

Voyeur, National

01 Oct 2016, by Kate Armstrong Kari Medig

General News, page 86 - 4,274.00 cm²

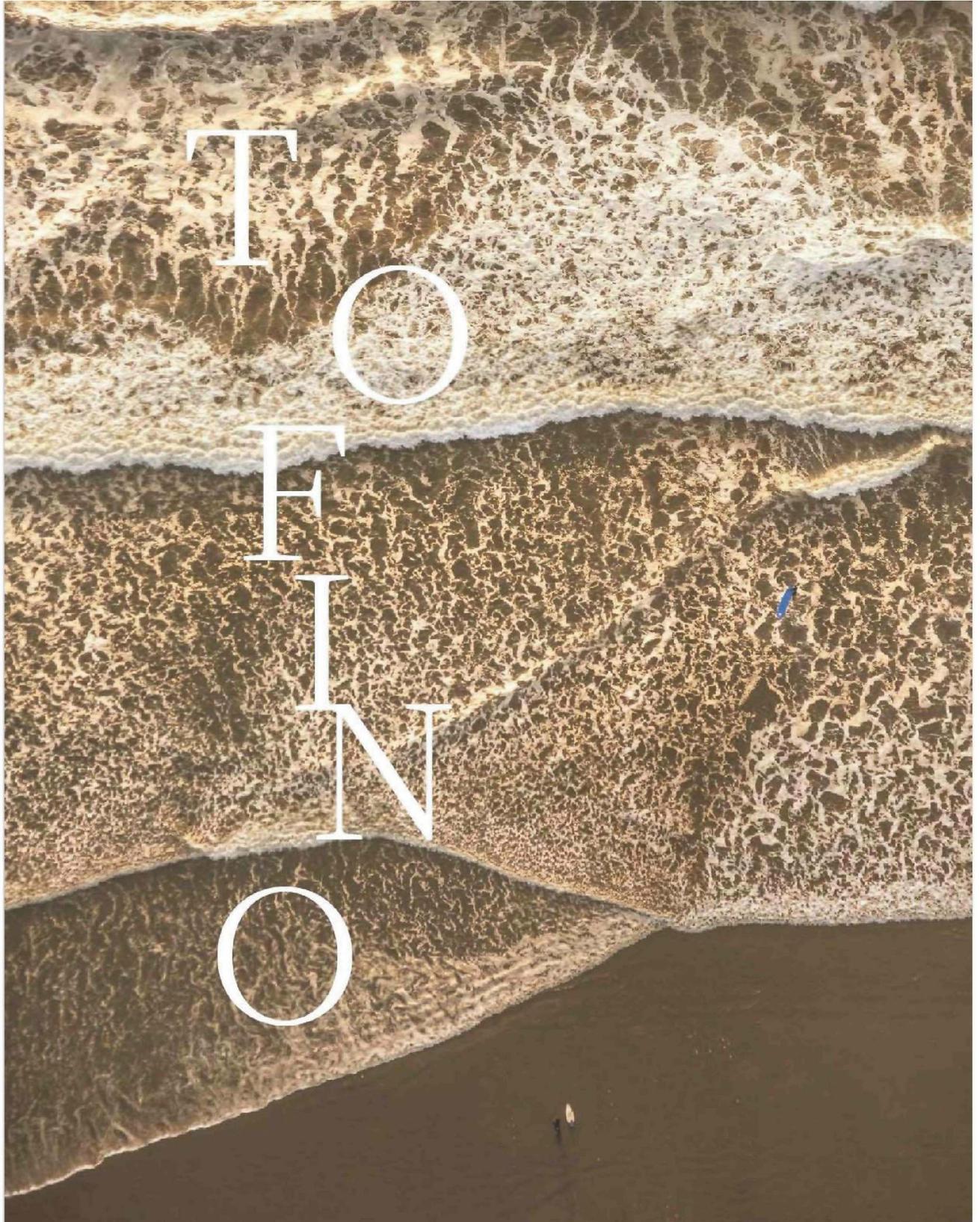
Magazines Lifestyle - circulation 79,028 (Monthly)

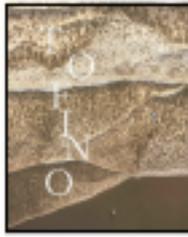
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BRIEF CANADA TOU

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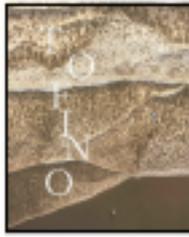
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Canada's surfing capital is a place of striking natural beauty and abundance,
where the weather is as unpredictable as the wildlife.

Words KATE ARMSTRONG Photography KARI MEDIG



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S FARAS local legends go, Vancouver Island has a good one. In the early 1900s, church authorities sent an envoy to the island's west coast with a brief: to find the most beautiful place to build their Anglican church. The chosen site for St Columba was Tofino. And it's easy to see why.

To start with, merely getting to this remote corner of British Columbia is fun. From the island's quaint capital, Victoria, you travel north to the small town of Nanaimo before veering south-west on the Pacific Rim Highway. The road winds through rainforests, via ravines and past ink-coloured lakes so shiny they resemble massive black ice-rinks. Nearly 320 kilometres later, you emerge at Tofino, on the northern tip of the Clayoquot Sound, an area classified as an UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

It's early when we arrive and the village — a compact grid of streets with shops, cafes and galleries — is deserted. From its slightly elevated height you can see boats, moored at tiny jetties, and a mist hovering above the water, parting here and there to reveal vivid green treetops on nearby island shores.

So tranquil is Tofino, it's difficult to envisage the busy summer period, when the population swells from about 2000 to more

than 20,000. It's easier to imagine the area millenia ago, when the Nuu-chah-nulth, a First Nations people, lived here.

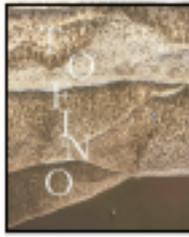
During the 1700s, European explorers established an otter fur trade, as well as an outpost called Clayoquot (opposite today's Tofino). For years, fishing was the economic mainstay, followed by the logging industry, which was responsible for the construction of a track to Tofino in 1959 (it only became a paved road in 1972).

In the 1960s surfers and hippies made use of the road access, and in 1993 the 'War in the Woods' happened, a protest against the clear-cutting of the rainforest in Clayoquot Sound, which saved Tofino from development.

These days Tofino attracts all types. There are bearded baristas, binocular-bearing birdwatchers and BMW-driving weekenders. They are drawn by the district's natural beauty, its outdoor

OPPOSITE The rainforest trail in Pacific Rim National Park. **BELOW, FROM LEFT** Tofino has plenty of fresh seafood; the city is known as Canada's surfing capital. **PREVIOUS PAGE, FROM LEFT** An aerial view of Chesterman Beach; surfer Ola Krol heading back into the water with her board.





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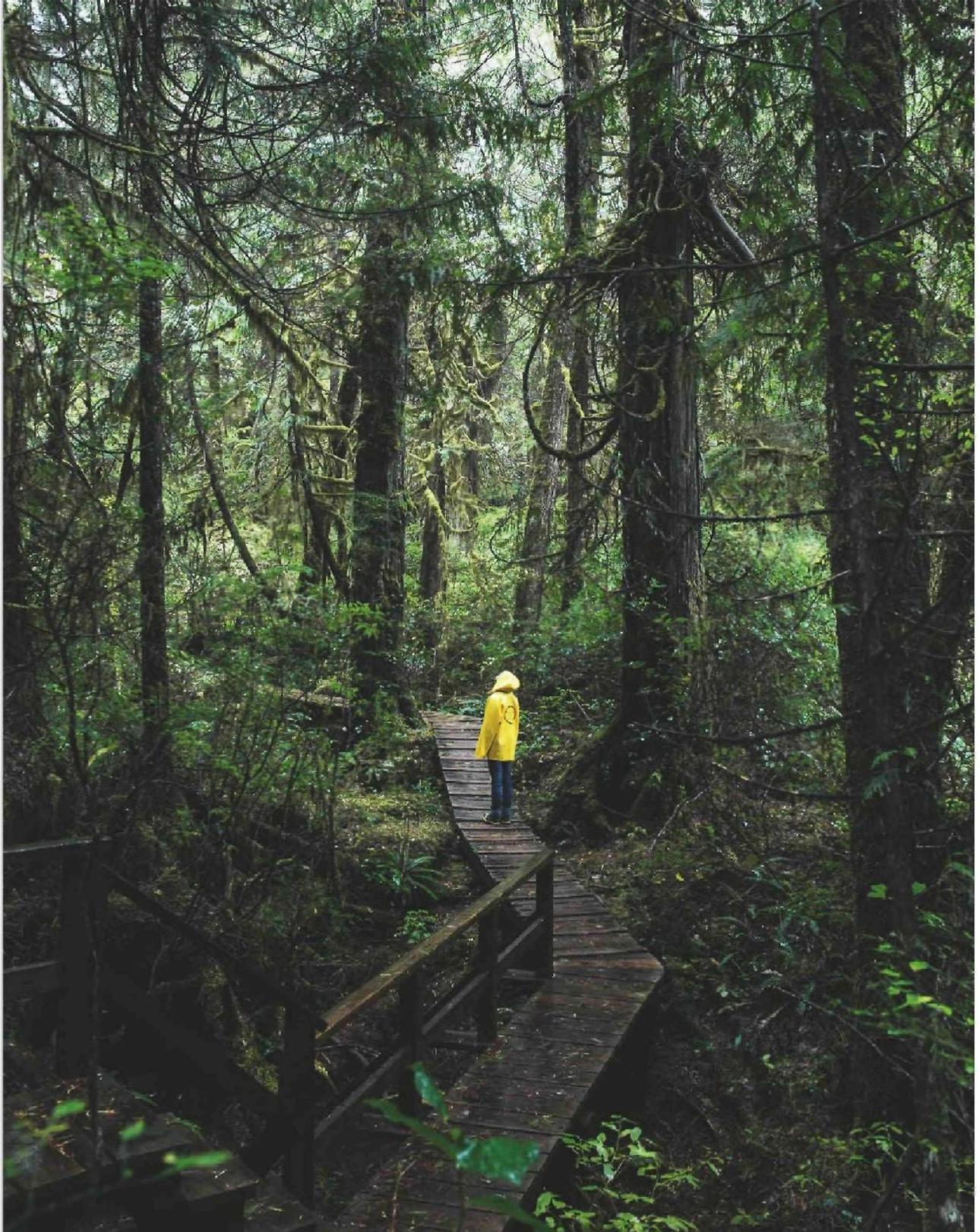
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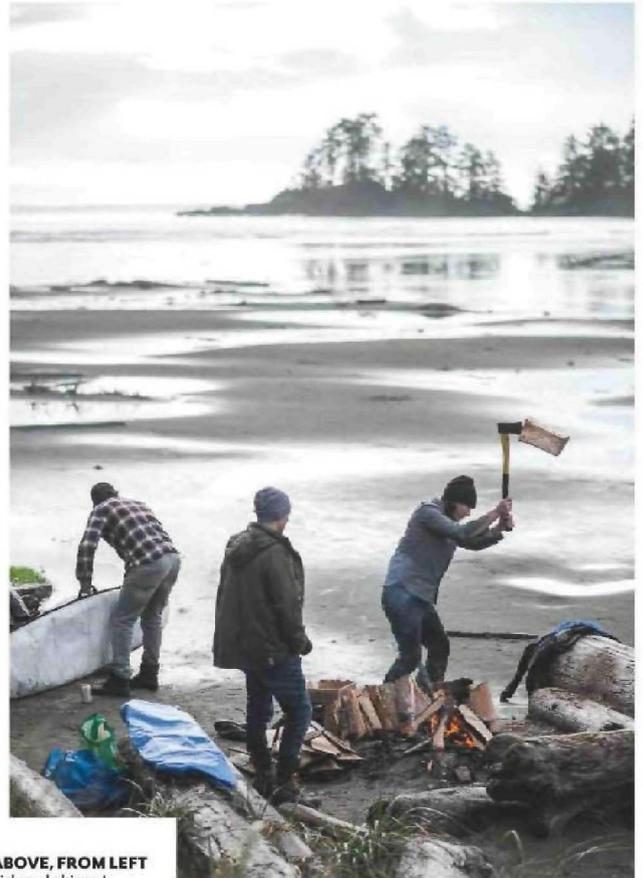
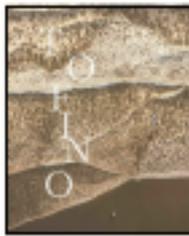
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ABOVE, FROM LEFT Fish and chips at Shelter Restaurant; preparing a fire on Chesterman Beach. **OPPOSITE Tofino** has a strong maritime history. **NEXT PAGE, FROM LEFT** Warming up on a rainy Tofino day; surfers walking along the spit between Cox Bay and Chesterman Beach.

activities and water-based fun. There is whale watching, bear-spotting, stand-up paddleboarding, and, of course, surfing. Tofino is considered Canada's surfing capital and Cox Bay, MacKenzie and Chesterman beaches offer excellent breaks.

Cox Bay Beach, home to the annual Queen of the Peak Women's Surf Championships, comprises a beautiful arc of sand that extends for 1.5 kilometres. Framing the beach is a line of windswept pines. Under these are piles of driftwood, eventually collected by creative locals who use it to make furniture.

Overlooking Cox Bay is the beautiful Long Beach Lodge Resort, an ultra-stylish beach house with 41 luxurious rooms. The Lodge's stunning ocean-facing dining room is a top spot to watch sunsets, especially in autumn.

Into the Wild

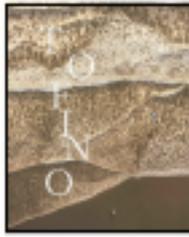
At one of Tofino's small wharves, we board a passenger boat and prepare to set out on a bear-spotting expedition. "Look out for moving rocks", our guide jokes as we depart, alluding to bears that forage at the water's edge. Given that more than 7000 black bears are estimated to inhabit Vancouver Island, we figure we are in with a good chance. (The island also boasts the highest density of cougars in the world and plenty of wolves). Not long after, two black bears, a mother and her baby, lumber along a semi-submerged log.

Back on dry land, we take a walking tour with eco-tour guide, Josh Lewis. He leads us through rainforest behind Long Beach Lodge. It's one of many trails in Tofino, but this section is special: it has old-growth forest, among the oldest forest ecosystems in Canada. Massive trees — western red cedar, western hemlock and sitka spruce — tower above us.

We emerge at a clearing and see a bald eagle soaring overhead. This isn't surprising, as the island is a bird paradise, attracting a number of migratory shore birds. Further along the trail, yellow-green lichen, known as 'old man's beard', hangs down off the trees. "Its presence indicates how clean the air is," says Lewis.

Tofino to Table

Throughout the rainforest, delicate orange and white fungi grow in a damp, spongy carpet of bark and leaves. So bountiful is this region that the native Nuu-chah-nulth people thrived living off the land. ➔



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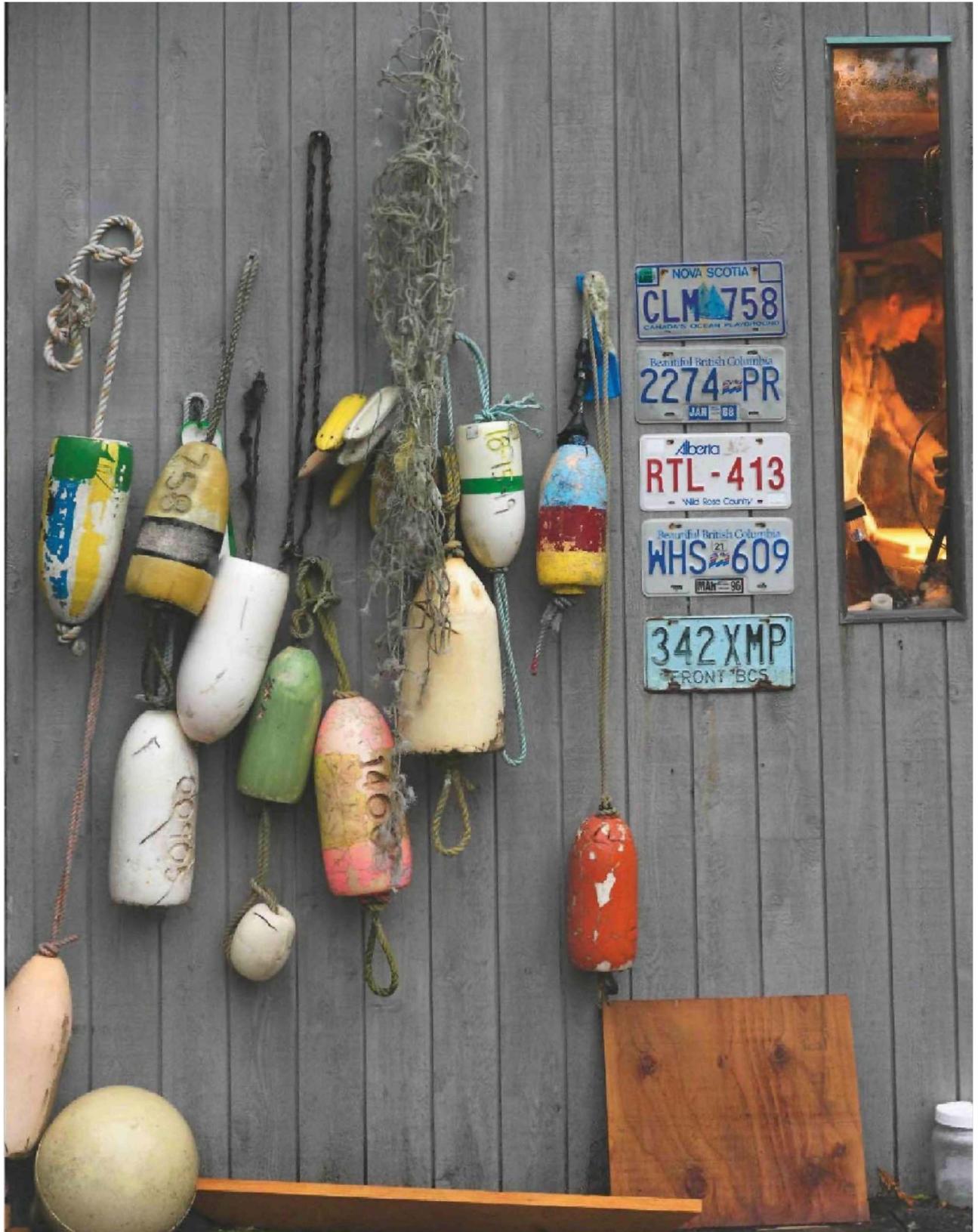
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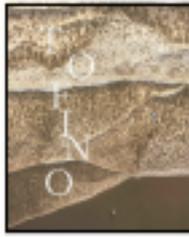
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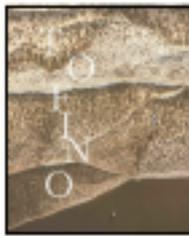
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"Still today, the Pacific Northwest — the region between Washington State and Alaska — is the richest part of the North American continent for natural foods; that is, food you can hunt and gather," says Lewis as he points out the various types of berries that grow around here.

Given the local bounty, it's not surprising that Tofino boasts one of Canada's most sophisticated culinary scenes. Restaurant Wolf in the Fog's tagline is 'Fish. Forage. Feast' and it delivers on that mantra, whipping up dishes of local clams, prawns and albacore tuna. There's also local seafood and more casual fare at Shelter Restaurant. At The Pointe Restaurant, which overlooks the Pacific Ocean, it's elderflower and maple glazed trout, and stewed island potatoes, served at tables made of douglas fir wood. The restaurant is part of The Wickaninnish Inn, which has been built in cedar wood to 'bring the outside in'. The highlight of the dining room is the bank of windows that frame the view, perfect for taking in the area's wild weather.

Between December and February, Tofino is the place for storm watching (one of the more unusual tourist attractions). Powerful fronts bring hurricane-force winds, huge waves and torrential rains — up to five metres of rain falls here annually.

After the storms settle, Tofino stirs up other kinds of fun. Each year, at the end of March, the town hosts the Pacific Rim Whale Festival to celebrate the return of about 20,000 migrating grey whales on their long journey from the Baja Peninsula,

DETAILS

Clayoquot Oyster Festival

www.oystergala.com

Feast Tofino

www.feasttofino.com

Long Beach Lodge Resort

14411 Pacific Rim Hwy; www.longbeachlodge.com

Pacific Rim Whale Festival

www.pacificrimwhalefestival.com

Queen of the Peak Women's Surf Championships

www.queenofthepeak.com

Shelter Restaurant

601 Campbell St; www.shelterrestaurant.com

St Columba Church

110 Second St; www.stcolumbatofino.com

The Wickaninnish Inn and The Pointe Restaurant

500 Osprey Lane; www.wickdnn.com

Wolf in the Fog

150 Fourth St; www.wolfinthefog.com

Mexico, to the Bering Sea, north-west of Tofino. In May, fishermen, foragers and chiefs come together for Feast Tofino, a sustainable seafood event, and then in November, it's the Clayoquot Oyster Festival. The festival takes place when the oysters are at their plumppest, and about 8000 are consumed. It also offers tours of the oyster farms, a Mermaid's Ball (where guests masquerade as starfish, pirates and all things ocean-themed) and a parade, which the mayor Josie Osborne jokes has more participants than viewers.

Osborne talks lovingly about Tofino as a community of people who care about the environment. "As a resort community, our role is to invite the world to come to Tofino and Clayoquot Sound and be in awe of its beauty and splendour, but also to protect the area passionately," she says. ☺

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