

# Gulf Island becomes golf island

## Vancouver Island is morphing into golf Mecca

Jack Branswell , [canada.com](http://canada.com)

When Canadians think of golf destinations, their minds have wandered to Prince Edward Island, Banff, Whistler, the Muskokas or even the Carolinas, Florida and Arizona - for the snowbirds. Surprisingly, Vancouver Island has been left off the map.

Consider that map redrawn with the advent of the Vancouver Island golf trail and a golf boom on the island.

When Bear Mountain, one of the jewels in the island golf crown, opened in 2003 it was the first new course on the island in 12 years. Now a second course is slated to open in 2008 at Bear Mountain, just outside of Victoria, and two other premium courses are also in the works for the next two years - the Cliffs Over Maple Bay, a Craig Norman course and Centre Mountain, a Robert Trent Jones design.



Courtesy Bear Mountain Golf and Country Club

**here are some spectacular views from Bear Mountain, so long as the sun is shining. The 14th green is one of those places to crane your neck a little after you sink your putt.**

What happened? Well, Bear Mountain happened.

The Jack and Steve Nicklaus designed course, literally changed the island golf landscape. "Bear Mountain has really created a lot of interest in the region," said Jim Lee, the president of the Canadian Golf Tourism Alliance.

"People have always thought of this as an area where you can play golf year round," but the addition of the top-name designers (Nicklaus, father and son) "has provided an additional reason for people to bring their clubs."

Bear Mountain is sculpted out of the mountain ridges around Victoria and it's owned by a group of NHLers, former and present, including Len Barrie, Mike Vernon, Rob Niedermayer, Joe Nieuwendyk and Rob Blake, to name a few. The course has the posh Bear Mountain Resort Hotel on it and a whole swanky community is developing around it - they may be more backhoes here than birdies.

Jason Lowe, the president of Golf Vancouver Island, an umbrella group of golf and travel partners promoting the island as a golf destination, says the year-round play and the quality as well as variety of courses is really hitting home with golfers.

"If people want to stretch their vacation dollar and if they don't mind putting on a couple of layers of clothes (for winter play)," then the island is a tempting choice for golfers. With a new float-plane service from Whistler to Victoria, people can even golf and ski in the same day at world-class venues.

"You have the mountains, the ocean ... Vancouver Island is such a hot-spot place that people are really discovering it," said Lowe, who is also the regional sales manager for Olympic View and Arbutus Ridge, two courses that are part of the Golf B.C. family. The area is pulling in visiting golfers from Seattle, Alberta and even Toronto.

Lee also says the island can lay claim to being a true golf trail. "It has a beginning and an end and you can fly into or out of either one (Victoria or Comox)," he added.

The trail is made up of 11 high-end courses that start in Victoria and go up to Campbell River, all of which can be covered in three hours of driving - the kind you do in a car, not on the course.

The Cliffs Over Maple Bay and Centre Mountain will most certainly be added to the trail when they are ready and there are rumours that another Nicklaus course will be built in Ucluetet, on the western side of the island.

Currently, there are 50 courses on the island spread out in many different terrains and with some spectacular views of the Olympic mountain range and Mount Baker in Washington State.

Among the must plays are [Bear Mountain](#), [Olympic View](#) (both in the Victoria area) Storey Creek (Campbell River), Morningstar International Golf course, and Fairwinds Golf Club both near Parksville.

Depending on where you are used to playing, Vancouver Island golf is fairly priced for the quality and there are lots of bargains to be had, if you are flexible on when you play. Bear Mountain's green fees for example range from \$130 to \$75 in low season (November to mid April), but even in the summer twilight rates are \$85.

At Olympic View, which is really good value for the money, rates are \$75 to \$35 (January to mid March and Oct. 30 to the end of December).

For booking a stay and play package or just a few rounds on the island, the consortium [Golf Vancouver Island](#) is a good place to price your holiday and find out what packages are available. It also has a good [golf map](#) that shows you where the courses are and links to more information, and each course's web sites, which have photo galleries and, in some cases, helicopter fly overs of the holes.

If you want to do the whole trail, figure on it taking at least 12 days. A shorter version, which still hits all the highlights can be done in six days of golf.

*Jack Branswell was a guest of Tourism Victoria.*