

Area features amazing courses and breathtaking scenery

Follow the Vancouver Island golf trail

RON PRADINUK

SINCE the start of the pandemic, the golf industry has expanded beyond anyone's imagination. Golf courses were the one place where people could meet in an outdoor environment—feeling relatively safe—while getting some exercise.

New adherents to the sport and longtime golfers alike are constantly looking to discover exceptional destinations for golf holidays in places where the courses are excellent—and all the other amenities for a good vacation exist nearby.

This fall I discovered what may be one of the best all round choices in Canada. It's along the Vancouver Island Golf Trail, 13 courses which run up and down the entire island, with each region highlighting at least one course most golfers would salivate to play on.

There is no shortage of scenic beauty on Vancouver Island golf courses, or of challenging holes which require strategic thinking, as well as good playmaking.

These are available to golfers at prices which pale in comparison to what most courses of equal or lesser quality cost at most U.S. known golf destinations. The island's more temperate climate also means many of the courses are open year-round.

Flying on Westjet with my friend Randy Williams, it was only a short connection in Calgary on our way to the Comox International Airport, and with a two-hour time-difference from Manitoba we were able to have our first game in the afternoon of the day we arrived.

Crown Isle Golf Resort

The Crown Isle Golf Resort in Courtney was a perfect way to begin six days of daily golf. It is situated in the heart of Comox Valley, with the Beaufort Mountain Range in the distance. The Crown Isle course was the home of

one of the Canadian Mackenzie Tour's qualifying Q-schools this spring.

With our first look at the narrow tree lined fairway along the opening hole of this Graham Cooke designed course—we had trepidation about what was to come. However, the landing areas on most holes are fairly wide—and the course itself is relatively flat.

It is the abundance of bodies of water and bunkers along the way you have to be careful to avoid, while the double dogleg on hole 15 can put a halt to any good game if not managed properly. After the game we enjoyed our first fresh salmon meal in their Timber Room Grill.

Campbell River Golf and Country Club

A short half hour away is the Campbell River Golf and Country Club, formerly the Sequoia Springs Golf Course. Purchased by the local Campbell River Mailman family just five years ago, it has gone through a major upgrade and redesign, also done by Graham Cook. This course is kept in pristine condition, and the staff on site, starting with associate pro Jesse Moussa, who spent three years in Manitoba managing the Killarney Golf Club, were all courteous, helpful and professional.

While it is a playable course for all levels, it offers a number of uphill and downhill holes to keep golfers awake and at the top of their game. It has six tee boxes with slopes ranging from 110 up to 122 from the Black tees. For the non-golfer—the higher the slope rating, the more difficult the course is likely to be.

It also has TopTracer technology on its driving range to give players, or instructors, data feedback on each shot to help improve golfing performance. While many of the newer courses which have been created over the past few decades are more about selling real estate than golfing, this is a purpose-built course, with no housing forcing narrow or short fairways.

The food service in their Velocity Restaurant is excellent.



An excellent post-game meal was enjoyed in Velocity Lounge at Campbell River Golf Course.

Fairwinds Golf Club

Fairwinds is situated in Nanoose Bay between Parksville and Nanaimo. We stayed at the Tigh-Na Mara Seaside Spa Resort, less than a 15-minute drive to the course. At only 6,151 yards from the back tees, one might conclude this is an easy course. It's not!

The slope rating is 129, likely because of the number of raised tee boxes and greens overlooking the scenic hills and valleys of the design, not to mention a couple of interesting doglegs and water invitations.

Arbutus Ridge Golf Club

This course is a wild ride with terrain and sloped greens which can tame even the best golfer.

The first hole is all downhill and has been described as the most challenging starting hole on the Island, while the last three finishing holes have been similarly described.

I had been playing fairly well until Arbutus, but golf is a game that offers never-ending ways to bring a person down to a certain degree of humiliation. It's a wonder we keep coming back for more, but I do have a wish to return to Arbutus, to at least try to tame it.



Arbutus Ridge golfers face at least four of the most challenging holes on Vancouver Island.

Olympic View Golf Club

This is an exceptional golf course, through the design, the view, the playing conditions and overall management.

Located 20 minutes from Victoria, with 12 lakes and the Olympic Mountains as a backdrop, the course has been rated highly by *ScoreGolf* magazine. It can be challenging, but its natural setting, capped off by the sight of its majestic waterfall, seen throughout the 450 yards of the 17th hole, instills a sense of awe about the sport we have chosen to be a participant in.

Bear Mountain Golf Club

There are two courses here, The Mountain and The Valley. Designed by Jack Nicklaus, The Mountain course is as demanding as it is beautiful. At 1,100-feet, traversing through ravines, valleys and steep rock sides, Nicklaus

may have hired the services of a mountain goat to help in his design task. Considerably more expensive than any of the other Vancouver Island Trail Course, golfers should accept that and definitely play this course. Its scenic beauty should not be missed and good golfers will love the challenge.

Randy and I are not particularly good golfers, but we both loved playing the course. It put the perfect exclamation point on a week of exceptional experiences on golf courses Canadians should be proud of.

If you go:

Whether it is fishing, whale watching, or capturing any of the sites nearby where we golfed, Vancouver Island has everything anyone would want for an exceptional vacation.

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Your EZ Guide to... Greater Grand Forks
October 29, 2022
Next Guide November 26, 2022

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\$79	\$89	\$89	\$89	\$89	\$114	\$114
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