.oceansidetourism.com or call 1-888-799-3222.

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