

## CANADA

Vancouver Island, reachable by air or ferry from Seattle or Vancouver, BC, is a remarkable wilderness destination, both on land and in the water. A traveler may encounter anything from eagles to orcas, sea lions to bears, while viewing a remarkable range of critters in the cold, clear water. This is dry suit country. Victoria is a small, charming, English town.

**Aqua-tek Scuba, Moby Dick's, March 20053, Trevor Cramer, Edmonton, Alberta.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 10 to 40 Feet. Water: 46 to 48 F., calm, choppy. First time in colder water, West coast of Canada is rated one of the best places to dive and I see why, fantastic wrecks...150 foot Rip Tow Ocean Tug, 336 foot Destroyer HMCS Saskatchewan, 410 foot HMCS Cape Breton. I was on a wreck course so this was all I saw. Jeff from Aqua-Tek did a great job instructing us in wreck diving 101. Nanaimo is a beautiful place and there is lots to do!

**Ducks Dive Charter, Ducks Dive Cottages, August 2005, Larry Schuth (Lschuth@eznet.net), Hilton, NY.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 65 to 50 Ft, choppy, no currents. George and Susan are great hosts and run the only dive operation on Point Traverse, a small point of land that sticks way out into Lake Ontario. They have a dive shop and air fill station. Their boat (46' tug, 12 divers max.) is stable in rough weather. The diving is wrecks from the schooner and steam era all beautifully preserved by

the mostly cold water. Expect a thermocline at various depths. Most dives are in the 60'-110' range. [www.Ducksdive.com](http://www.Ducksdive.com)

**God's Pocket Resort, September 2005, Sandra Cohen, Seattle, WA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 48 to 50 F, calm. Every year we dive for five days in September with a dozen friends at God's Pocket. Owners Bill and Annie have made this the best place for diving in the Pacific Northwest. The comfortable land-based motel-style accommodations (every convenience you could possibly need, but nothing over-the-top luxurious) are just a few minutes from the fabulous sites in Browning Pass. There is a large sundeck on pilings (complete with campfire pit) so you can lounge there between dives if you are lucky to have calm sunny days. Food is plentiful and delicious, and conversation around the table is lively. The boat is comfortable for two divers, and you can go into the boat's cabin "wet." Bill will take you on two or three boat dives daily, depending on what you prefer; he tries to accommodate the group's preferences. Night dives are off the dock or from the boat, too. Most dives are at or on both sides of slack, but no one should be here who can't manage some current. This year we saw many humpbacked whales (never underwater, however), sea lions, and Pacific white-sided dolphins. Also wolf eels and octopus in large numbers, and many kinds and numbers of rockfish and greenling. The search for nudibranchs is always rewarding. Electric power is on 24 hours a day, from batteries charged by a wind turbine and a quiet unobtrusive generator that only

runs a few hours a day. Kayaks are available free. The two best things about God's Pocket are the brilliant, colorful diving (amazing red soft corals, bright sponges and anemones, nudibranchs, wolf eels, octopus, schools of fishes) and the warmth and friendliness of Bill, Annie, and their hardworking staff. They love what they do in this remote part of the continent. The nearest dive shop and town are an hour's boat ride away in Port Hardy (\$200 for a water taxi), so be self-contained as to repair/replacement parts. Bring a drysuit (unless you are internally steam heated), bring all the batteries you will need, bring your own wine and beer and pop. Weight belts are provided, as are steel and aluminum tanks. Nitrox and argon are an extra charge. All bedding, towels, etc. are provided. It can rain a lot on the coast, so rubber boots are handy any time of year.

**Rockfish Divers, March 2005, Rory L. Cox (rosuzq@quik.com), Chehalis, WA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Water: 48 to 50 F., calm. Jonathan Grant from Rockfish Divers has an outstanding operation out of Brentwood Bay on the Saanich Inlet of Victoria Island. Saanich Inlet is a fjord, with tidal exchanges in the 10 ft. range. This makes for a nutrient rich environment, with the top 40 ft of water exchanging daily. Below 80 to 100 ft. the water doesn't exchange, which makes for a wonderful crystal clear, though dark wonderland. Our first dive was to see "glass sponges," which apparently are only in this area. Visibility was only about 10 ft until the 70 ft range, then we encountered clear, cold water. The sponge field was at 100-120 ft. The

sponges looked like large piles of white bones. I experienced a buoyant ascent from 60 ft.; the operation was outstanding, providing oxygen back to shore. They observed and provided numbers to local recompression chambers. Very professional. The next day we dove a seamount 65 to 70 ft., an area of high exchange which contributes to the large variety of sea life. Our final dive was a drift dive at exchange. This provided a 3-4 knot journey over white anemone fields, numerous nudibranch species and carpets of tunicates covering the bottom filtering out the rich water flowing over them. The wild northwest setting, the rich and varied diving and the great hospitality of our hosts made for an unforgettable Canadian weekend. UW Photography Comments: No fresh water for cameras, but good dry protection.

**Vancouver Island, August 2005, Fiona Rattray, Elora, Ont.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: 50 F., calm, choppy, currents, no currents. I dived in a dry suit, and my niece dived in a 7 ml wetsuit. First stop was Great Ocean Adventures, in Victoria, BC. The shore diving included Henderson Point and then Ogden Point Breakwater, a kilometer of granite seawall sticking into the Pacific; lots of macro critters. The dive shop was helpful when booking the dives before the trip. Next, we headed to Nanaimo, BC and dived with Ocean Explorers; their boat went out to HMCS Saskatchewan, a destroyer sunk as an artificial reef. Big cabezons, tons of plumose anemones, rockfish and lion's-mane jellies. The second dive was to Snake Island, with a seal basking area and lots of ledges with critters.

We ended the dive snorkeling with the seals. These dives were great, and the captain gave an entertaining and informative briefing. We went further north to Quadra Island, home of Abyssal Dive Charters. Big current diving; I've never seen so much life even in tropical waters. Orcas sighted on the ferry back. Lastly, we dived with Relax Zen Dive Inn, near Duncan, BC. This was service at its best, a small operation serving delicious local food, with Zen-inspired accommodations and fantastic shore and boat diving. The highlight was a boat trip to Saanich Inlet to dive Senanus Island and the fragile cloud sponges at 100 feet..

## COSTA RICA

Costa Rica is famous among experienced divers for the big animal action off uninhabited Cocos Island, 300 miles offshore. Here are challenging, high-tension dives among hammerheads, mantas, occasional whale sharks, and other awe-inspiring creatures. Land-based dive operations find a few big animals. However, they're unpredictable and the visibility is often so low you'll miss them. Costa Rica has great tourist destinations, is exceptionally safe.

**Aquacenter, Flamingo Cove, September 2005, Terry Garland (garlandmarine@comcast.net), Naples, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 35 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F. Surge on every dive, visibility marginal. White tip sharks plentiful. Saw one manta, a few turtles, many eagle rays.

lots of small tropicals. Great treatment by the dive company, had fresh fruit and cookies on all dives. For those who wanted it they set up your gear. Had fresh water to rinse. Camera rinse tank not large enough. Boat was slow (gasoline outboards). I did extra dive and the price was reasonable. The trip was put together by Bill Beard's in Costa Rica and provided canopy tours, rapelling, white water rafting besides the diving so good for a group. Food was ok, nothing to brag about. Locals were great and appreciative.

**Cano Island Divers, Casa Corcovado, December 2004, LeRoy Anderson (landersonsprint@earthlink.net), Salt Lake City, UT.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 120 Feet. Water: 75 to 85 F., calm. Variable abilities of divers necessitated strict guiding practices and depth limits. One diver could not maintain buoyancy and had to be nursed along on the first dive. Visibility of the first dive was only about thirty feet. Quite limited number of dive sites. Divemaster attentive and supportive. Expended more fuel and time to find the best sites. When my rented depth gauge proved nonfunctional, he swapped out his own gear for my rented gear. The first dive site (el banco) displayed numerous whitetip encounters and schools of tropicals, and one barracuda. The second site (el bajo del diablo) displayed 120 ft. visibility, numerous types of tropicals in high concentrations and variety (butterflyfish, trunkfish, pufferfish, guinea fowl pufferfish, surgeonfish, triggerfish, parrotfish, etc.), large moray. A huge flounder, many large snapper, perhaps to four feet or so, along with numer-