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TRAVEL & LIFE

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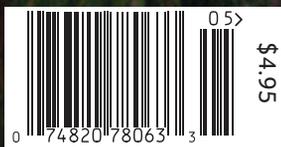
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ON OUR COVER Hike to the Park Butte fire lookout in Washington's North Cascades National Park for spectacular views, p.44

Bear Watching

Tofino, B.C.

BY ANNE NORUP



The First Nations people of coastal British Columbia have a saying that when the tide is out, the table is set. It seems the black bears who reside along the shores of Clayoquot Sound near Tofino on Vancouver Island's wild West Coast think so too. They come out of hibernation in April and ramble down from the rainforest to roll rocks aside in search of their favorite forage of sea urchins and crab. The bears continue to feast on the area's natural bounty of salmon, berries and shellfish through October.

Over 12,000 black bears call Vancouver Island home—the highest density in North America. But because they're typically shy, the best and safest way to marvel at these mammals is on a bear-watching tour.

Tofino-based Remote Passages Marine Excursions (remotepassage.com), which has been offering bear-watching tours for 30 years, knows the best spots for watching these reclusive bruins on the otherwise inaccessible bays and beaches of Tofino Inlet. Remote Passages times its tours for low tide, when the bears roam across the tidelands in search of their next meal. The shallow-bottomed inflatable Zodiac boats can maneuver close to shore for close-up viewing, and, because

bears don't have any natural predators from the water, they don't pay any attention to humans.

No worries about getting wet from salty spray or choppy waves on the high-speed ride to the day's viewing location. You'll stay dry in the Mustang suits and rain gear Remote Passages provides, and your camera gear can be stashed in waterproof bags until you arrive in quiet waters to view the bears. But be sure to have it within easy reach: the first bear sighting—especially if it's a sow and her cubs—is sure to steal your breath.

Before or after your tour, you'll have plenty of time to explore Tofino, with its unique shops and tempting eateries. Enjoy Shelter Restaurant, SoBo or espresso at Tuff Bean. Hike the Tonquin Trail, which curves around the edge of the ocean to a secluded cove with a pristine beach.

Spend the night in elegant Northwest style at the Long Beach Lodge Resort (longbeachlodgeresort.com) on Cox Bay. In the Great Room, where picture windows frame magnificent views of the crashing surf, guests can relax next to the stone fireplace while indulging in delicious local, artisan-inspired meals.

To plan your Tofino stay, visit tourismtofino.com. 🐻



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