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TRAVEL & LIFE

Fall Getaways

Inside

Farm-Fresh Harvests

Scenic Fall Drives + *Forgotten Ghost Towns*

**MUST-SEE
British Columbia
DESTINATIONS**

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NWTRAVELMAG.COM

A UNIQUE SEA-CATION IN B.C.'S INSIDE PASSAGE

BY NANCY MUELLER



© J.F. Bergeron/ Destination BC

***If your idea of paradise rests at
the nexus of wildlife and wonder,
welcome aboard the MV Aurora
Explorer,***

a working freight vessel cruising British Columbia's Inside Passage. Owned by Marine Link Tours in Campbell River on the east side of Vancouver Island, the 135-foot landing craft runs remote marine channels to service isolated fishing, lodging and logging communities. On board cargo ranges from heavy equipment to fuel, building supplies, seedlings for reforestation and groceries.

From April to October up to 12 lucky guests can cruise with the six-person crew on one of two main routes out of Menzies Bay: Discovery Passage with possible tours to Loughborough and Knight Inlets, or in our case, further north to the Broughton Archipelago, a group of undeveloped islands, islets and fjords at the southeast edge of Queen Charlotte Strait.

That's the plan at least for our five-night, six-day, slice-of-heaven adventure with 10 to 14 freight stops scheduled along the way.

"Historically, that's not a lot," says seasoned Captain Philippe Menetrier, after our safety briefing in the passenger lounge, though noting, "Our stops can change with a phone call, and our course is always wind and tide driven."

As example, he cites a log loader booked at 8:00 a.m. only to be canceled at 10:00 a.m. No matter for passengers. After all, we're bound for discovery and remembrance of our interconnected home among humpbacks and Orcas, seals, sea lions, and eagles, here in nature's playland.



© Marine Link Tours

WHAT'S NEW ONBOARD MV AURORA EXPLORER

- + In 2022, passenger accommodations have been completely overhauled and expanded to enhance passenger comfort and safety. Highlights include:
- + Six new two-passenger staterooms: four "Port/Starboard" staterooms with two lower/single berths and two "Forward" staterooms, slightly larger with two lower/single berths, forward-facing. Each has its own private ensuite shower/washroom facilities.
- + Expanded space in the Dining Lounge allows for three four-person dining tables and adequate space for social distancing among 12 passengers.
- + Altered Uppermost Deck and the Bridge for increased interior access to view the vessel's navigational operations and interactions with the crew.



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As we set sail, a bob of seals weaves through gentle waves off the bow as a rainbow crests overhead. From the observation deck, spellbound passengers and crew alike search for words to describe the heart-lifting passing scenery that stops conversations mid-sentence. Our steward Jackie singles out the “different shades of blueberry” covering the cloudscape and massive granite mountains rising from shore’s edge. Fellow passenger Lou points to “candy floss pink skies” and “houses set like nests on the hillside.”



© Marine Link Tours

Everyone’s a poet when ambushed by astonishment.

WHEN YOU GO

No need for fancy dress or pretensions aboard the MV Aurora Explorer. Our staterooms are snug yet comfortable and more than accommodating of all the amenities one requires. We settle into the evening ahead, buoyed by the surrounding beauty, friendly banter volleying among new friends, and a feast for the gods prepared by our galley crew. Locally sourced Salt Spring mussels, scallops, prawns, and chicken combined in a savory saffron wine sauce present an irresistible seafood paella. A bounty of delectable chocolate desserts complete the meal, only the first of many culinary marvels to come.

- + To book your cruise, visit Marine Link Tours at marinelinktours.com.
- + For information about the Campbell River region, including transportation and lodging options, visit Campbell River Tourism at campbellriver.travel.
- + Discover more about Victoria, B.C. at tourismvictoria.com and Vancouver Island at hellobc.com/places-to-go/vancouver-island.



Good thing we'll have opportunities to stretch our legs on a few shore hiking excursions while soaking up the ambiance of old-growth forests hugging the coastline along our projected route. One such stop takes us to Yorke Island, the site of Canada's last line of defense in WWII and now an abandoned garrison that gave rise to the phrase "Going Yorkie," when military personnel here saw no action in the isolated location off the northwestern tip of Hardwicke Island. Now preserved as a B.C. park, the post overlooking Johnstone Strait provides stellar scenic views of both sea and skyline.

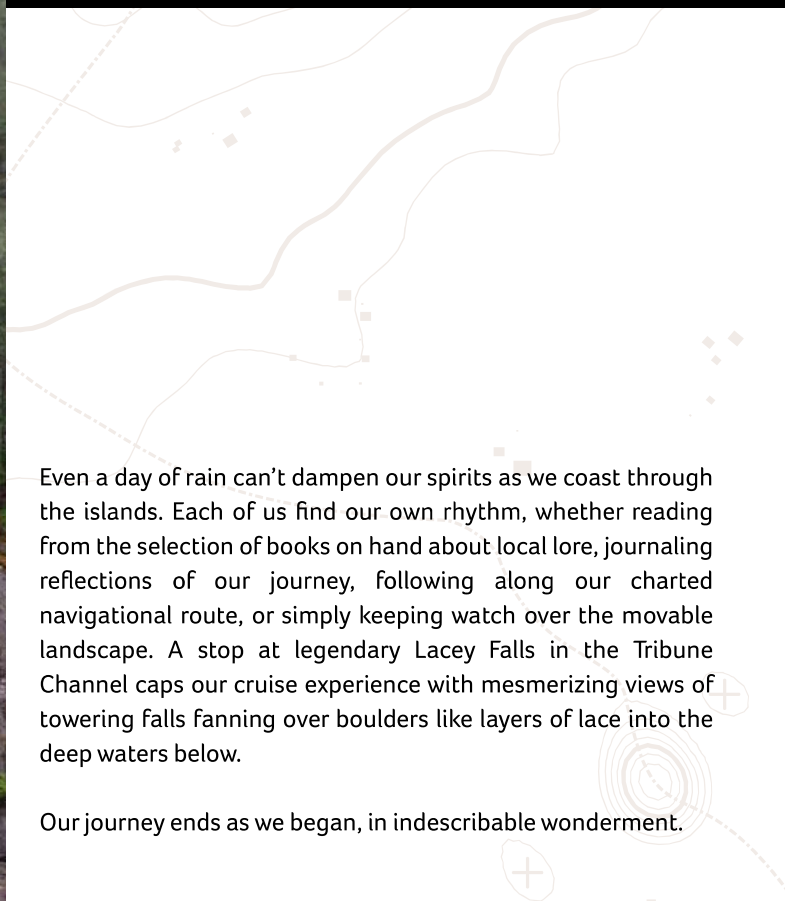


Our cruise continues at a leisurely pace between freight stops leading us onwards to Gilford Island in Simoom Sound where we're warmly greeted dockside by renown resident Billy Proctor and his dog Goldie. Billy's Museum exhibits a compendium of curiosities and cultural artifacts gathered by its namesake from decades of discovery on beach walks and sailings on his now moored Ocean Dawn. For fellow passenger Ian, meeting Billy has been a cruise highlight.

"When he described befriending a humpback at age seven, I suddenly got into the spirit of the place," Ian reflected. "For me he epitomizes that."

Back on board, passengers take turns in the wheelhouse two at a time watching freight pickups and deliveries as the crew orchestrates their fine-tuned choreography maneuvering heavy loads like bundles of lumber from the long cargo deck up a steep, muddy embankment to a watchful house dweller, then carefully backs down the slippery slope before re-positioning the forklift back on deck.





Even a day of rain can't dampen our spirits as we coast through the islands. Each of us find our own rhythm, whether reading from the selection of books on hand about local lore, journaling reflections of our journey, following along our charted navigational route, or simply keeping watch over the movable landscape. A stop at legendary Lacey Falls in the Tribune Channel caps our cruise experience with mesmerizing views of towering falls fanning over boulders like layers of lace into the deep waters below.

Our journey ends as we began, in indescribable wonderment.

"Being on the water, you feel more connected," says Michael, a fellow passenger, adding, "There's something magical . . ." before his voice drifts off across the passage as the rest of us nod in silence.



WHERE TO STAY BEFORE AND AFTER YOUR CRUISE

Painter's Lodge Resort: a popular fishing resort destination in Campbell River, B.C.

+ HISTORY

Boat builder E.P. Painter developed the resort in the 1920s, beginning with a few permanent tent structures and cabins. The original lodge was built in 1940 and rebuilt after a fire in 1985. The destination became a popular fishing destination among celebrities like John Wayne, Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and Susan Hayward.

+ LODGING

Suites, lofts, cabins and a gatehouse for up to six guests, offering garden, ocean or woodland views.

+ DINING

Legends Dining Room, Tyee Pub and Fireside Lounge.

+ ONSITE ACTIVITIES

Watersports, tennis, bocce, pool & fitness center, board games.

For more information, visit painterslodge.com.