A RUGGED COASTLINE, Northwest mountains, British civility, high tea, and a handful of clothes-free opportunities make the Victoria area of British Columbia a fine choice for a week-long vacation.

Located at the southern tip of Vancouver Island in the southwest corner of Canada, the area warrants careful exploration.

Most naturists in the region know of many opportunities for nude recreation in and near Vancouver, including naturist clubs, clothing-optional hot springs, and world-famous Wreck Beach. But few take the time to cross through the gorgeous San Juan or Gulf islands by ferry to visit Vancouver Island.

During the Vietnam War, many Americans moved to Canada to avoid the draft, making their homes on the dozens of islands between the Canadian mainland and Vancouver Island. Their casual lifestyle echoes today in the acceptance of nudity on isolated rivers and beaches.

But today the population growth here is explosive, making it harder to find skinny-dipping oases; but if one is willing to rent a kayak or even walk a little further along a deserted beach, one can still find a special place in the sun.

Sol Sante Club

Sol Sante is a naturist club located in the rural community of Cobble Hill, approximately a half-hour’s drive north of Victoria off Highway 1. It can provide a home base for naturist exploration for those who wish to maximize their time out of clothes.

Sol Sante is an older club, established in 1955. Membership numbers were low for years until the club added a swimming pool and hot tub in 2000. Today, due in part to the new amenities, Sol Sante boasts a growing and younger membership.

The club has a quiet, rustic atmosphere. Its 175 acres are forested in...
Douglas fir and other conifers, with large open lawns and meadow for camping and sunbathing.

The deep, 100-yard-long lake was once the main attraction, where club members and visitors would congregate on the two docks and the adjacent lawn area to use the row boat, swim in the chilly water, or fish for rainbow and cutthroat trout.

Lately the social activity seems to have shifted to the pool area, as is true at most naturist clubs. The pool appears designed for water volleyball, as it is only about three to five feet deep, but children and adults also wade in to float and play in the water.

On many Saturday evenings club members have a potluck cooked in the communal kitchen near the pool. Visitors are often invited to join them for dinner out on the deck overlooking the lake. There is no café at Sol Sante, but the well-stocked kitchen is open for visitors’ use.

Guests with RVs or trailers have access to full hook-ups, and campers have ample space for tents. The club has two small rental trailers available for overnight stays. Both trailers have seen their glory days a decade or more ago, but remain functional and allow visitors the option of arriving without camping gear. Visitors using the trailers must bring their own bedding.

The small town of Mill Bay is less than three miles away and has a bank with an ATM to provide Canadian currency (Sol Sante does not take credit cards), a gas station, a store, and a café that serves breakfast and lunch. If you like good pub food served generously and at a reasonable price, ask club members for directions to the nearby Cobblestone Pub. It has a large nonsmoking section, and a menu to satisfy both timid and adventuresome tastes.

Sol Sante is a quiet, family-friendly club. The official club policy is nudity-mandatory, not clothing-optional; guests are expected to disrobe when weather permits. That said, occasionally members will be found walking about fully clothed, having, perhaps, just come to camp from work (although the lake, pool, and hot tub remain clothes-free), so the policy seems to be more a statement of principle. It may also alert potential visitors that this community is not interested in catering to gawkers or textiles who are merely inquisitive.

The club has some short hiking trails leading out to the edge of the
Nude & Natural 22.1

Kathy checks out the clothing-optional sunning dock at Prior Lake.

camp. Those wishing to get closer to a Northwest forest experience might enjoy wandering these. More sedentary types may be satisfied watching the deer browse about the club grounds.

Aside from the new pool and hot tub areas, much of Sol Sante shows its mature heritage. Old cabins of varying design dot the club grounds. Some look like they may fall down any moment; others are new and obviously the result of attentive care.

The sand volleyball court, the shuffleboard court, and the children’s play area do not appear to get much use, although there are children present who seem to enjoy themselves. Folks either settle down at their cabin sites or alongside the pool. In that respect, Sol Sante is like most nudist clubs in North America.

Sol Sante is affiliated with the Federation of Canadian Naturists, and though not in the Naturist Society Network, it is open to singles, couples, and families, and does not discriminate inappropriately. As with most clubs, it is best to make contact ahead of time to secure a reservation. If you arrive unannounced, you may find the gate locked with no way of getting in.

To contact Sol Sante, call 250-743-2400 or e-mail them at solsante@uniserve.com. You may also visit their Web site at www.fcn.ca/solsante. Their mailing address is 3120 Cameron-Taggart Rd., RR#1, Cobble Hill B.C. V0R 1L0, Canada.

To get to Sol Sante from Victoria, take Highway 1 north to Mill Bay. Turn left at the small town’s second stop light at Shawnigan-Mill Bay Road. Drive 1.4 miles and turn right onto Cameron-Taggart Road. Drive 1.6 miles to a gated entrance to Sol Sante on the left.

Prior Lake

Prior Lake in Victoria remains a delightful naturist opportunity. Victorians can be proud of this little, unofficially tolerated piece of lakeside heaven.

On the edge of Thetis Lake Park, Prior Lake is a 100-by-75-yard, tea-colored body of water surrounded by towering Douglas firs and edged by native willows and other water plants. Access is via a sloping 100-yard trail leading to a well-maintained T-shaped dock stretching into the lake.

The dock and water are the only places where nudity is allowed, although the 15-foot-long beach next to the dock allows for a sandy entrance for skinny-dippers.

As at most public clothing-optional sites, men outnumber the women here. The ratio at Prior Lake is about two to one. Women arrive in pairs and by themselves to sunbathe and swim, however, so everyone seems to be comfortable soaking up the sun in close proximity to each other.

On a sunny weekend the dock can get quite crowded. Approximately 30 people could comfortably lay out towels for themselves; the rest will be in the water. Bring an air mattress to float out on, adjusting your position to follow the sun as it peers over the tall trees. Floating on the lake will also give you some space if relaxing next to strangers is just a bit too much.

A group of naturist-friendly locals called the Prior Lake Naturist Preservation Committee, led by Harvard Budgeon, responded effectively when local authorities tried to close the site to nude use. They have worked with officials to maintain the dock and to do some self-policing. Prior Lake is definitely worth a short visit while touring Victoria.

Other locations in Thetis Lake Park have enjoyed nude use over the years, but the word now is that nudity is limited to Prior Lake. Follow Internet and older published directions to the Trillium Trail and Thetis Lake with discretion.

To get to Prior Lake, drive north from central Victoria on Highway 1 to Exit #8 (Helmcken Road). Head north on Helmcken Road, turning at the first left onto Watkiss Way. Drive 0.9 miles to the intersection with Burnside Road West. Continue on Watkiss for 1.7 miles (0.6 miles beyond the last housing development) to a locked gate and...
er ferry terminal at Sydney. Expect to spend two or three hours touring this horticultural Disneyland, and more if you love plants.

Prices in Victoria, though higher than at smaller, less attractive Canadian communities, are still a pretty good deal for U.S. citizens. The Canadian dollar usually is equal to approximately 60 or 70 U.S. cents. This will help relieve some of the sticker shock when you first price things here.

Internet rumors still float around about a clothing-optional bed and breakfast called Deswin House. This fine establishment is now closed. The owner opened up his house afterwards for a time as Paul’s CO Place, but told N that he had to step away from the B&B business for a while because he has run out of room for visitors. When he receives calls from people who have run across his phone number on outdated Internet pages, he happily refers the callers to Sol Sante.

For the truly adventuresome, the Bungy Zone is located in Nanaimo, two hours north of Victoria. This commercial enterprise boasts the only legal bungy bridge in North America. On one weekend each February, the Bungy Zone lets people jump naked at no cost, charging others $10 to watch. No amount of cajoling or bribing would convince them to let me jump naked during my June visit. They said that it would violate indecent exposure laws. If you wish to brave the cold, rainy February weather for a nude bungy jumping experience, you can look into this option at www.bungyzone.com.

**Sombrio Beach**

Another naturist opportunity near Victoria is the coastline north of the town of Sooke. Driving Highway 14 northwest from Victoria, you will wind your way toward Port Renfrew. Beach access along the way is limited, so aim for Sombrio Beach, about an hour away from Victoria.

Keep a map at hand and look for a one-lane bridge crossing Loss Creek. Continue for 1.8 miles to a dirt road off to the left leading down to the Sombrio Beach trailhead. Follow the dirt road for one mile, park, and walk the trail 300 yards to a fork in the trail. Veer left toward East Sombrio Beach.

You will be on a hiking trail that
stretches from Port Renfrew to the north, down almost to the town of River Jordon to the south. Since there are few access routes to this beachside trail, it is often quiet and can lead to some fine sunbathing spots.

Avoiding the busiest weekends, when backpackers line their tents side by side all along the beach, walk south along the cobble and gravel shore for approximately 300 yards. Continue past a rock point and find what should be a deserted beach. Explore the quiet coastline and find your own place in the sun.

Sandy stretches are rare and the water is bitterly cold and rough. The temperate rain forest graces the shoreline, however, and the Olympic Peninsula in the distance mirrors the mountains behind you. The natural setting thus has an astonishingly rugged beauty.

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VANCOUVER ISLAND is experiencing its own growing pains, as are similar regions throughout North America. It’s getting harder and harder to find sites that are recognized—officially or unofficially—as clothing-optional. Naturists will need to develop self-sufficiency in finding out-of-the-way locations where they can enjoy sun and water as naturally as they wish.

In the Victoria area, renting a kayak is relatively easy. You can use it to gain access to island shorelines rarely visited by others. Rivers like the Sooke and Nanaimo have many fine swimming holes, but growing crowds of prudish young people have found them too, so naturists may need to search further or earlier in the day to stake a claim to a sunning rock or river pool.

Fortunately there is still a lot of open space on and near Vancouver Island. There is plenty of room for naturists to find their own secret hideaway.

For information on the U.S. and Canadian ferry system serving Vancouver Island, see www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries and www.bcferries.com.