

From opulent to rustic

QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS: Outdoor adventures to suit many tastes

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SPECIAL TO THE PROVINCE

If ever there were forests in the real world like those twisted limb arboreal terrors of children's fairytales, those of the southern half of Haida Gwaii (The Queen Charlotte Islands) would be their more cheerful cousins.

Shadowy twisted trees lose some of their scariness when every surface is covered with a jolly green growth of furry moss.

(Of course, during a storm they, too, turn into a nightmare of dark and malevolent arms, reaching and thrashing.)

Every step is soft and soundless as you coast the paths of the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve (www.greatcanadianparks.com/bco-lumbia/gwainp/index.htm), the 138 southern islands of the archipelago of the Queen Charlottes.

One of the best preserved abandoned Haida villages, Ninintins, is here, guarded by Haida Watchman. In a small cove, the village's mortuary poles stand like dancers frozen in various poses at the water's edge.

Frog, raven and fish carvings are still preserved in detail on the poles while the pit houses are barely recognizable, filled in with vegetation and rotted logs.

Even if your travels don't take you as far south as the park, other hiking trails may reward you with glimpses of some of the 39 distinct subspecies of plants and animals endemic to the islands. The most famous, however, are the salmon, still mythically large and plentiful.

Some of the most expensive fishing in the world is in the Queen Charlottes. Mind you, you do get everything and more than you pay for.

The West Coast Fishing Club (www.westcoastfishingclub.com, of course), for instance, has anything you might want for a luxury fishing experience, from helicopter pick up at the airport to the world class chefs who make guest appearances.

These lodges are more akin to resort hotels but with a before dawn wake-up call. Fish obviously rise early. But thankfully there are fishing lodges for every pocketbook and they also have experienced fish wranglers to help you land that 18.18 kilogramer (40 pounder still has a better ring.)

From the opulent to the rustic, kayaking expeditions of several days can start with a floatplane flight from the airport in Sandspit.

After flying south for a half hour, kayakers and supplies are thrown off, the aircraft lifts away and an eerie uncivilized quiet descends.

Later, with everything you might need strapped in around you, you paddle to the first campsite. The food is hearty, showering and bathing is in



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Many adventurers make their way around the islands on well-stocked kayaks. — THE PROVINCE

creeks and your muscles soon become accustomed to swing of the paddle.

You'll fish, too, for rockfish or salmon in between islands. It's catch and hide, though, because eagles will streak down and snag your supper right off of your little ship if you leave any part of it exposed.

If you consider hot showers a must, sail aboard a yacht that gives you a home base equipped with a chef, naturalist and library.

Everyone has a kayak that is parked aboard the mother ship each night. See www.bluewateradventures.ca. Both www.qcinfo.ca and <http://queen-charlotte-islands.travel.bc.ca> will help with all there is to see and do.

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