

# TRAVEL

“We’ve got the most incredible coastline in the world because of the scenery and wildlife. Add in the Indigenous culture and it’s amazing.”  
**Randy Burke, Bluewater Adventures**

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Bluewater Adventures' Island Roamer carries a maximum of 10 passengers on week-long sailboat cruises from Prince Rupert to the Khutzeymateen Grizzly Bear Sanctuary. **STIG BRONDBO**

## EXPLORE THE WILD BEAUTY OF B.C. ON THESE BOUTIQUE CRUISES

Wildlife, scenic wonders, Indigenous culture make for memorable small group journeys

### GLEN PETRIE

The rugged British Columbia coastline stretches for 25,725 kilometres. Keeping this great wilderness pristine while also experiencing it firsthand is the aim of a few boutique cruises that carry small groups to the land of the spirit bear, grizzly feeding grounds, protected islands of Haida Gwaii and breathtaking fiords.

“We’ve got the most incredible coastline in the world because of the scenery and wildlife,” says Randy Burke, whose company, Bluewater Adventures, has operated sailboat expeditions in remote B.C. waters for more than 40 years. “Add in the Indigenous culture and

it’s amazing.”

With experienced naturalists and guides on board, they cruise channels where orcas roam, explore sounds where humpback whales may be seen bubble-feeding, and provide guided visits to Indigenous communities and cultural sites.

### BLUEWATER ADVENTURES: PRIVILEGED ACCESS

Seeing grizzlies in the wild often comes down to luck, but you can better your odds with Bluewater Adventures' week-long sailboat cruises from Prince Rupert to Khutzeymateen Grizzly Bear Sanctuary.

“We focus on the prime times,

following the seasonal flow of bear behaviour,” says Burke. “We’ve never not seen a grizzly.” His operation is one of few with permission to access the Khutzeymateen, a privilege earned through five decades of partnerships with B.C. First Nations, including the Metlakatla.

The 21-metre Island Roamer carries a maximum of 10 passengers up the conservancy and docks to meet with Coastal Guardian Watchmen, who continue the work of their ancestors in protecting and managing coastal territories as caretakers of the land and sea. Metlakatla hereditary chief Clarence Nelson often meets up with the group on land or by coming

to the boat for a talk. “He’s just a wealth of cultural information,” says Burke. The Bluewater Adventure fleet also includes the Island Odyssey and the new 25 metre Island Solitude, which sets a high bar for sailboat cruising with spacious indoor and outdoor salons, cabins with lower beds (no bunks) and ensuite bathrooms.

Red Seal chefs on each ship prepare meals using local ingredients, some of which are foraged along with way including fresh Dungeness crab and wild greens.

The ships also tour Haida Gwaii, the Great Bear Rainforest, the Gulf Islands and northern Vancouver Island.

Trips range from four to eight

nights, cost from \$3,595 to \$7,405 and depart Prince Rupert, Sandspit, Bella Bella, Terrace, Port McNeill or Sidney, depending on the itinerary.

### MAPLE LEAF ADVENTURES: WILDERNESS AND WINE PAIRINGS

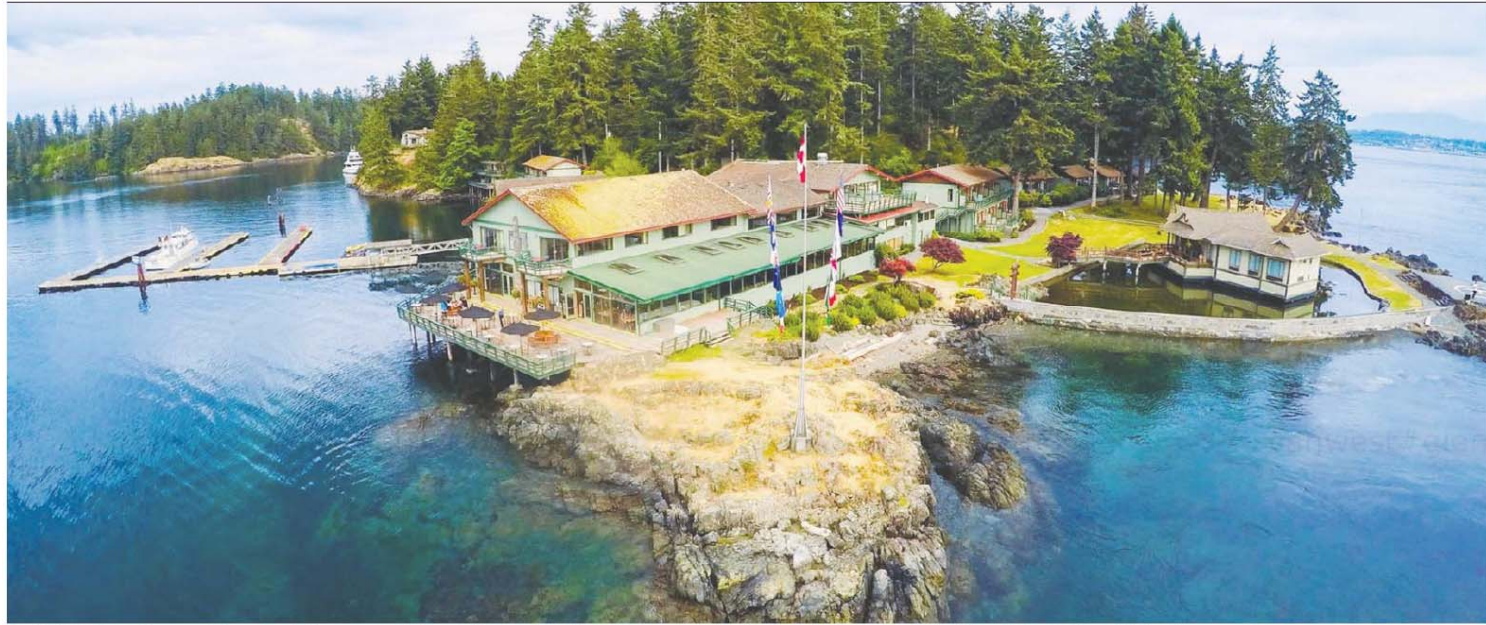
Big ship comfort and stability in a small expedition vessel is the idea behind Maple Leaf Adventures' Cascadia, a 42-m catamaran that has hotel-sized guest rooms, indoor and outdoor dining areas, a lounge and open decks with a hot tub. Yet her shallow draft enables her to slip into some of the most secluded pockets of the B.C. coast. **SEE CRUISES ON C8**



Maple Leaf Adventures sails three ships, including a 12-passenger tugboat. **JEFF REYNOLDS**



Maple Leaf Adventures passengers enjoy some quiet time ashore. **TAVISH CAMPBELL**



April Point Resort is one of the overnight accommodation options enjoyed by passengers of Pacific Coastal Cruises, which offers three- or four-night cruises. **APRIL POINT RESORT**

# BASK IN UNSPOILED WILDERNESS

## CRUISES FROM C7

Cascadia is also more suitable than a sailboat for people who have mobility issues. "A catamaran is extremely stable," says co-owner Maureen Gordon. "She carries landing craft for going ashore, not zodiacs, so the bow can be dropped right onto the beach and people just walk off."

She accommodates up to 24 guests in 12 luxurious cabins, with a crew of 10. A Haida elder travels along to help guests learn the local culture and history.

The ship's kitchens are restaurant-grade. "The food was excellent and beautiful," says past passenger Peggy H. (she gave her full name but didn't want it published) from Ontario. "They even had wine pairings with the local fish that was caught that day."

For Peggy, the highlight of her Haida Gwaii journey was a visit to a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the remote islands of SGang Gwaay, where the ruins of houses and memorial poles illustrate the ancient Haida relationship to the



Bluewater Adventures' cruises to Khutzeymateen Grizzly Bear Sanctuary follow "the seasonal flow of bear behaviour." **BLUEWATER ADVENTURES**

land and the sea. "It was like time stood still," she says.

Maple Leaf Adventures operates two smaller vessels: the Swell, a converted 27-m tugboat, and the Maple Leaf, a classic 28-m schooner. The three ships also explore the Great Bear Rainforest

in search of the rare "spirit bear." Onboard naturalists and First Nations guides based onshore help identify the best bear viewing opportunities. Along the way, passengers explore fiords, watch for whales and take guided hikes through one the world's largest



Pacific Coastal Cruises sails scenic channels by day and docks at night so passengers can sleep at wilderness lodges. **PACIFIC COASTAL CRUISES**

temperate rainforest.

"This is one of the last great unspoiled wildernesses on the planet," said Ted Middleton, who travelled from Australia to experience it.

Additional itineraries have the three ships exploring the Gulf Islands, Desolation Sound and

Broughton Archipelago.

Fares for four, five, six, seven and eight-night cruises range from \$2,650 to \$13,450, departing Vancouver, Campbell River, Prince Rupert, Bella Bella, Kitimat, Sandspit, Masset, Port Hardy or Port McNeill.

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The cargo ship Aurora Explorer follows an ever-changing delivery schedule to places few people ever go, often stopping along the way for passenger fun. PHOTOS: GLEN PETRIE

**PACIFIC COASTAL CRUISES: LODGE-TO-LODGE CRUISING**

If sleeping on a boat for a week is not for you, Pacific Coastal Cruises offers an alternative with three and four-night voyages that combine daytime cruising with overnight stays at wilderness lodges.

"Guests get to sleep in comfortable lodges, so they can enjoy on-shore activities, meet locals and learn first-hand about First Nations cultures," says owner George Bartel. Guests stay at Klahoose Wilderness Resort at Homfray Channel, the deluxe Sonora Resort in the Discovery Islands, Telegraph Cove Resort on the Johnstone Strait, and Black Rock Resort in Ucluelet.

During the day, the company's 28-m yacht, Pacific Bear II, carries 16 passengers from lodge to lodge, taking time to watch for seals and humpbacks in the Homfray Channel, bears in Toba Inlet or Blind Channel, or to go ashore for hiking and beachcombing. Different activities are available at each lodge. The newly renovated ship has walk-around decks, indoor and outdoor viewing lounges, a dining room and a bar. Breakfasts and lunches are served onboard, and dinners are at the lodges.

Departures starting in spring 2024 run from \$2,250 to \$4,750, with sailings departing Powell River, Port McNeill, Port Alberni, or Nanaimo, depending on the itinerary.

**MARINE LINK TOURS: CARGO CRUISING**

Tag along on a 41-m cargo ship operated by Marine Link Tours as she delivers essential supplies where roads don't go: coils of cable to remote lumber camps, new windows to off-grid homes, a busted float plane to be repaired, and luxury items to the fly-in hideaways of the rich and famous.

For those living or working in the Broughton Archipelago or around the spectacular Bute Inlet and Toba Inlet, the Aurora Explorer is a vital lifeline. As a working ship it follows an ever-changing delivery schedule to places few people ever





The captain of the Aurora Explorer takes advantage of a waterfall in Bute Inlet to clean the decks of the cargo ship.

go. Often the ship will stop just for passenger fun – to hike, swim, visit a historical site or feel the spray of a towering waterfall.

The custom-built vessel is like a floating flatbed truck with a ramp at the bow that can drop directly onto shore to discharge freight or passengers. The six passenger cabins have twin beds and ensuite bathrooms. A large room with encircling windows serves as dining room, library and lounge. A talented chef creates meals that rival dining on a cruise ship. From the grill come burgers, salmon, halibut and honey-glazed ribs. Wine is included.

Sailings for 2023 are sold out, and they are booking for 2024. Five-night voyages are \$3,465 to \$4,250 departing from Menzies Bay near Campbell River.





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