

# Passing Cloud shines light on B.C.

Outer Shores' six-passenger sailing ship explores vistas you never knew existed

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FROM  
THE  
DECK  
CHAIR

It took me a moment to realize I was hearing nothing, except for the sound of the water lapping idly at the side of my kayak.

This, after we'd hiked through the forest on Prevost Island, which was alive with the sounds of birds, distant animals and the creak of swaying trees.

Welcome to an average day on the greatest little cruise line you've never heard of. I joined B.C.-based Outer Shores Expeditions recently for a quick four-day sailing cruise around the Gulf Islands aboard the beautifully-restored 70-foot schooner *Passing Cloud*.

Founded by Russell Markel (who happens to have a PhD in marine biology from UBC), Outer Shores focuses on exploring the coast of British Columbia aboard this gorgeous six-passenger wooden sailing ship, highlighting the ancient cultures, amazing wildlife and spectacular natural beauty of the province's vast coast.

It's the second time I've sailed with Outer Shores, having spent a week aboard *Passing Cloud* in 2014 in Haida Gwaii. This quick jaunt from Sidney through the Gulf Islands impressed me just as much as that voyage did.

During the day, we'd sail as much as possible, resorting to our engine only when needed. We'd have no set schedule, leaving it up to Capt. Matt Lemay to pick our destinations.

In just four days, we were able to circumnavigate Saturna Island and call on Prevost Island and Russell Island, where some of the earliest settlers were fur traders from Hawaii. We also found time to stop in the small town of Ganges, on Salt Spring Island.

During the day, explorations were made into the wilderness. These consisted of hikes through the woods, sometimes on marked trails and many times on trails that had been carved through the forest by people long before us.

*Passing Cloud* also carries two kayaks that can be used when conditions allow, like during our time on Prevost Island.

It's hard to imagine, but the quiet solitude I kayaked through exists not far from Active Pass, which B.C. Ferries ships thunder through on their way to and from Tsawwassen and Swartz Bay.

Throughout the day, meals and snacks are provided by a roster of local chefs that hop on for a voyage or two.

On our voyage, Vancouver-based chef Graham McLennan provided us with culinary delights that surpassed most of the luxury cruises I've taken. Seriously, the food was stunning and, for the most part, relied on locally-sourced ingredients.

Complimentary red and white wine is served in the evenings and coffee, tea and water are available throughout the day.

If there is a downside to this voyage, it is that four days simply wasn't enough. It left me wanting more — as any good cruise should.

Outer Shores isn't repeating this Gulf Islands itinerary next year. Instead, they'll be operating quick fall taster cruises to Johnstone Strait and Blackfish Sound throughout October of 2017. Departing round trip from Port McNeill, these five-day, four-night cruises sail through one of the best areas of the world for viewing killer whales.

Next year, *Passing Cloud* begins her 2017 season in Pacific Rim National Park Reserve with a selection of six- and five-day itineraries that sail out of Ucluelet. Incredibly, two of the four itineraries are already sold out.

Much of the rest of *Passing Cloud*'s season is spent exploring Haida Gwaii and the Great Bear Rainforest.

On my own sailing to Haida Gwaii, I found myself entranced by the beauty of this forgotten land and humbled by the rich history of the Haida that many British Columbians — including me — simply aren't aware of.

Outer Shores would be worth writing about on its own merits, if it were any other sailing adventure. But it's the combination of entertainment and education that makes these cruises so special. Markel and his team are proud to showcase the beauty of British Columbia to the world, while seeking to preserve and educate at the same time.

Outer Shores shows you the B.C. you never knew existed.

Visit [fromthedeckchair.com](http://fromthedeckchair.com) for our day-by-day report from on board *Passing Cloud*.



Tours on *Passing Cloud* showcases the beauty of B.C. while also educating and preserving. AARON SAUNDERS