

# Introduction to British Columbia

Over 250,000 pleasure boats of every size and description ply the waters of Northwest Washington and British Columbia each year. The coastal waters of British Columbia provide a vast playground for exploration, relaxation, adventure, and a myriad of diversions. Although there are many designated Marine Parks, in a broader sense the entire coast is a marine park of gigantic proportion, breath-taking beauty, and bewildering variety. There are thousands of harbors (spelled harbours in Canada), bays, coves, marinas, towns, and waterways to explore.

The province covers 366,275 square miles or about 9.5 per cent of Canada's surface area. British Columbia is Canada's third largest province, after Quebec and Ontario. Only one American state, Alaska, is larger in surface area. There are only 30 nations in the world that are larger in surface area than British Columbia. The province is four times the size of Great Britain. All of Japan would fit into British Columbia two-and-a-half times. All of Germany, France, Austria and Switzerland would fit nicely into British Columbia. Of American states, you could fit California, Oregon and Washington into British Columbia and have enough room left over for Tennessee.

Almost 60 per cent of the province is covered with forest. Huge Douglas fir and western red cedar thrive in the moist coastal regions. Vast forests of pine, spruce and hemlock are more common in the higher and drier interior. Ten per cent of British Columbia is grazed by domestic animals or is under cultivation. Less than two per cent, about 7,000 square miles is covered by freshwater lakes or rivers, located primarily in the trenches between the mountain ranges.

More than 90 per cent of the land in British Columbia is owned by the provincial government as Crown land. (Crown is a British term which signifies the government interest.)

The climate of British Columbia varies greatly from south and east to west, influenced primarily by latitude, distance from the moderating effect of the Pacific Ocean and by the province's mountainous topography. The diversity results in huge variations in average hours of sunshine, rainfall, snow and average temperatures, sometimes over short distances. For example, the average yearly precipitation in White Rock, a small community just south of Vancouver, is 43 inches. Less than 30 miles away in North Vancouver, the North Shore mountains force clouds to rise and release their moisture, producing yearly rainfall averaging 73 inches.

It is precisely this wide variation in climate that makes it possible to find the best of such a wide variety of outdoor activities within the same province. It is the climate, combined with suitable mountain sites, that serves up superlative skiing and heli-skiing. It is the climate of the coast that provides excellent conditions for sailing and motor cruising the inland ocean waterways of the south coastal region. It is the climate that creates the habitat which, in turn, supports the abundant and diverse wildlife of British Columbia that attract fishermen, hunters and hikers from around the globe.

In the South Coastal Region, summertime is reliably sunny, warm (not hot) and with a frequent ocean breeze. Temperatures in summer go to average highs in the mid 70° to 80° Fahrenheit, but evenings can be cool, so a sweater, even in July, is not at all out of place.

In winter, the south coastal region is the most temperate in all of British Columbia, with temperatures ranging just below 32° Fahrenheit. The weather is reliably rainy. The amount of

rain varies greatly with location relative to local mountain ranges. Parts of this coast receive as much rain as the jungles of South America and they also have the lush, dense forest to match. Vancouver receives more rain than the eastern coast of Vancouver Island, including Victoria.

Winter or summer, weather here is extremely changeable. Lovers of the great outdoors should never be without rain gear and warm protection in the winter, and even in summer, for those sudden rainstorms. Most winters serve snow to the Vancouver and Vancouver Island regions at sea level. It can last from a few hours to a few weeks. The amount and duration of snow increases with the distance from the water, both horizontally and vertically above sea level. South coast ski resorts like to boast that you can ski, golf and take a swim in the ocean all on an early spring

Vancouver Island occupies an area about the size of Holland. A mountainous spine runs its length, breaking into long mountain fjords on its west coast that cut deeply into the island. One of them, Alberni Inlet, cuts more than half-way through the island, ending at Port Alberni. The west coast of the island is uninhabited, except for a sprinkling of small communities. The open Pacific Ocean washes its shores. Pockets of sandy beach add to a magic amalgam that attracts visitors from around the world to its shore. The island's major settlements and roads are clustered on its east coast where the ocean is protected. Lush forests of large Douglas fir and cedar thrive in the moderate, wet ocean climate. Victoria, on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, is the province's capital with more than three hundred thousand people if you include its suburban communities. Nanaimo, 62 miles north, has a population of about 62,260. The island economy is based squarely on the forest industry, with several mills located up and down the eastern coast. North of Vancouver Island lie the Queen Charlotte Islands, a scenic, mist-shrouded galapagos.

The Lower Mainland is part of the trough between the Vancouver Island mountains and the Coast Mountains on the mainland. In this trough, the Fraser River, which stretches half-way up the middle of the province almost to its eastern border with Alberta, has deposited a large delta. It is on or near this delta where 1.58 million people, close to half of the population of British Columbia, live in the city of Vancouver and its suburbs, which include Richmond, Burnaby, Delta, Surrey, North and West Vancouver, New Westminster and Coquitlam. The Lower Mainland is the commercial and transportation heart of the province. Burrard Inlet is a natural harbor with a scenic backdrop of Coast Mountains to the north.