

Qualicum: Where the Dog Salmon Run

by Ron Kirstein, Edited by Lisa Cole

Dog Salmon! Hard to imagine what it might look like. Four-legged fish with floppy ears running up and down the beach! I don't think so.

The Coast Salish (First Nation people) on Vancouver Island called Chum or Keta Salmon, Dog Salmon. Chum salmon develop a very hooked jaw with fierce teeth at spawning time. Perhaps that is why they were called Dog Salmon. Chum, on average, weigh eight to ten pounds and measure about 40 inches in length. Their ocean coloration of silvery blue green changes at spawning time to splotchy purplish red and with distinct yellow and pink vertical bars on their sides. They are one ugly fish!

When we arrive at Qualicum Beach (which means, "where the dog salmon run"), the last image that comes to mind is Dog Salmon. Qualicum Beach is a quaint village in the middle of absolute paradise. Everything is beautiful from the endless expansive sandy and pebble beaches to the beautiful snow-capped mountains that provide a backdrop to the area. The town has worked hard preserving its heritage which is obvious walking through the downtown area. A heritage style design is predominant, providing a friendly village atmosphere. Everywhere we go from the spectacular heritage designed Quality Foods grocery store to the funky Smithford's, we meet very friendly people.



Play on the big beaches at Qualicum Beach
Photo by Ron Kirstein

Everywhere you go in Qualicum you see immaculate gardens, so we decided to check out some of the attractions. Milner Gardens and Woodlands is a rare property perched on the shores of the Strait of Georgia. It has a 10 acre garden complete with a character home that is used primarily as a tea-house. The garden is surrounded by 60 additional acres of Coastal Douglas fir. Malaspina-University College acquired the site from Veronica Milner in 1996. Veronica's mother was a cousin of Winston Churchill. Much of the Royal family has visited or stayed at the gardens.



The town hall in Qualicum Beach
Photo by Ron Kirstein

Finding a place to stay is not difficult. The area has an abundance of accommodations from bed and breakfasts to motels and resorts. We chose the Seaview Beach Resort because we are having a family get-together. The quaint cottages range from 1-3 bedrooms and come fully equipped. When we walk out our door, within seconds, we are right on the beach. The Seaview is well off the road and sits among modern residential properties. It is very quiet and peaceful. Across the road we discover a large Federal Wild Life Sanctuary. As we walk down the beach and the roadway we are drooling over incredible new oceanfront homes. My wife is scoping out the fire pit where she will roast her marsh mellows just as soon as the sun goes down.



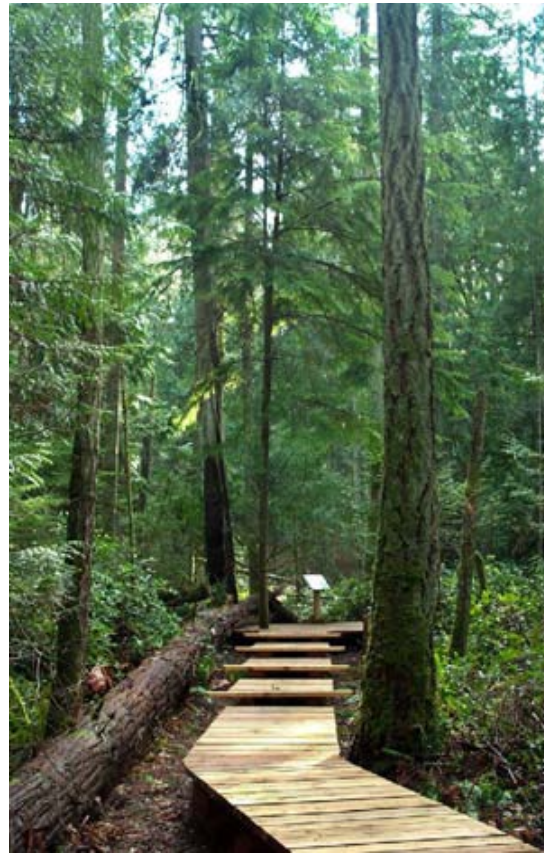
Tea Room at Milner Gardens in Qualicum Beach
Photo courtesy of Milner Gardens

From the tea-room and gardens you can enjoy super-natural views of Georgia Strait and the Coastal Mountains on the Mainland. The Gardens and Woodland is operated by a non-profit horticultural society with a mission to maintain and restore the gardens and buildings. Volunteers and students carry out much of the maintenance of the gardens under the supervision of horticulture staff. I recommend these gardens and walks through the woodlands.



One of the beautiful homes along the sea shore
Photo by Ron Kirstein

Now we are settled in to our cabin by the sea. Besides the obvious, we check around to see what we can do while we are in paradise. Locals inform us that you can beach walk almost continuously for about 50Km (30 miles) along the coast line with the exception of interruptions by two rivers, the Englishman and French Creek. When the tide goes out, it feels like we can walk half-way to the mainland.



Board Walk at Milner Gardens in Qualicum Beach
Photo courtesy of Milner Gardens

Looking for a tourist trap? Well, the best little tourist trap in BC is the Old Country Market in Coombs. Just a few kilometers out of Qualicum you will find a country market with goats living on the roof. This eclectic market has something for everyone. My favourite is the ice cream bar. It is no ordinary ice cream bar. It is about 40 feet long and offers many choices of ice cream, sorbet and gelato. A single cone cost me just \$3.00 and I swear that it had a pound of ice cream in it. After eating the mound on top, I gobbled ice cream to the very bottom of the waffle cone. I consider myself an ice cream aficionado and I have never seen a place so generous. This is a shop till you drop market with vegetables, meats, food specialties, clothes, toys, unique gifts and a whole lot more. It also has a very fine restaurant which seems to efficiently serve a never-ending line-up. It has my vote for the best little tourist trap in the

world!



Coombs Country Market - goat are in the little hut on the roof.
Photo by Ron Kirstein

The area boasts some of the best of BC Provincial Parks. If you like to camp, hike, explore the beach or visit spectacular waterfalls you should check out Rath Trevor Beach Provincial Park, Englishman River Falls Provincial Park, Little Qualicum Falls Provincial Park and Cathedral Grove Provincial Park. Other attractions can be found throughout the area by checking the web at <http://tourismmall.victoria.bc.ca/aavanisle/pgattract.htm>

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