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Port Renfrew: Gateway to the West Coast Trail

by [Michelle Hopkins](#) , Posted Monday 19th September 0 Comments

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by [Michelle Hopkins](#) , Posted Monday 19th September

Here we are at the beginning of the famous West Coast Hiking trail; home to some of the best salmon and halibut fishing in British Columbia. A few hours earlier we had arrived at our destination, the Wild Coast Cottages in Port Renfrew. One of our neighbours quipped that these quaint wooden cabins are dubbed by other guests as 'the Yuppy way of camping.'

Indeed, the fully equipped cabins with wrap-around deck, which are about the size of a hotel suite, are the only way I like to camp! The [Wild Coast Cottages](#), which are located in prime fishing grounds and boasts the only deep water moorage available in Port Renfrew, is our home while we explore this community of 250 year-round residents. Imagine Tofino two decades ago and you might be able to picture Port Renfrew. It retains its rugged, natural beauty with its roaring surf along the Strait of Juan de Fuca ... a perfect, and may I say, spectacular landscape for hiking, fishing, strolling the

beach and unwinding!

A windy road to Avatar Grove

After settling into our cabin, we meet up with our hiking guide TJ Watt, the passionate founder of [Ancient Forest Alliance](#). We head out on a rough, windy road to Avatar Grove, home to 'Canada's Gnarliest Tree'. What a treat to stand beside a 150-foot tall cedar tree that dwarfs anyone and everything around it.

After our hike, we head to the eclectic Coastal Kitchen Cafe. It was highly recommended by TJ, locals and many of the other hikers we met along the way. The place was packed and buzzing with activity. The seafood is local, portions huge, and it's a great spot to people watch. My partner Dennis and I would venture to say our meals were as good as anything we've had in Vancouver. We shared a carrot ginger soup and a side of prawns. Afterwards, I went for the salmon dill quesidillas while Dennis chose the halibut.

As darkness approached, we set out for a stroll along the nearby beach, gathering driftwood for an evening fire. Picture this scene: A nice bottle of red wine, a good read, a cozy fire and a sky filled with stars. It doesn't get much better than this!

Fish don't sleep in!

The next morning, bright and early Dennis quietly leaves me sleeping soundly while he meets up with Karl Ablack. The evening before, Karl had offered him a golden opportunity to go fishing with him. The only catch? A 5:30 am start.

At 5:30 a.m., the two set out to fish off of what the locals call East Point. The real name is San Juan Point, located off of Hammond Rocks. They troll out to 500 feet of water and drift west across Owen Point and set the down riggers. Across the straight of Juan de Fuca, Dennis tells me he could see the outline of the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State. Within an hour they hook into two wild coho salmon, which they release. The next two bites were pink salmon that end up on our dinner table that evening. Karl tells Dennis that he often spots whales, sea lions and sea otters while plying the fishing grounds. It's also not uncommon to spot a black bear or Roosevelt elk around the delta of the San Juan River.

Meanwhile I had met up with Rosie for a hike to Botany Bay. What a treat. We went down a trail constructed by the youth of the Pacheenaht and the T'Souke First Nations. It winds through the rich tidal pools and a shoreline filled with life ... a natural jewel in the Juan de Fuca Provincial Park.

I feel in love with the simplicity and solitude of this magnificent place ... Port Renfrew is worth the trip.

A Few Facts:

Port Renfrew is located on the southern end of the West Coast Trail, a world famous hiking trail built in 1907 along the West Coast of Vancouver Island to save shipwrecked sailors. During the days of sail, from 1830 to 1925, 137 major shipping tragedies occurred in the immediate vicinity of the entrance to the Straits of Juan de Fuca. International recognition was given to the waters off Port Renfrew when it became known as 'The Graveyard of The Pacific'.

Originally named Port San Juan, the settlers changed the name to honour Lord Renfrew who planned to settle crofters here.

In 2011, Port Renfrew came in 5th place in the World Fishing Network "Ultimate Fishing Town" competition.

Local population:

- 250 residents. Population expands ten-fold in the summer months with hikers, fishers, and campers.
- Amazing natural spots: Avatar Grove, home of the Gnarliest Tree, and Botanical Beach are two of the most famous locations.
- Trailhead of both the West Coast Trail and the Juan de Fuca Trail.

More Information:

- Wild Coast Cottages: www.wildcoastcottages.com
- Coastal Kitchen Cafe: 1-250-647-5545
- Ancient Forest Alliance: www.ancientforestalliance.org