



Twenty-one communities, one quick read.

A QUICK-GLANCE GUIDE TO THE CENTRAL ISLAND

Which Mid-Island Community Fits You?

2026 EDITION

*From Bowser to Mill Bay, the vibe, the errands, and the drive,
side by side, so you know where to look first.*

WELCOME

The two of us, here to help

We're Travis and Kiel Bach, two brothers who've spent more than two decades living and working across the Central Island. Between us we've spent real time in every community in this guide, and we know how different one town can feel from the next, sometimes within a ten-minute drive.

What we enjoy most is helping people figure out where they actually fit. The right community matters as much as the right home, and that's the part you can't get from listing photos. So think of this as a starting point. Find a couple of places that catch your eye, and that's where we come in: we'll tell you what each one is really like to live in, day to day, and help you find the right pocket within it.

THIS GUIDE IS FOR YOU IF

- ✓ You're moving to the Island and not sure which community fits.
- ✓ You want the quick, plain version before you dig into listings.
- ✓ You'd like a calm, no-pressure read before you talk to anyone.

YOUR ISLAND TEAM



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START HERE

Where do you even start?

The Central Island is not one place. From Bowser in the north down to Mill Bay at the top of the Malahat, every community has its own pace, its own price, and its own feel. When you are looking from a distance, they can all blur together.

So this is the quick read. One short snapshot for each community, the kind of thing a neighbour would tell you, plus the practical stuff at a glance: roughly how big it is, how far to a ferry, and how far to the nearest Costco, Walmart, and Canadian Tire. It is not the whole story, just enough to point you somewhere.

We have worked in these communities and spent time in them, and we are happy to tell you what each one is really like to live in. Find a couple that catch your eye, and that is where we come in.

How to read each one

The snapshot covers the vibe, the gardening-and-sunshine side, amenities, and what there is to do. The facts give population, the closest ferry (Departure Bay or Duke Point), drive times to the big-box stores, and the drive to the two airports. Times are approximate door-to-door drives, so treat them as a guide.

A word on health care

The north and central communities lean on Nanaimo Regional General Hospital; the south on Cowichan District Hospital in Duncan (a new hospital is on the way); and Port Alberni has West Coast General. Most communities have local clinics, and a family doctor can take time to find right across the Island.

Costco runs, Victoria, and flying out

Up north and through the centre, Costco means Nanaimo. In the Cowichan and the south, Langford's Costco is often closer, and it puts Greater Victoria's bigger-city amenities within easier reach. For flights, each community shows the drive to the Nanaimo Airport (YCD), just south of the city at Cassidy, and to Victoria (YYJ), which has more destinations and international connections.

WHICH COMMUNITY FITS YOU

The communities at a glance

OCEANSIDE & THE NORTH *Up Highway 19A, north of Nanaimo.*

Bowser **RURAL SEASIDE, OLD-ISLAND**

A quiet stretch of shoreline and small acreages where the pace drops right off. Oysters, the Legion, big gardens, and neighbours who wave. You trade quick errands for room and calm.

Pop small rural · Ferry Departure Bay ~55m · Costco Nanaimo ~50m · Walmart Nanaimo ~50m · Cdn Tire Parksville ~30m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~1h05 · Victoria YYJ ~2h

Qualicum Bay **SHORELINE, SHELLFISH, SLOW**

Just south of Bowser, a rural oceanfront pocket with cabins, gardens, and a fishing-and-shellfish rhythm. Big beaches, low-key, and not much hurry to anything.

Pop small rural · Ferry Departure Bay ~50m · Costco Nanaimo ~45m · Walmart Nanaimo ~45m · Cdn Tire Parksville ~25m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~1h · Victoria YYJ ~1h55

Little Qualicum / Errington **COUNTRY LANES, ACREAGE**

Inland from the coast toward the falls: hobby farms, tall trees, and room to garden, with the Coombs market and its rooftop goats minutes away. Rural living, town close enough.

Pop small rural · Ferry Departure Bay ~40m · Costco Nanaimo ~45m · Walmart Nanaimo ~45m · Cdn Tire Parksville ~20m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~55m · Victoria YYJ ~1h50

Qualicum Beach **REFINED VILLAGE CALM**

A walkable village core, heritage streets, gardens, and golf, long a draw for people slowing down somewhere that still feels cared for. Mild, bright, and proud of its flowers.

Pop ~9,300 · Ferry Departure Bay ~35m · Costco Nanaimo ~35m · Walmart Nanaimo ~35m · Cdn Tire Parksville ~10m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~50m · Victoria YYJ ~1h45

Parksville **BEACH TOWN, EASY PACE**

Built around Rathtrevor's warm, shallow flats, so summers revolve around the beach. Services in town, gentle winters, and a favourite for retirees and young families alike.

Pop ~13,600 · Ferry Departure Bay ~30m · Costco Nanaimo ~30m · Walmart Nanaimo ~30m · Cdn Tire in town
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~45m · Victoria YYJ ~1h40

Nanoose Bay **OCEAN-VIEW, SETTLED**

Between Parksville and Nanaimo: ocean-view homes, golf and a marina at Fairwinds, and a quiet, settled feel with the city a short hop south. Trails and water close at hand.

Pop ~6,100 · Ferry Departure Bay ~20m · Costco Nanaimo ~20m · Walmart Nanaimo ~20m · Cdn Tire Parksville ~15m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~35m · Victoria YYJ ~1h30

WHICH COMMUNITY FITS YOU

The communities, continued

Port Alberni **INLAND VALUE, REAL TOWN**

Over the hump on Highway 4: the most affordable homes around, a working-town feel, and rivers and lakes at the door. It has its own Walmart and Canadian Tire; the trade is the drive to the coast.

Pop ~18,200 · Ferry Departure Bay ~1h15 · Costco Nanaimo ~1h15 · Walmart in town · Cdn Tire in town
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~1h30 · Victoria YYJ ~2h25

NANAIMO & AROUND *The hub, and the pockets right beside it.*

Lantzville **SEASIDE VILLAGE, OWN PACE**

An outdoors-first seaside village just north of the city, Lower for the water, Upper for the views, with all of Nanaimo's shopping only minutes away. Small-town feel, big-town convenience.

Pop ~3,800 · Ferry Departure Bay ~15m · Costco Nanaimo ~12m · Walmart Nanaimo ~12m · Cdn Tire Nanaimo ~12m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~30m · Victoria YYJ ~1h30

Nanaimo **THE HUB, ALL OF IT**

The Central Island's anchor: the regional hospital, both ferry terminals, the airport, every kind of housing, and the widest range of pockets, from walkable Old City to rural Cedar.

Pop ~100,000 · Ferry Departure Bay & Duke Point in city · Costco, Walmart & Cdn Tire in town
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~20m · Victoria YYJ ~1h20

Yellow Point **FOREST, OCEAN, ACREAGE**

A rural ribbon of forest and shoreline south of the city around Cedar: acreages, gardens, country halls, and the well-loved lodge, with town a short drive north.

Pop small rural · Ferry Duke Point ~15m · Costco Nanaimo ~25m · Walmart Nanaimo ~25m · Cdn Tire Nanaimo ~25m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~15m · Victoria YYJ ~1h10

COWICHAN & THE SOUTH *Down Highway 1 into the warmest valley on the coast.*

Saltair **QUIET COAST, IN-BETWEEN**

A calm residential stretch of coast between Ladysmith and Chemainus, with water views and an easy reach to both towns. Settled, unflashy, and handy to everything in the south end.

Pop small rural · Ferry Duke Point ~25m · Costco Nanaimo ~30m · Walmart Duncan ~20m · Cdn Tire Duncan ~20m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~15m · Victoria YYJ ~1h05

Ladysmith **HERITAGE HARBOUR TOWN**

Above its harbour, with one of the prettiest restored main streets on the Island and a town that lights up every December. Small-town feel, and the city close enough to forget the drive.

Pop ~8,990 · Ferry Duke Point ~20m · Costco Nanaimo ~25m · Walmart Duncan ~25m · Cdn Tire Duncan ~25m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~10m · Victoria YYJ ~1h05

WHICH COMMUNITY FITS YOU

The communities, continued

Chemainus **MURALS AND THEATRE**

The murals town, with a well-known theatre, a walkable core, and a creative streak, set within North Cowichan. A real arts-and-community calendar, and Duncan's big-box close by.

Pop ~3,000+ (N. Cowichan) · Ferry Duke Point ~30m · Costco Nanaimo ~35m · Walmart Duncan ~15m · Cdn Tire Duncan ~15m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~20m · Victoria YYJ ~1h

Crofton **MILL TOWN, SALT SPRING FERRY**

A quiet coastal community with its own ferry across to Salt Spring, seaside walks, and value homes, also part of North Cowichan. Down-to-earth, with the water at the bottom of the hill.

Pop ~3,000 (N. Cowichan) · Ferry Duke Point ~35m · Costco Nanaimo ~40m · Walmart Duncan ~15m · Cdn Tire Duncan ~15m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~25m · Victoria YYJ ~1h

Maple Bay **SHELTERED, BOATING**

A forested pocket east of Duncan built around a sheltered bay and marina, leaning to ocean views and privacy under the trees. Calm water, and an easy run into town for errands.

Pop ~1,500 (N. Cowichan) · Ferry Duke Point ~40m · Costco Langford ~50m · Walmart Duncan ~10m · Cdn Tire Duncan ~10m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~30m · Victoria YYJ ~55m

Duncan **COWICHAN HUB, WARMEST VALLEY**

The Valley's hub and the warmest, driest corner of the coast, wine and farm country, with its own Walmart and Canadian Tire and a budget that stretches further than the coast.

Pop ~5,000 (N. Cowichan ~32,000) · Ferry Duke Point ~40m · Costco Nanaimo ~50m or Langford ~45m · Walmart & Cdn Tire in town
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~30m · Victoria YYJ ~50m

Cowichan Bay **FUNKY WATERFRONT VILLAGE**

A row of houseboats, docks, and small shops along the water, one of the first Slow Cities in North America... bakeries, cheese, and a maritime, artisan streak. Charm over polish.

Pop ~2,800 · Ferry Duke Point ~45m · Costco Langford ~40m · Walmart Duncan ~10m · Cdn Tire Duncan ~10m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~35m · Victoria YYJ ~45m

Glenora **COUNTRY, RIVER, RURAL**

A rural pocket southwest of Duncan toward the Cowichan River: acreages, gardens, and trails, with the trailhead for the Kinsol Trestle nearby. Quiet, green, and close to town.

Pop small rural · Ferry Duke Point ~45m · Costco Langford ~45m · Walmart Duncan ~15m · Cdn Tire Duncan ~15m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~35m · Victoria YYJ ~50m

Cobble Hill **RURAL, WINERIES**

Country living south of Duncan among wineries and small farms, with Shawnigan Lake and the Kinsol Trestle close by. Space and quiet, and a short hop to Mill Bay or Duncan for the basics.

Pop small rural · Ferry Duke Point ~50m · Costco Langford ~30m · Walmart Duncan ~15m · Cdn Tire Duncan ~15m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~40m · Victoria YYJ ~40m

WHICH COMMUNITY FITS YOU

The communities, continued

Mill Bay **TOP OF THE MALAHAT, GATEWAY**

The southern gateway, just over the Malahat from Greater Victoria: a marina, a seaside shopping centre, and a quick run to Langford's big-box, with the little Brentwood ferry across the inlet.

Pop ~3,500 · Ferry Duke Point ~50m · Costco Langford ~25m · Walmart Duncan ~20m · Cdn Tire Duncan ~20m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~45m · Victoria YYJ ~35m

Lake Cowichan **LAKE LIFE, WEST VALLEY**

On the shore of big Cowichan Lake, west of Duncan: swimming, paddling, tubing the river, and an affordable, outdoorsy pace, with Duncan's services about half an hour east.

Pop ~3,325 · Ferry Duke Point ~1h · Costco Langford ~1h10 · Walmart Duncan ~30m · Cdn Tire Duncan ~30m
Airports: Nanaimo YCD ~50m · Victoria YYJ ~1h10

Seeing one or two that fit?

That is exactly the idea. Send us the ones that caught your eye and we will tell you what they are really like to live in, day to day, then help you find the right pocket within them.

WHERE WE COME IN

Found one that looks like you?

That is exactly how this is meant to work. A couple of these stand out, and you want to know what they are really like to live in, day to day. That part is hard to get from a list.

- ✓ We have spent time working in all of these communities, so we can tell you the honest version, the good and the trade-offs.
- ✓ We will line up the pockets within a community too, since the street matters as much as the town.
- ✓ We tour homes by live video and send straight assessments, so you can shortlist from a distance.
- ✓ We point you to the right local people: brokers, notaries, inspectors, and trades we trust.
- ✓ We live and work here on the Island, and we are around long after the keys change hands.

“

I couldn't recommend Travis more highly. Calm, helpful, and completely down-to-earth.

Beth H. · Nanaimo

“

Working with Kiel and the Bach Real Estate Group was an absolute game-changer.

Alicia G. · Nanaimo

[Read more reviews on Google](#)

GET IN TOUCH

Let's point you in the right direction

Send us the two or three communities that caught your eye and we will tell you what each is really like to live in, then help you find the right pocket and the right home. A call, an email, or grab a time that works for you.



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Book a 20-minute call

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There's a community here that fits. Let's find yours.

PLEASE NOTE

This guide is a general, at-a-glance overview to help you plan, not advice for your circumstances. Populations, drive times, and store locations are approximate and current at the time of writing, and they change, so please confirm the latest before you act. Travis Bach and Kiel Bach are licensed REALTORS®; we are not financial advisers, financial planners, accountants, mortgage brokers, or lawyers, and nothing here is financial, investment, tax, or legal advice. For those matters, please rely on the appropriate licensed professional, along with gov.bc.ca and the Canada Revenue Agency at canada.ca. We are always glad to walk you through any of these communities in person.