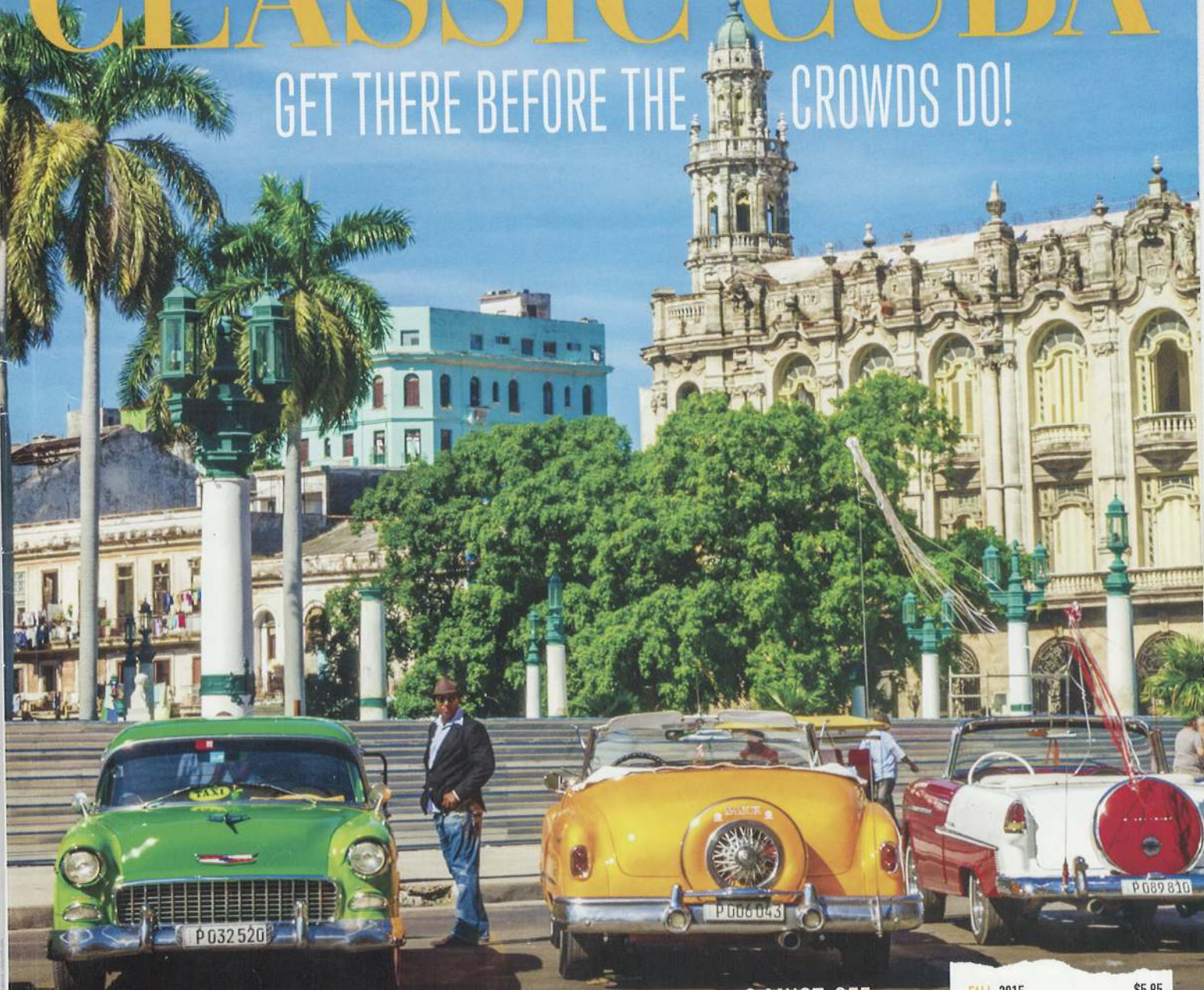


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*"We sat in the rain waiting.
Time passed and some of us
started to question our sanity...
What felt like hours passed
until finally the rain stopped
and the clouds parted...
Moments later a black bear
appeared..."*

PASSING TIME WITH **PASSING CLOUD**

Wild, rugged and remote: our writer samples an authentic and relaxing slice of the Canada's West Coast aboard the breathtaking *Passing Cloud* schooner in Barkley Sound

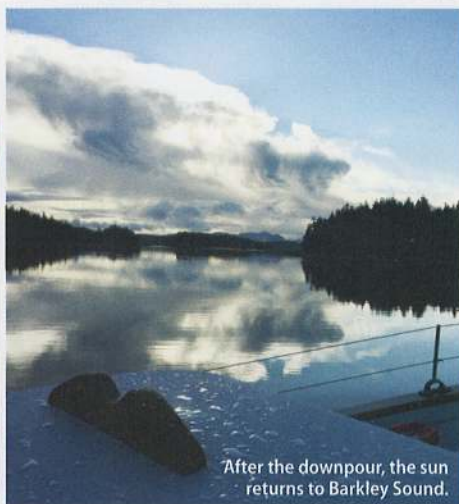
Words and Images by Samuel Burkhart



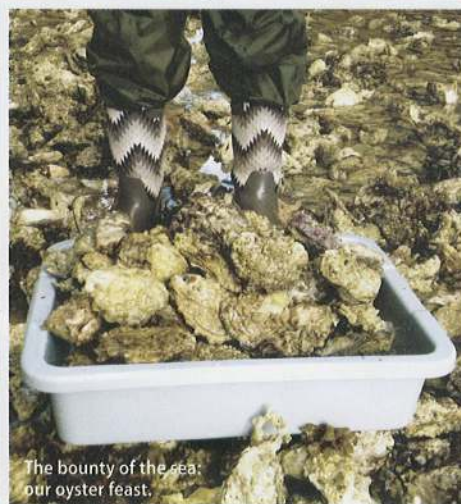
Passing Cloud at anchor at Nettle Island.



The crew prepping the day's prawn catch.



After the downpour, the sun returns to Barkley Sound.



The bounty of the sea: our oyster feast.



Barkley Sound can feel like the edge of the world.

IT'S 6:30 IN THE MORNING AND the sun is slanting through the pilothouse windows. The coffee is made.

There's a certain silence surrounding us as we sit anchored in Effingham Bay. It's the kind of silence you only find at dawn on the water. It's broken by the pattering and whistling of Joel, the first mate and biologist, as he goes about his duties at the bow of the ship: washing some leftover dishes from the night before, checking the anchor, preparing the Zodiac for the day ahead.

Devon, the cook, or should I say chef—or magician—is working too, preparing a breakfast you'd be lucky to find at any restaurant on dry land. I climb out of the aft berth into the pilothouse and sit down at the table next to Denis St Claire, the resident anthropologist and larger-than-life character. He's reading the paper and discussing the delights of Viognier and Belgian Gouda with the chef.

Devon brings me a cup of coffee. "Milk and sugar, right?" he confirms.

AT A GLANCE

PACIFIC RIM NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

The wild and wondrous Pacific Rim National Park Reserve offers a West Coast experience like no other. Steeped in Nuu-chah-nulth culture dating back thousands of years, the park is your gateway to the rugged coast of Vancouver Island. Enjoy a summer stroll along an endless sandy beach or grab your storm gear and witness the winter breakers crash onto the wild, rocky shoreline.



"Perfect." I reply, still half asleep. A sip of coffee wakes me up enough to notice Captain Russ is at his helm station going over charts and the day's sail plan. The other guests aren't awake just yet. It's rare that I am up this early, but I don't want to miss anything on this trip.

This is the morning routine aboard *Passing Cloud* as we cruise through Barkley Sound in search of tranquility. I'm here for Outer Shores' 'Pacific Rim National Park—Ancient Civilizations and West Coast Wilderness' adventure, a five-day trip aboard a classic wooden schooner through the Broken Group, an archipelago in Barkley Sound. Barkley Sound is one of many large bays on the west coast of Vancouver Island and it forms the entrance to the Alberni Inlet. It lies just south of the town of Ucluelet, which was where *Passing Cloud* was moored when my fellow passengers and I arrived.

ALL ABOARD

We had taxied from the Black Rock Oceanfront Resort to Ucluelet Harbour. Once aboard *Passing Cloud*, we were introduced to the captain and crew, shown around the boat and given a very important lesson in safety: essentially, fire is bad, man-overboard is bad and not wearing a life jacket in the Zodiac is bad. Although once aboard and in the capable hands of the crew, danger felt like it was 1,000 miles away.

Our tour of *Passing Cloud* revealed an attention to detail and level of comfort not found on even the finest yachts. We entered the cabin through the companionway that leads into the pilothouse. To the left, a hatch lead down to the aft cabin—some agility required. To the right there was the small, but fully-functioning galley. Forward through the pilothouse and down a set of stairs was the salon or living quarters.

Everyone was blown away by the varnished wood, brass and beauty of the vessel. Bookcases piled high with historical tomes and nautical reference guides lined the port side of the boat. Cushion-covered chairs made this space incredibly cozy and the dining table was perfect for gathering together over fine food or for the evening's "chart chat"—an informal recap of the day's events that was held each evening.

Just forward of the main salon were the forward staterooms. These cabins each had two spacious single berths complete with fluffy feather duvets, a private sink with mirror, a skylight, brass reading lamps and plenty of storage space for your personal items. As we settled into our own spaces, *Passing Cloud* began motoring out of Ucluelet Harbour and into Barkley Sound.

OPEN WATERS

Once in the sound, it felt as if we were in another world. We crossed an open section of water where the swells from the Pacific raised the boat up and lowered her down with a gentle rhythm that can't be experienced on a luxury cruise. Make no mistake, this cruise is luxurious—but it's also an adventure—and we were an active part of that adventure, controlling just how much of the action we wanted to take part in.

Want to help hoist or lower the sails? No problem! Want to go help drop the crab trap? No problem! Want to read your book in the salon all day? No problem!

But I do recommend joining in with the activities. Daily excursions in the Zodiac took us to sandy island beaches and rock landings where we learned about First Nations history. Denis' knowledge of the original inhabitants of the coast was matched only by his oratorical



The food aboard *Passing Cloud* is spectacular.





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authority and charm. He brought these sacred locations to life with tales.

RELAXING INTO THE ROUTINE

Each day took on a pleasant routine. We'd rise in the morning and gather together for breakfast on the aft deck. We'd eat locally-produced eggs, sausage, bacon, fried potatoes and sautéed greens, all prepared to perfection by a magician in the most basic kitchen imaginable.

The itinerary was like a rough sketch that was constantly open to revision and interpretation depending upon the weather, the desires of the guests or just the overall vibe of the day. That created a peaceful atmosphere aboard the boat, where the only commanding force was the tide.

Breakfast was followed by a short Zodiac ride to shore. We visited at least six islands on our trip, stopping to examine fascinating archaeological sites, including fish traps, middens (beaches made from discarded and broken shells) and ancient T'seshaht village sites.

Returning to the boat for lunch we'd find another feast prepared and laid out on the aft deck table. Lunches consisted of soup or chili and freshly baked bread or muffins.

Even the menu was open to revision: "Just like any good sailor, I like to respond to the conditions as I'm cooking," explained Devon.

On the second day, we set the prawn trap in the morning. We returned to the trap in the afternoon and found it loaded with 40 delicious spot prawns. I learned the ins and outs of de-heading and shelling them—not for the squeamish—and they were added to the evening's menu. One day we collected oysters for dinner and another day we gathered gooseneck barnacles, which were cooked in a white wine and garlic sauce.

RAIN WITH CAPTAIN RUSS

On the third day it rained. After two days of blissful sunshine, it was only fitting that we experienced some rain. The area receives 3,350mm of rain a year, although the majority happens during the winter months. Captain Russ handed out umbrellas and we loaded into the Zodiac in spite of the rain. With the umbrellas interlocked over our heads like a turtle's shell, we motored into an estuary at Equis on Vancouver Island, a place known for its black bears.

We sat in the rain waiting. Time passed and some of us started to question our sanity. But Russ had faith, so we settled

in and waited. What felt like hours passed, until finally the rain stopped and the clouds parted. "Now watch," he said, and moments later a black bear appeared about of the bush to forage at the river.

Only with such a relaxed schedule can these moments happen. It is part of what made this trip so special. Russ and his crew are in tune with the area and they run the boat effortlessly.

UNFOUNDED FOREBODINGS

Before the trip, I had two main concerns. The first was seasickness. No one on my trip ever felt seasick, but there were motion sickness pills on the boat. The second was privacy. I shared the aft cabin with a total stranger, but by the end of the trip we were great friends. During the day there were plenty of places to find a little solitude, whether it was in your own cabin, in the salon curled up with a book, on the aft deck or at the bow of the ship. My concerns were quickly dismissed as I was taken aback by the little luxuries aboard the ship and the kindness of the crew.

TEA AND SENTIMENTALITY

The last five days have passed quickly, but leisurely, as we charted a meandering course through the archipelago. On this final evening, I do my best to take it all in: the natural beauty, the cultural history, the camaraderie of guests and crew. It's hard not to feel sentimental.

It's 6:30 in the evening and the sun is slanting through the coach-house windows. The tea is made... ☺

GEAR GUIDE

The weather can change quickly on the West Coast so it's important to take the right gear.

Here's a list of essentials:

- *Passing Cloud* cannot accommodate suitcases, so it's best to take a soft duffel bag or backpack that can be easily stowed.
 - Waterproof rain gear, including a jacket with a hood and pants.
 - Rubber boots (can be provided by Outer Shores).
 - Warm clothing, including long underwear, wool socks and gloves.
 - Sunglasses, hat and sunscreen.
 - Swimsuit (if you're brave).
 - Beach towel.
 - Insect repellent (midges and mosquitoes can be abundant).
 - Camera with extra storage and batteries (every moment is a photo op).
 - Extra layers, including underwear.
- There are no laundry services onboard.

WHEN YOU GO

Our writer experienced the 'Pacific Rim National Park—Ancient Civilizations and West Coast Wilderness' trip with Outer Shores Expeditions, \$2,995 for six days/five nights aboard the schooner. While 2015 is fully booked up, the company is taking bookings for 2016 expeditions. For more information visit outershores.ca.

PACIFIC RIM NATIONAL PARK TRAVEL TIPS

- Getting there by plane: KD Air and Orca Airways fly twice daily from Vancouver (YVR) to Tofino-Long Beach Airport (YAZ). You can rent a car at the airport or take a taxi to Ucluelet, which is 30 kilometres away.
- Getting there by car: Driving from Vancouver is an option, but it is a long haul. Ferries run from Horseshoe Bay (40 minutes north of Vancouver) to Nanaimo. From there it is a three-hour drive across Vancouver Island to Ucluelet.
- Black Rock Oceanfront Resort

is a great pre-adventure accommodation option. Perched on the edge of the continent, this resort blends a luxurious ambience with a natural West Coast feel. Alternatively, check out the Whiskey Landing Hotel. Located right on Ucluelet Harbour, this hotel boasts a strong West Coast influence in both its design and construction. You'll be amazed by the towering ceilings and exposed cedar woodwork. The views across the harbour are pretty stunning too.

• *Passing Cloud* is a classic, 70-foot schooner designed by William James Roué, famous for designing the legendary schooner *Bluenose*. Built 1974 in Victoria, BC, *Passing Cloud* is renowned for her elegant design, exceptional accommodation, robust construction, and remarkable sailing abilities. Comfort, beauty and functionality are all second-to-none.



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