

Maple Bay

The Bay of Plenty

"IT REALLY IS A remarkable place," states David Messier, genial General Manager of Maple Bay Marina. From the everyday traveller to Hollywood royalty, many are inclined to agree. One noted past visitor was John Wayne, who moored his 136-foot converted minesweeper 'Wild Goose' in Maple Bay, then hosted a legendary shindig still spoken of in awe-inspired tones today. Like anyone who comes to call here, 'Duke' was impressed.

Approaching Maple Bay by sea or air, the views are stunning. Tucked snugly into the protective embrace of a narrow channel within a natural harbour, it's truly enchanting in

every direction. Although a bustling portal to aquatic and outdoor pursuits, Maple Bay retains a lulling ambience that marks this as an understated Vancouver Island destination of seductive charm.

A hub of nautical activity, Maple Bay is situated in the Cowichan Valley, just a 10-minute drive from the city of Duncan and a short cruise or floatplane hop from Saltspring Island. (Harbour Air operates daily flights from downtown Vancouver to the Gulf Islands with Maple Bay as a pick-up point).

While renowned for activities focused on the clear ultramarine depths of the bay, including kayaking, swimming and year-round fishing, it is the diving that is especially exciting. This tiny community's future was assured when none other than the famed French aquanaut Jacques Cousteau proclaimed the waters of Maple Bay as his second favourite dive on earth after the Red Sea. Unusually, the diving experience

here is best in the shallow waters close to the shore, where visibility is normally excellent. A vivid undersea garden awaits, bubbling with fascinating creatures, plants and surprises.

Mid-May sees Maple Bay gripped by three days of boating fever: the annual Wooden Boat Festival attracts scores of owners and fans in celebration of classic wooden vessels. This is an important regional event, as wooden boats have a proud tradition and long history of use on the West Coast. The 12th annual festival will take place May 18-20, a perfect way for the whole family to spend the Victoria Day long weekend.

Most Maple Bay action understandably centres on the marina and Maple Bay Yacht Club, both in Bird's Eye Cove. These respected establishments offer year-round moorage and superb facilities that have seen Arnold Schwarzenegger, Barbara Streisand and Jack Nicholson amongst other esteemed clientele to take advantage of them. According to David Messier, however, "you would not know them to see them" amidst similarly enthusiastic, though lesser-known boaters.

The excellent Shipyard Restaurant and Marine Pub, a coffee bar, Internet access and full maintenance services are available for the convenience of all, megastar or otherwise. Locals gather at the popular Yacht Club, where weekly, monthly and annual events are held, ranging from sports screenings to art exhibitions, themed dinners to movie nights and live entertainment.

Aside from the prevailing maritime buzz of Maple Bay, there is plenty more to see and do within easy reach. Hikers of all levels of

Activity centres around the marina and yacht club
(Carol Messier)



Otters and other marine life frequent the bay
(David Messier)



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Maple Bay's stunning natural harbour
(Peter Vassilopoulos)

experience will be delighted with its many trails, especially in Maple Mountain Centennial Park. Ranging from 70 to 140 minutes, a selection of pathways offers breathtaking views of the bay and beyond. Choose your trail colour according to ability and fitness: Green, Orange, Blue or Pink in ascending order of physical challenge, the latter naturally affording the most rewarding views.

Further trails and mountain biking routes can be found just south of Maple Bay on the 536-metre Mount Tzuhalem, close to the small cluster of homes that constitute the idyllic village of Genoa Bay. These trails are known for stunning wildflowers and more magnificent vistas of the area. Genoa Bay itself provides a variety of pleasing distractions, including floating homes and an absorbing art gallery.

Golfers are particularly spoiled around Maple Bay with four 18-hole courses within less than a half-hour drive from the marina. The delightful town of Chemainus invites you to the Mount Brenton Golf Course and the Arbutus Ridge Golf & Country Club is close by in Cobble Hill. In development, due to open spring 2008, is The Cliffs Over Maple Bay, a magnificent course designed by Australian golfing superstar Greg Norman and nestled in a residential community of enviable location. With Duncan offering up a further two excellent courses, take your pick from a world-class selection.

So whatever you may do in Maple Bay, pulling yourself away to head for home should be the only downer of your visit.

—David Morrison 



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