

[Home](#) » [Entertainment](#) » [Travel](#)

# Family-friendly beach destination stretches along the shoreline of the Salish Sea

Getaway to Parksville and Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island

Janice and George Mucalov / North Shore News  
APRIL 15, 2019 10:27 AM



At low tide Rath Trevor Beach stretches nearly a kilometre out into the Strait of Georgia.  
Photo SUPPLIED, TIGH NA MARA

Once upon a time, when our son was much younger and so were we, there was a quirky, one-building grocery shack with goats nibbling on its grass roof. Parksville, where we vacationed as a family, was a sleepy little town with not much more than the goat-topped store in nearby Coombs and a couple of rustic resorts with cabins on the beach.

How times have changed.

Parksville and neighbouring Qualicum Beach are all grown-up now. The country store still sports a trip of goats mowing the green-grass-roof. But today it's a full-blown visitor attraction that packs people in with its popular local market (shades of Whole Foods), buzzing Italian trattoria, expansive ice-cream parlour and even a furniture gallery. And new resorts in town like the trendy Beach Club give Whistler's hotel digs a run for their money.

Some things stay the same though.

Rath Trevor Beach – that five-kilometre stretch of beachfront famous for its warm shallow waters – still holds huge appeal for both family holidays and adult getaways.

The first thing we do after arriving is ditch the flip-flops and walk out onto the beach. The tide has rolled out almost as far as the eye can see. We relish the pleasure of squishing our toes into the

## Highest and best POLL

Should B.C. stop basing commercial assessments on highest and best use?

- ☐ Yes, regular increases are driving mom and pop shops out of business.
- ☐ No, government meddling will only create other problems.

[VOTE](#) or [view results](#)

## Shop over 50 t-shirts

Nostalgic designs tell the story of B.C.



## POPULAR NEWS

[You Might Like](#) [Most Read](#) [Most Recent](#)

**Woman caught in avalanche near Field, B.C. dies of her injuries: Parks Canada**

MARCH 12, 2019

**PEDAL PUSHERS: St. Andrews a good route for zipping down to Lonsdale Quay**

APRIL 12, 2019

**Canada warming twice as fast as rest of the world, scientific report shows**

APRIL 1, 2019

**Youth seriously injured in Grouse skiing incident, police seeking witnesses**

APRIL 16, 2019

**High avalanche risk on the North Shore mountains**

MARCH 18, 2019

**Check your backyards for missing man, North Van RMCP plead**

APRIL 8, 2019

**B.C.'s south coast prepares for short, snowy blast, raising avalanche risks**

FEBRUARY 22, 2019

**North Vancouver's Natasha Wodak wins Sun Run**

APRIL 15, 2019

soft grey sand, amazed at all the tiny sea critters. Zillions of little grey and red crabs scuttle about as our feet slosh through the bathtub-warm water; tiny harmless jellyfish float by.



The Beach Club Resort at Parksville, B.C. - Supplied

Later in the evening, the tide comes in right up to the shoreline. As we sit on our balcony over a glass of wine, watching the sky turn pink, a swimmer catches our attention. Parksville boasts the warmest ocean swimming in Canada. How did we miss actually swimming in the water all those years ago? Somehow back then we mistakenly thought the beach was just an ankle- to knee-deep playground for kids.

We could spend our whole getaway on the beach or looking at the beach from the deck. But we’re also keen to check out some of the area’s other attractions.

Like Horne Lake Caves. Vancouver Island is rich in caves – more than 1,000 – but those at Horne Lake are the only ones safely accessible to the public.

From the small visitor education centre, we cross a suspension bridge to meet out enthusiastic cave guide, Alex, for the “easy” two-hour Riverbend Explorer tour. While you can explore one of the caves on your own, its crystalline rock formations aren’t as pristine as in the ¼ mile Riverbend Cave, which can only be entered via a guided tour.

As soon as we step through the gated entrance, our world becomes inky black except for the lights on our headlamps. There are no electric lights, handrails or ladders in this wilderness cave system, and we scooch down (our butts sometimes the recommended “third contact point”) to scramble over boulders or squeeze through narrow openings. But when we look up, following our guide’s flashlight beam, our jaws drop as we take it all in. Everywhere we look, there are glistening crystalline ice “draperies”, thin delicate tubes and stalactites. One sparkling white formation looks just like a Buddha.

Surprisingly, there’s life in this netherworld. A tiny bug, the size of a speck of dirt, swims in a palm-sized cave pool. It’s probably just as well we don’t

Community Event Calendar

April 2019

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11

Find out what's happening in your community and submit your own local events.

[Add an event](#)

[See all community events](#)

see the other cave critters though – cave crickets, beetles, spiders and bats – all co-existing here in total darkness.

A decidedly different grotto experience awaits us at Tigh-Na-Mara's Grotto Spa. Its large warm mineral pool with gentle waterfall is designed like a natural stone grotto, but with a high ceiling and windows. After soaking until we're as mellow as milk, we slip on white bathrobes and head upstairs to the intimate Treetop Tapas restaurant.

The only restaurant of its kind in Canada, it's reserved exclusively for robed spa guests. And it makes for a relaxed evening to go for dinner straight from the shower with wet hair and no makeup. The menu is fixed – a selection of 16 tapas, all made to order and creatively presented, one after the other. Gazing out through cedar-framed windows at the serene forest, we ooh and aah over fresh crab meat wrapped in zucchini slices, and duck with camembert polenta and mustard greens. (And, yes, wine can be ordered too.)



All-grain beer from Love Shack Libations. - Supplied

We also pay Love Shack Libations a visit. Blink as you're driving along the Island Highway and you could miss it – this is probably the smallest craft brewery in B.C. After moving to Qualicum Beach from Whistler in 2005, Dave Paul lived in a tent while building a "love shack" for his family. Along the way, the veteran bartender started brewing beer at home, then learned how to make all-grain beer – which he says is like switching from making Betty Crocker cakes out of the box to baking a la Martha Stewart. He now shares his tasty concoctions at his 12 ft. by 16 ft., one-man shop.

Sitting on bar stools around a cedar plank tasting bar, we sip his four mainstays – Killer Kolsch, D.P.A. (Dave Paul Ale), Crafty Cream Ale and Precious Porter – and other seasonal products, from an eclectic assortment of martini, sherry, highball and other glasses. The beer is good, and word has spread. Restaurant demand for his beer is more than he wants to produce. And even though his "microbrewery" is officially closed except for our appointment, people still trickle in to buy his hand-bottled creations.





Dairy cows on the picturesque Morningstar Farm. - Supplied

Another fun stop is Little Qualicum Cheeseworks and the MooBerry Winery, both located on the picturesque Morningstar Farm. We watch a team of cheesemakers making artisan cheeses from milk from the farm's dairy cows. We also taste some of the popular brie, feta and blue cheeses along with various fruit wines (the gooseberry wine would go well poured over vanilla ice-cream!). Outside, it's fun to pet the rabbits and other farm animals.

We end our mini-trip with a bang-up dinner at Cuckoo, the Italian restaurant at the Coombs Country Market. We could sit inside the authentic Italian villa at tables set with white linens. But it's a lovely warm evening, and the outside terrace overlooking a dry forested riverbed with mini-lights strung overhead in leafy trees wins us over. Pastas are home-made, and the rich and creamy spaghetti carbonara hits the spot – as does our Parksville and Qualicum Beach getaway.

### **If you go:**

The Beach Club has contemporary studios and large one-bedroom units with full kitchens, air-conditioning, gas fireplaces and large balconies right on the sandy beach in Parksville.

<https://www.beachclubbc.com/>

Tigh-Na-Mara is more woodsy, with nicely gussied up rooms and suites (families might like the cabins, but couples should definitely book an oceanview suite). <https://www.tigh-na-mara.com/en-us>

The two-hour "Riverbend Explorer" tour at Horne Lake Caves costs \$42. Several other tours are also offered, including a five-hour "Extreme Cave Rappel" which includes rock- and ladder-climbing and rappelling to get you to the end of Riverbend Cave. <https://hornelake.com/>

Dip and dine at Tigh-Na-Mara for \$110. Allow 3 hours for the grotto and endless tapas experience. <http://grottospa.com/dining/dip-dine/>

Visit Love Shack Libations on Wednesday from 5 to 9 pm and Saturday from 1 to 5 pm. <http://www.loveshacklibations.com/>

Check out <http://www.morningstarfarm.ca/> for more information on Little Qualicum Cheeseworks and Mooberry Winery.

Coombs Country Market and the Cuckoo trattoria are open March to December.  
<http://www.oldcountrymarket.com/>

For more information, see the Parksville Qualicum Beach Tourism site.  
<https://www.visitparksvillequalicumbeach.com/>

© 2019 North Shore News

[Sign up for the North Shore News FREE digital newsletter to receive top headlines from each issue in your Inbox.](#)