British Columbia: Choose Your Own Adventure in Canada's Crown Jewel

Indisputably one of the most beautiful areas on the planet, British Columbia is the one place you won't mind getting lost in.

The beauty of British Columbia certainly needs no introduction, nor do travelers need much convincing to cross through its borders. Between the snowy peaks of the Rocky Mountains and the lapping waves of the Pacific Ocean there are a dizzying number of natural wonders to explore. In fact, no two people are likely to have identical "must-see" lists, though virtually everyone who has spent time in the province will have a personal favorite hideaway to recommend. That said, here's a list of some of the gems – both hidden and in plain sight – that should put British Columbia at the top of your travel plans.

The small, quirky town of Nelson is a flourishing home of the arts. Named one of the top 100 small arts communities in the world, you could spend hours here just poking into galleries and specialty shops. This is where you'll find those one-of-a-kind pieces that will have friends asking, "Where did you find *that*?" The city has also been called "Queen City" for its many restored historic buildings, most of which are open for touring.

If you find yourself nearby, a stop in Kimberley is a must. See the world's biggest cuckoo clock, snack on Bavarian treats, shop the boutiques, hit the slopes or hang on for dear life as you embark on a white-knuckle river rafting excursion.

The Okanagan Valley just might have the most "beautiful" per square kilometer of anywhere in the world. Here, Penticton is our destination of choice. Challenge yourself to take on the granite ledges and handholds of Shaka Bluffs for a world-class rock climbing experience. The Kettle Valley Railway Trail is tops in the region for hiking, with scenic paths that suit all ages and fitness levels. If relaxation is in order, the sandy beaches on the city's north and south ends offer ample opportunity to cast a line or just kick back and enjoy the inevitable sunshine.

Turn up the heat with a stop in Osoyoos, a charming town in the heart of Desert Wine Country. Hidden out of reach from winter's icy fingers, the desert ecology here promises mild December days and hot summer nights. Savor your chance to tip back a glass of local red, swing the day away at a nearby golf course or go for a swim in Osoyoos Lake, the warmest lake in Canada. For a sight that will have you raising an eyebrow and reaching for the camera, take a short hike to the curious formations at Spotted Lake.

Further adventure awaits you on Vancouver Island. Some of the Province's most eclectic communities and best RV parks are found here. Take the opportunity to explore Nanaimo, with its roaring coastlines and sprawling beaches. Nearby, Petroglyph Park offers the chance to see 1,000 year old cave paintings. You might also be surprised to learn that this is a scuba diving hotspot. The sleepy surf town of Tofino is a welcome escape from the ordinary where you can hang ten on a surf board, stroll the eye-popping Long Beach or – if you're lucky – enjoy some of the greatest storm watching anywhere in the world.

Alive with history, natural beauty and aboriginal culture is Haida Gwaii, the crown jewel of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Charter a whale watching boat or reel in a winner in the bountiful waters of Langara Island. There's no better place to purchase aboriginal art or hear passionate retellings of their proud history.

Learn the meaning of seclusion in the Province's most north-westerly town, Atlin. The road here is long, but jaw-dropping roadside views, pastel-painted houses and warm welcomes are all fitting rewards for those who make the journey. Atlin Lake is the province's largest, with fantastic fishing and boating. A chartered flight over the icefields is once in a lifetime experience – and don't miss the chance to snap a photo of Bear Glacier.

Despite its enormity, the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area, the largest protected wilderness area south of the 60th parallel, remains one of the country's best kept secrets. This is in part due to its location north of Fort St. John on the Alaska Highway. Teeming with wildlife and bursting with biodiversity, this is the very picture of pristine. Dubbed the "Serengeti of the North", the rafting, hiking, kayaking and camping here will be an experience you won't ever forget.

Of course, navigating your RV through BC can be a challenge, particularly the winding passageways through the mountains. The variety in climate means being prepared for all conditions and caution in the winter months is tantamount. Heading north is a commitment given the distance you'll need to cover – but the raw beauty and rich experiences you'll find when you arrive will never disappoint.

All of this is only the beginning. We've said nothing of booming Vancouver and its harbor sunsets, Granville Island's eateries, Fraser Canyon's vistas or the bustling ski-community in Whistler. But perhaps this is what makes a trip to BC so worthwhile: the opportunity for discovery and adventure at every turn. With a natural landscape that is envied the world over, the best way to learn what British Columbia has to offer is to point your RV in westward, take a deep breath and prepare to be surprised.