

## Quadra Island an arresting place of natural beauty

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"There ... look there! A bear! Can you see him?" Our Zodiac operator, Jeff, cuts back the outboard motor, and steers us across the choppy ink-blue waters of Discovery Passage. I scan the stony shoreline with my binoculars and zero in on a small black dot.

As we get closer, the dot grows into a roly-poly cub, who is so engrossed in foraging among the rocks for his breakfast, that he totally ignores us. A couple of moments later the baby bruin, perhaps bent on finding his mom, takes off without a backward glance at us and climbs up the rock-strewn hillside with astonishing speed.

Bears aren't the only wildlife we encounter during our Zodiac excursion through the labyrinthine waterways of the Discovery Passage. At the mouth of Johnstone Strait bald eagles glide the thermals, their serrated wings fanning a cloudless sky.

Hugging the shoreline at Frederick Arm, the waters are emerald, reflecting stands of massed evergreens fringing the high water mark. A deer pauses for an instant and then nimbly bounds away into the foliage. A little further along a colony of harbour seals and their pups sunbathe and flop across a rocky outcrop. One of them with big soulful eyes in his doggie-like whiskered face watches us a little apprehensively, before diving underwater.

Aside from a wildlife thrill, our Zodiac trip is also a wild-ride thrill. Approaching Seymour Narrows, Jeff opens throttle and, Zodiac tilting sharply, we circle whirlpools formed by the ebbing tide. Despite my penguin-like flotation-padded suit, I hang on white-knuckled to the seat frame in front of me.

We straighten out and head towards the mad, froth-spittled waters over the infamous Ripple Rock -- twin fangs that once constituted the worst navigational hazard in Canadian waters. The cruel razor-sharp projections, a mere 200 centimetres below the surface of the channel, sheared away the hulls of as many as 120 ships, and caused more than a 100 drownings. Ripple Rock was eventually blown to smithereens on an April morning in 1958.

Our three-hour Zodiac adventure ends at the April Point Resort and Spa wharf on Quadra Island.

My sister and I board the complimentary water shuttle to Painter's Lodge on Campbell River's waterfront where we soak up the sunshine on the deck of the Tyee Pub. Kayakers dot the waters below, and a couple of rugged-looking sports fishermen make their way down to the dock. We sip frosted fruit punches and nibble golden-brown breaded Fanny Bay oysters.

Then, stuffed appropriately to the gills, we return to April Point Resort to spend the rest of the afternoon on a trip around Quadra Island. The largest of all the

Discovery Islands, it's an unspoiled world of gentle delights: sun-dappled roads winding past sequestered beaches, placid fresh water lakes, broad undulating meadows and hiking trails through resin-scented evergreen forests. Rebecca Spit is lively with picnickers and sunbathers and, at the little shopping arcade at Quathiaski Cove, we are invited to come back for the Saturday Farmers' Market.

Back at our luxurious suite at April Point Resort, my sister and I sit in companionable silence on our private patio. As the dusk deepens and the shadows lengthen, the only sound is the soft lap of wavelets against the shore, and the occasional baritone horn of a passing ship. An enormous silver-plate full moon rises above the treetops, and sets a shimmering, sequined pathway across the waters of Discovery Passage.

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