



## Cruising the Islands of British Columbia

By Jan Ross · in Cruising ·



**JAN ROSS**

As a child Jan traveled the world as her dad was a career officer in the Marine Corps. She has been writing all her life so it was a natural progression to become a full time travel writer. Lucky for her that her husband is a travel photographer so the two are together often on assignments, photographing and documenting their adventures.

You won't find Broadway shows, expansive swimming pools, or numerous theme restaurants on the yacht "Safari Quest" with Un-Cruise Adventures, but that's just the way the passengers on this small luxury yacht like it. With cabins for just 22 passengers and crew, the yacht is the perfect size for comfort and retains the ability to cruise into secluded inlets and coves that larger ships will never explore. And with a 2:1 ratio of crew to passengers, the level of attention each and every one of the passengers receives is amazing.



Photo: Tom Ross

Departing from Seattle, this cruise was all about "gunkholing", a boating term that refers to shallow or shoal water cruising, meandering from place to place and mooring overnight in sheltered coves. In addition, the line seeks anchorages to view wildlife, hike and kayak or just enjoy amazing views. We were astonished by the incredible beauty of the hidden Princess Louisa Inlet with the roaring Chatterbox Falls plummeting from hundreds of feet up the mountain into the water. After kayaking ashore, then hiking up the waterfall, we were even more impressed.

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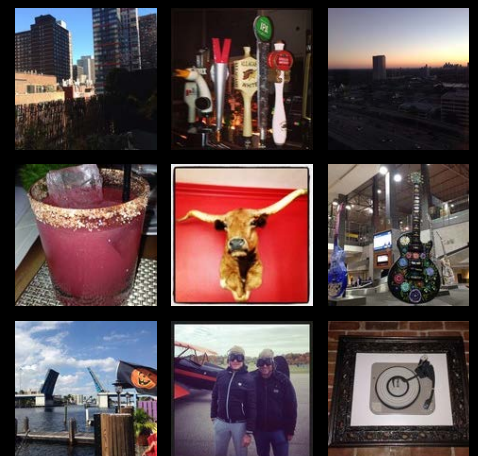
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Photo: Tom Ross

Our cozy stateroom on the lower deck was compact yet surprisingly comfortable and designed for maximum organization. The sun lounge on the top deck became the most popular spot, the perfect place to enjoy the warmth of early spring. The kayaks were neatly stored there along with the skiff, used for excursions to view local scenery and wildlife, and there was also a roomy hot tub. The salon was the gathering place in the evening where everyone congregated at the open bar to discuss the day's adventures.



Photo: Tom Ross

My husband quickly became enamored with the bridge. With a true open bridge policy, the Safari Quest even had a bench for passengers to sit and relax and the captain was always welcoming, explaining everything from the itinerary to the wildlife we'd be seeing. And after a long day of activities we'd all gather for another incomparable dinner in the dining room. Both the chef and pastry chef did a wonderful job with the meals and we enjoyed them all immensely. In fact, let me just say that you'll never go hungry on this ship; in addition to the three full meals, there were delicious appetizers every night before dinner and when we returned from one of our outings, there was always something that had been prepared for nibbling.



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Photo: Tom Ross

The waters surrounding the islands of British Columbia are quiet and it's one of the first things you notice, before the lush growth of dark green evergreens, the granite slopes scoured by ancient glaciers and the snow topped mountains and waterfalls. It's practically a boater's paradise with clear and clean water for swimming, snorkeling, kayaking and fishing. As we approached the Skookumchuch Rapids which line the entrance of the channel leading to the beautiful Jervis Inlet, the yacht paused long enough to drop a skiff for those in the group who wanted to brave them. In a few moments the hardier among us were riding the rapids and shouting with excitement as our kayaks threatened to capsize. The soaring surrounding mountains loomed above us, seemingly watching us as they had watched the Sechelt First Nations people riding these same rapids hundreds of years before.



Photo: Tom Ross

Then we glided into the inlet where the water turned dark green and as smooth as silk, so much so that the reflections of the mountains around us were perfectly mirrored. We floated by harbor seals and river otters, some poking their heads up to gaze inquisitively, unafraid and unabashedly lazy lounging in the warm sun. As we neared the end of the channel and anchored in tranquil Jervis Inlet, a bald eagle soared above us in the cloudless sky, checking out the new intruders in his domain.

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
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Photo: Tom Ross

Our resident marine biologist then leaned precariously out of the skiff and plucked a huge, purple starfish from an outcropping of stone lining the pristine inlet, just one from the huge amount clustered everywhere under and above the water. She held it up for all of us to see and again we marveled at the unique experience we were having. Our lazy sojourn came to an end when we headed out of the inlet and into the Strait of Georgia, spotting a colony of sea lions on a rocky outcropping along the way.



Photo: Tom Ross

A few minutes later we spied three black and white Orcas in the distance, silhouetted against the snow tipped mountains, and drawing closer we noticed a lone sea lion with them. For the next 30 minutes the Orcas circled him, driving him back to the middle when he tried to escape and even brushing up against him as they cavorted. All of us were equally horrified and mesmerized by the spectacle. Finally, there was a huge splash as the largest of them came down on top of the poor sea lion, bore him underwater, and then appeared once more with the dead animal in his jaws. Then they swam fast away disappearing and leaving us stunned by their awesome power.



Photo: Tom Ross

Our cruise with Un-Cruise Adventures was the perfect way to partake of incomparable wildlife experiences in a stunning and completely unspoiled destination ... and trust me; we never missed the water slide.

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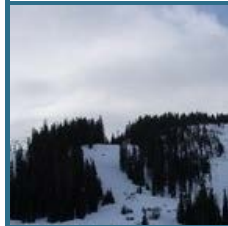
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