

Village delights and pristine pleasures

Harrison Hot Springs

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Harrison's historic hotel and dock.

Harrison Hot Springs attracts regular returns. A handsome wooden sasquatch welcomes visitors, where many like us stop for photographs. As this First Nations spirit-being is now a popular icon, similar ape-like fellows adorn this attractive village.

Bigfoot tracks emboss pavement tiles linking its public spa, many hotels, shops with sasquatch dolls or chocolates – and terrific restaurants. The spa resort’s Copper Room provides nightly haute cuisine, lively bands and an inviting dance floor. Two blocks away, Morgan’s Bistro offers another scrumptious possibility. And further along the waterfront, Muddy Waters serves delish casual meals. This tasty food is typically created from using fresh local farm products.

Enticing trails loop around the town’s sandy-beached lagoon, parallel its serpentine Miami River, and enter surrounding forests. A bridge links Bridle Trail to our favourite, the Spirit Trail. Winding through red cedars here, terracotta masks look down on us from their lofty trunks. Some faces express surprise, some grin, several meditate. All enhance the sense of sylvan spirits.

Another trail heads to the celebrated source of the geothermal waters. Here, a plaque recounts how Coast Salish utilized the lake’s soothing therapeutic waters and how in 1858, a party of capsized miners discovered its surprising warmth. Their report spurred this destination’s immediate popularity. Nearby, modern wings flank the spa resort’s historic red-brick core. Inside, hallway photos show guests arriving in early motor vehicles and enjoying good times in the hot pools.

The resort dock supplies further adventures. One morning, a six-passenger Harrison Eco Tours boat takes us up the nearby Harrison River. Darting between two mountains, we soon arrive at Chehalis Flats, teeming with wildlife and renowned for salmon. Captain Jim points out bald eagles perched on pilings once used for log sorting. These majestic birds also settle atop surrounding alders and cedars. Two seals swim curiously by, and dive. More fish fanciers appear: elegant western grebes, gulls, hovering ospreys, rusty tufted common mergansers, mallards and blue herons. And meat-loving turkey vultures peck at a seal carcass lying on a sandbar. After witnessing the clear blue Harrison merge into the muddy Fraser, we return.

That afternoon, a 62-foot cabin cruiser carries us northward. While passengers enjoy lakeside panoramas, the crew grills burgers on the sundeck’s barbecue. The chicken burgers prove yummy! Off Echo Island’s steep cliffs, guide Sterling tells of escaped convicts who once hid here. Passing around a local rock studded with black clamshells, he explains, “These fossils suggest this area was an ancient seabed pushed up by tectonic forces. Ice-age glaciers eventually carved out this 60-kilometre long lake.” He also tells us a paddle wheeler once carried miners to this lake’s end.

“Disembarking at thriving Port Douglas, they trekked onward to the Cariboo gold fields. Shoreline Tours provides day trips to this famed ghost-town.”

Motoring up a long inlet, we sight Rainbow Falls. “Another tour features walks to the look-out point,” Sterling notes. “There, you can fully appreciate the spectacular 140-metre plunge.”

Next morning in nearby Sasquatch Provincial Park, we begin a walk around Hicks Lake starting at the day-use parking lot. A narrow path leads us to a serene forestry road. Our walk continues high above the lake’s eastern shoreline. Woodsy aromas perfume the air. At the southern end’s white sand beach, we snack and gaze upon fall colours mirrored in the water. Our return skirts the lake over hilly, forested terrain, across a dozen rickety wooden bridges and along two other pleasant beaches. A spruce grouse sighting concludes this six-kilometre lakeside hike.

Healthful walks, delicious local cuisine, splendiferous voyages and spa rejuvenations create a spectacular three-day getaway. And Harrison Hot Springs lies less than two hours from Vancouver.

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