

**TRAVEL**

# Passing Cloud schooner a pearl in the ocean

SAILING from TI

"We want you to know that we know this is your holiday," says Marhel.

"If you want to spend it reading a book with a cup of tea in the salon, do that. But if you want to steer, pull on lines or wash down the deck, we're happy to help you share in that too."

Right on cue, Carr returns to the ship, carrying a wet, weighed-down garbage bag. He'd recognized a fishing boat that had just come into the dock, and rushed off to procure a couple of fresh halibut. He fillets them right there on the forward deck just as Marhel starts Passing Cloud's engine and begins to motor her southeast out of Uchelet Inlet.

In the time it takes him to stash away the new fillets into one of his many meticulously organized supply coolers, Carr has spotted seven bald eagles, a dozen sea lions and more than a hundred barking seals basking on the jagged rocks.

"This place has so much," Marhel says of the Broken Group, the hundreds of tiny islands tucked safely inside the sheltered waters of Barkley Sound, which will be our marine playground for the next five days.

"It's like the coast of California, a cold-water Great Barrier Reef, the Galapagos Islands, the Redwood forests, and Alaska all rolled into one."

The boat's daily routine kicks in pretty quickly: wake up around 8 a.m., a strong cup of coffee in the wheelhouse and a hearty cooked breakfast on the deck.

Then time to decide which beautiful island we're going to visit, before we put on our gumboots and life-preservers, pile into the Zodiac and skim across the water to our landing beach, spotting seals, sea stars and multi-colored seaweeds along the way.

Once onshore, we get to see a different side of the crew, who have just been expertly cooling gourmet meals, hoisting heavy sails and steering the ship. Shipmate Joel White, 27, spots a hawk oystercatcher disturbed by our sudden appearance on the beach.

"Let's move below the high-tide line to avoid stepping on their nest — the eggs were well camouflaged as rocks," he says.



EMMA YARDLEY PHOTOS FOR THE TORONTO STAR

The crew of Passing Cloud takes advantage of the clear skies and winds in Vancouver Island's Barkley Sound.



Passing Cloud chef Devon Carr on the hunt for gooseneck barnacles.



Prawns just pulled in from one of Passing Cloud's seafood traps. Chef Devon Carr incorporated them into his gourmet dinner.

Later, White — who studied oceanography and biology at University of Victoria — plucks a small bright-green fern growing out of the bark of a first-growth cedar tree, strips away the skin and eats from the root with his pocket knife and hands me a piece. "Ever eaten isonrice fern?"

The twin archipelagos of the Broken Group were densely populated by the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nation for millennia, thanks to the abundance of food you can forage for. "Land mammals weren't really used out here," explains archeological and ethnographic researcher De-

nis St. Claire. "It was the sea, always the sea." Back on Passing Cloud, Carr has just come back from a quick paddle on one of the ship's two glass-bottom kayaks and has found an oyster bed. I jump into the Zodiac to help him with the harvesting. Standing in my

**> GETTING THERE**

Orca Airways flies the 45-minute journey year-round from Vancouver International Airport South to the Long Beach Airport. From there, take Uchelet Taxi (250-726-4475) to Passing Cloud's mooring dock.

**> BE A SMART PACKER**

The weather changes very quickly from sunny to rainy along the west coast of Vancouver Island, so make sure you pack light wool layers, fully waterproof pants, comfortable waterproof boots, and more pairs of socks and underwear than you think you'll need. Showering every second day is encouraged on Passing Cloud to save water.

muddy gumboots, looking out to the sun sinking over the ocean with fat-sized oysters in my hands, I realize I'm not going to touch a single book or TV episode during this excursion.

The crew shares enough oysters for us all to enjoy and then returns the surplus to the same spot we got them — Outer Shores holds a gold rating from Green Tourism Canada for its conservation and preservation work.

We gather in the salon around the captain's table to taste the sea-fruits of our labour, along with some Kelp Stout from the Tofino Brewing Company.

Carr has whipped up a fresh mignonette, which I splash on my oyster before throwing it back. I bite down and hear a crack! Must be some shell. I think. I spit it out into my hand and stare down for a full 10 seconds before quietly announcing, "Hey, guys. I found a pearl."

So has Capt. Marhel... and her name is Passing Cloud.

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## Schooner voyage offers intimate look at B.C. coast

Tour of Vancouver Island goes where wind and interest take it

**EMMA YARDLEY**  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

The day before flying to Uchelet, B.C., to join Outer Shores Expeditions, I drop nearly 8000 on ebooks and episodes of *Vikings* for my iPad. After all, I figure, if I'm going to spend nearly a week on a 70-foot schooner sailing around Vancouver Island's Barkley Sound with nine complete strangers — without reliable Wi-Fi or cell reception — I would need plenty of personal entertainment.

I couldn't have been more wrong. The first clue comes when I and the five other passengers, plus three crew members — a professional chef, a marine scientist and an archaeologist — climb up the short ladder from the Uchelet Harbour boat onto the wooden deck of the magnificent double-masted Passing Cloud. "We're here on business," explains Capt. Russell Marhel, a marine biologist and the 46-year-old president of Outer Shores.

"Where we go will be determined by the weather, the tides, the wildlife we encounter," he says. "If you are looking through the binoculars and you say, 'Hey, Russ, what's that over there?'" (I) say, "I don't know. But let's get in the Zodiac and go check it out!"

Sure enough, as Marhel is briefing us about on-board safety, chef Devon Carr — who has laid out a tasty spread of fresh tapenades, crackers, cheeses and salads for us to nibble on — spots something two berries over that piques his interest.

"Be right back," Carr, 24, shoots over his shoulder as he scurries down the ladder and disappears from sight.

As Marhel finishes his safety lesson, I step into the wheelhouse and climb down the main ladder, en route to check out the fully kitted-out stateroom I'll be sharing with a fellow female passenger.

Walking into the salon is like stepping into Capt. Jack Aubrey's cabin on *HMS Surprise* — but with a really good stereo system.

Overstuffed brown leather bench seats wrap their way around the sunken, brass-accented room, bathed in sunlight streaming down through a trellis of sky-lites.