

Duncan and Maple Bay

Travelling deep into the Warm Land

THIS SUMMER THE CITY of Duncan, BC, known as the "City of Totems", hosted a special ceremony. On August 3, a cheering crowd of nearly 20,000 people lined Canada Avenue in downtown Duncan to welcome athletes from

Canada and the U.S. for the opening ceremonies of the week-long 2008 North American Indigenous

Games. A procession of drummers, spiritual leaders and more than 4,500 young aboriginal athletes headed down the town's main street toward the Si'em Le'lum Field where the ceremony was held.

The Cowichan tribe hosted the games, the first time the athletic event has been hosted by a tribe not a city. The ceremony concluded with the raising of the Cowichan Spirit Pole. Signifying the strength and unification of the province and etched with carvings of a frog, a salmon, a wolf and an eagle, the pole had travelled across the province for three months with carver Carey Newman, and was carved by more than 10,000 British Columbians. It will remain in Duncan as a lasting legacy of the games.

Once a mere whistle-stop at William Duncan's farm in the 1880s, the city of Duncan is now the civic centre of the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island. Located just off the Trans Canada Highway, about halfway

*One of the many totems in Duncan's downtown square
(Belinda Bruce)*

between Victoria and Nanaimo, Duncan is the traditional home of the Coast Salish Indians. In 1985 the city transformed into a vibrant reflection of its heritage with 80 hand-carved totems by Native artisans on display in parks and downtown streets. Visitors can easily see 41 of these totems by following the yellow footprints through town on a self-guided tour.

Duncan is renowned for another massive landmark: the *World's Largest Hockey Stick & Puck*. Created for Expo 86, the stick was built from wooden beams reinforced with steel, measuring 205 feet and weighing 61,000 pounds (28,118 kgs). This stupendous artifact is on display at the Cowichan Community Centre.

More than just a place of towering monuments, this quaint town of 5,000 is filled with heritage and vintage buildings, charming 'art' alleys and a wide array of boutiques, curio shops, funky cafés and restaurants. From March to October the lovely City Square hosts 'Market in the Square', a cornucopia of vendors, artisans, entertainers and alternative health practitioners.



*The pretty heritage City Hall anchors Duncan's downtown core
(Phil Ives)*

A visit to the excellent *Quw'utsun' Cultural and Conference Centre* is a must; here you'll find First Nations exhibits, traditional foods, storytelling and Cowichan artists and elders at work. For another dose of history drop into the *Cowichan Valley Museum*. Housed inside a 1912 train station in downtown Duncan, the museum features pioneer artifacts, displays and photographs. And explore the history of BC's forest industry through indoor and outdoor exhibits at the *BC Forest Discovery Centre*. See vintage logging trucks and the first pre-fabricated schoolhouses, board the steam locomotive and ride a trestle out over Somenos Lake.



World's Largest Hockey Stick, Duncan

Photo: Mauro Azzura

Things heat up in the summer in Duncan. Watch the creation of the famous Cowichan sweaters as they are hand-knit in one piece. Learn about the history and fascinating legends of the Northwest Coast people on a free guided tour provided by the Cowichan Valley Volunteer Society.

As the centre of the Cowichan Valley or "Warm Land", Duncan and its environs are blessed with a mild year-round climate ripe for growing a host of grape varietals. No surprise that there are several award-winning wineries in the Valley, many of which offer tours and tastings. The mild temperatures also make this part of the Island a great golf destination. Duncan is a stone's throw from several stellar golf courses including the Cowichan Golf and Country Club, Duncan Meadows Golf and Country Club, and Arbutus Ridge Golf and Country Club in nearby Cobble Hill.

Nature lovers will love *Cowichan River Provincial Park*, a 750-hectare area stretching almost 20 kilometres, from the village of Lake Cowichan to Glenora, just south of Duncan.

Maple Bay has a thriving marine culture
(Phil Ives)



The surrounding area also provides plenty of opportunities for sea kayaking, hiking, swimming, tubing and cycling. Birders will love Somenos Marsh on Duncan's north edge, a nature sanctuary and crucial winter habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds and songbirds.

The year-round fresh-water fishing is legendary along the 30-kilometre stretch of nearby Cowichan River, loaded with large Brown trout and resident rainbows and

cutthroats. In the fall, anglers thrill at the enormous salmon runs of Chinook, Coho and Chum combined with winter Steelhead.


Maple Bay

Located just a 10-minute drive from Duncan, halfway up the narrow inlet of Sansum Narrows, is the seaside community of Maple Bay. Ringed by smooth, pebbled beaches and boasting one the finest natural harbours on

the West Coast, Maple Bay is a hub for marine activity all year round.

Sailing, kayaking, canoeing, swimming and scuba diving are key activities in this charming village. The Maple Bay Yacht Club and Maple Bay Marina, both located in protected Bird's Eye Cove, offer excellent facilities for boat owners and enthusiasts as well as a restaurant, chandlery and pub open to the public. In May, classic wooden boats are on display at Maple Bay's annual Wooden Boat Festival, and July brings fans of Chris Craft vessels to the Chris Craft Rendezvous. Year-round fishing for salmon, sea bass and cod is available at nearby Quamichan Lake.

Home to a Greg Norman-designed championship 18-hole golf course and soon-to-be-completed master-planned community, The Cliffs Over Maple Bay provides a great set of links and stunning views over the town.

As a gateway to the surrounding communities including Duncan and Salt Spring Island, Maple Bay is a popular commuter spot, complete with a floatplane terminal for easy access to and from the Lower Mainland. —Belinda Bruce 

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