

TRAVEL

Add popular year-round activities, along with superb dining at some of the West Coast's most celebrated and innovative restaurants, and a fall escape to Tofino adds up to a lot of fresh-air fun. **Mark Sissons**

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Tofino's Cox Bay Beach hosts international pro surfing competitions each fall, offering visitors front row seats amid the beauty. PHOTOS: MARK SISSONS

TOFINO'S CALM BEFORE THE STORMS

The late-fall lull offers plenty of activities

MARK SISSONS

The hike up to the top of the Cox Bay Beach lookout is a steep and muddy bushwalking slog. But the reward is a panoramic view of Tofino's pearl string of beaches and the swelling waves that pummel wetsuit-clad surfers.

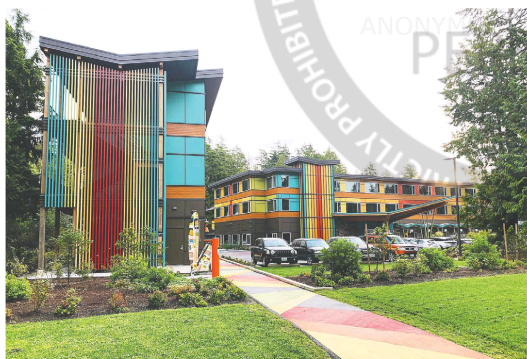
This summer, Tofino's beaches were even more packed than usual as wildfires and intense heat waves ravaged much of the B.C. Interior, redirecting many vacationers west toward Vancouver Island's cool sea breezes. Come winter, storm watchers will return to once again fill up this resort town's hotels and restaurants. Until then, Tofino slips into a late fall lull, which makes it the perfect time to visit.

The water is still warm from the summer sun, the winds change direction to offshore (southeast) for optimal wave shape, and the first mighty, frothy 10-foot-plus swells appear. Pro surfers also arrive to compete in events like the Queen of the Peak, the Women's Canadian Surf Championships, that transform Tofino's top beaches into front row seats.

Add popular year-round activities such as whale watching, kayaking, cycling and hiking, along with superb dining at some of the West Coast's most innovative restaurants, and a fall escape to Tofino adds up to a lot of fresh-air fun.

FUNKY STAYS

The brash and retro Hotel Zed is an affordable accommodation



Tofino's Hotel Zed offers mid-range accommodation with a retro vibe.

option located on the Pacific Rim Highway a few kilometres south of Tofino and just a 10-minute walk from Chesterman Beach. It opened in late 2019 on four acres of old-growth rainforest with private access to the Tofino Mudflats, home to a rich array of shorebirds and waterfowl species.

The Zed brand promises "ridiculously fun, unpretentious hotels that look damn good on your Instagram."

Entering the lobby feels like stepping onto the set of That '70s Show, with bold vintage colour palettes, a green shag rug in the huge sunken living room and teardrop fireplaces hanging from the ceiling.

Zed Hotel guests can hang out in the poker room, hit the mini disco or arcade, and ride guest bicycles right through the lobby. And even get your fortune read by a resident psychic just in case you're wondering how your surfing lesson will



Enjoy a meal at the acclaimed Wolf in the Fog restaurant.

IF YOU GO

Cycle from Tofino's Multi-Use Path straight to the new 25-kilometre apsciik tasii (ups-cheek ta-shee) pathway — translated from Nuu-chah-nulth as "going the right direction on the path" — through Pacific Rim National Park Reserve.

Explore the scenic coastline of Clayoquot Sound en route to the common feeding areas of migrating humpback, orca and grey whales on a whale watching tour with Jaime's Whaling Station.

Or hike the length of Long Beach, Pacific Rim National Park Reserve's longest stretch of sand, spanning an incredible 16 kilometres.

RECOMMENDED EATS

Located on top of a surf shop across the street from the fisherman's wharf in downtown Tofino, Wolf in the Fog consistently ranks among Canada's top restaurants. Succulent signature dishes include prawn corn dogs, seaweed salad, wild mushroom gnocchi and ling cod and clams.

Nearby, Shelter Restaurant offers casual West Coast fare and elevated dining showcasing fresh, local seafood and island-grown produce.

GETTING THERE

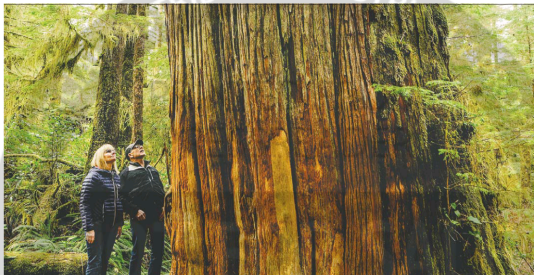
You can fly non-stop to Tofino-Long Beach Airport from Vancouver on scheduled flights with Pacific Coastal Airlines or into Tofino Harbour with Harbour Air.

If driving to Tofino from November through April, check the Sutton Pass webcam for the latest conditions, as the stretch of road between Port Alberni and Tofino can become snowy and treacherous. For more information visit tourismtofino.com.

transport.

The on-site restaurant, Roar, features outdoor fire pits, a charcoal oven and a wood-fire gaucha grill. Inspired by Patagonian country cooking, it features a menu created by executive chef Kaelhub Cudmore that features fresh, local ingredients. Signature dishes include 37-day dry-aged tomahawk steak and fire-roasted whole fish, smoked prime roast watermelon and flambéed grilled beach oysters.

SEE TOFINO ON B6



Tofino's vast beach areas are known for their beauty and size. At left, Pacific Rim National Park Reserve is famous for its gigantic Western red cedar and Western hemlocks. PHOTOS: JORDAN DYCK/TOURISM TOFINO

SURE, SAID & SUSTAINABILITY

TOFINO FROM B5

FIRST NATIONS WAYS

Hotel Zed was the first Tofino accommodation to join the Tribal Parks Allies, a group of local businesses that recently came together to help support ecological protection and restoration of the Tla-o-qui-aht Tribal Parks.

This vast area, which encompasses the most extensive intact old-growth rainforests remaining on Vancouver Island and the resort municipality of Tofino, falls within the ancestral territory of the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation.

Today, descendants of the Tla-o-qui-aht guardians and caretakers of these lands help protect and restore the ecologies of places like Meares Island, located just across from Tofino Harbour.

Meares gained international notoriety in the mid-1980s during the anti-logging protests led by the Nuu-chah-nulth and environmentalist groups like Greenpeace and Friends of Clayoquot Sound.

On a walking tour of Meares Island's iconic Big Tree trail, which contains some of the tallest trees in B.C., Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation deputy chief Terry Dorward explains the essence of the Tribal Parks program.

"With the Tribal Parks mandate, we're reclaiming all of our traditional territories and putting into practise our ancient responsibility to ensure the well-being of not only the people here but also the environment," he says, dwarfed beneath stands of old-growth spruce, hemlock, and Western cedar trees that are more than a thousand years old.

BEACHFRONT BLISS

Perched on the curvaceous surfer's paradise of Cox Bay Beach a few kilometres south of Hotel Zed, the Pacific Sands Beach Resort has

also been long committed to sustainability.

This upscale Tofino resort takes environmental and social responsibility seriously.

Eco-friendly initiatives include an on-site geothermal exchange plant that taps into renewable solar energy stored in the ground to provide efficient heating and cooling, and a rainwater catchment system that provides fresh water. Pacific Sands guests can even participate in community-led beach cleanups like SurfRider Pacific Rim's Love Your Beach Clean initiative.

"We have had an overwhelmingly positive reaction from our guests regarding our eco-focused efforts," says Meghan Whyte, Pacific Sands' Environmental Ambassador.

"Some say they've chosen to stay with us over other resorts in the area due to the efforts we already have in place."

Pacific Sands is home to Surf Sister Surf Shack, located beside the Surfside Grill that serves up fresh seafood platters, fish tacos, and fish and chips. Pacific Sands guests have exclusive access to wetsuit rentals and surf lessons at this location.

"People always assume that the surf is freezing at this time of year. It's true that the water is cold, but with a proper wetsuit, you stay warm," says Surf Sisters owner Krissy Montgomery.

At sunset on the rocky Cox Bay Beach outcrop called Pettinger Point, those giant waves crashing up against the shore look intimidating, especially considering there is nothing but a ferocious North Pacific Ocean between here and Japan.

Yet it's the pleasure of pondering such elemental awesomeness that makes a fall escape to Tofino so magical.

Take a trip on the stormy side.



Photo Credit: Destination BC / Jordan Dyck

Enjoy a 3rd night FREE when you book a Storm Watching Retreat to Tofino or Ucluelet and prepare to see Mother Nature put on a show.

Book by January 3 for travel before March 31, 2022.

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