

Ladysmith Maritime Society Marina

Rich in history and activity

by Deane Hislop





The 49th parallel forms most of the border between the U.S. and Canada and turns sharply to the south at its western end, preserving all of Vancouver Island within the confines of British Columbia. Just west of that turn lies the seaside community of Ladysmith. This picturesque town, built on the eastern shore of Vancouver Island, is 16 miles south of Nanaimo and 53 miles north of Victoria, overlooking the glistening waters of its harbor, Stuart Channel and British Columbia's northern Gulf Islands.

When visiting Ladysmith, we enjoy staying at Ladysmith Maritime Society (LMS) Marina. The LMS is a non-profit charitable organization of 300 volunteers and a small staff that strives to preserve, promote, and perpetuate a rich heritage.

On our last visit, after hailing the marina on VHF Ch. 66A, and receiving our dock assignment, we met a friendly wharfinger who was waiting at our assigned slip to assist with the lines. Once *Easy Goin'* was secured, he shared information about the marinas

amenities and attractions: 1,100-foot-of transit moorage, 30-amp power, water, pumpout. The impressive 3,000 sq. ft. floating Welcome Centre includes the registration desk, a fireside lounge, large TV, Wi-Fi, clean washrooms, showers, laundry, book and DVD exchange and a comfortable area for socializing. The building is also the home of the Oyster Bay Café, which is open mid-May through September—daily from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. for breakfast and lunch. Outside there is also a covered social dock with propane barbecues, tables and chairs for guests.

There is always something happening at the marina. Every other Friday from June through the first week in September, the LMS Marina Dine on the Dock events are a great way to meet fellow boaters and community members. This event has been very popular with visiting boats and area residents and does sell out, so reservations are suggested. Tuesday evenings during July and August is open mic night at Music on the Dock. Drop by with your guitar, or whatever you'd like and join in on the jam session.

During July and August daily two-hour tours of the harbour are available aboard *Maritimer*, a former 17-foot deep-sea lifeboat. The Marina is also the site of a purple martin restoration project. Nesting boxes are attached to every piling, and each morning, at sunrise, the air is filled with the sound of birdsong.

The marina is also home for the floating Maritime Museum where you can be transported back in time to when coal mining and logging shaped the life in the harbour. There are also fascinating heritage vessels of many descriptions on display, including the tug *Saravan* and the restored water





taxi *Kirkegaard* as two fine examples. Not only are the boats on display, but there is information about their history and photographs of the restoration projects.

The town is a short walk up the hill, and once you have arrived you can ride a trolley that stops throughout town. It would be easy to spend an entire day exploring the historic main street and its interesting shops.

Ladysmith's founder, James Dunsmuir, received word on March 1, 1900 that the British forces had finally relieved their besieged countrymen in Ladysmith, South Africa, during the Boer War. To honor that victory, he named his town Ladysmith. Streets such as Buller, Kitchener, and Baden-Powell were named after the British generals who led troops in the war, and several beautifully restored historical buildings along the town's main street evoke memories of the area's pioneering coal miners and loggers.

Today, Ladysmith is home to a strong community of artists, and ongoing downtown heritage revitalization



Ladysmith Maritime Society

Ladysmith Maritime Society (LMS) is a non-profit charitable organization in continuous operation since 1985. Initially, the Society was established to promote local maritime heritage, but its purpose has grown to serve the community by promoting tourism, and protecting and promoting Ladysmith's maritime heritage as well as public access to the waterfront. LMS also operates a marina, which has become a gathering place for marine events, and for harbour tours in the summer months.





is attracting visitors. Downtown celebrates and honors the community's rich and colorful history. Ladysmith's appealing red-bricked sidewalks evoke some of that history in the quaint downtown core, where one can wander amid restored 100-year-old storefronts and arcane pieces of multi-levered, cog-wheeled mining and logging equipment, which have been painted black and make for eye-stopping sculptures.

While in town, visitors may step back in time at the Ladysmith Heritage Museum. Operated by volunteers from the Ladysmith and District Historical Society. The museum features an impressive collection of facts, artifacts, photographs, and local stories. Another interesting historical stop is The Black Nugget Museum, a refurbished hotel, with quirky delights.

There is no shortage of shopping opportunities in Ladysmith, including a health food store, hair salons, bakery, soup and sandwich diner, clothing, housewares, jewelry, pet supplies, shoes, coffee shops, drug store, book/computer store, auto supplies, home décor, consignment shop, thrift store and restaurants. There's also a gourmet store with kitchen tools and unique foods. To cure your sweet tooth there

is a sweets shop with its fudge, gourmet popcorn and British sweets. There is also a butcher shop with its sausages and meat pies. At the north end of town is the 49th Parallel Grocery, which has everything you will need for provisioning, and they will even provide free transport back to the marina for you and your purchases.

Of course, shopping is senseless without a little time for eating, and there is no shortage of restaurants. You will find many options for everything from takeout to a leisurely meal. You can enjoy home baking, bistro-style meals, fresh-roasted coffee, Asian cuisine, pizza and much more. Some of our favorites are morning coffee and breakfast at The Bean Time Café, Old Town Bakery for sticky cinnamon buns, for British pub food it's Fox and Hounds, or check out Roberts Street

Pizza and Wild Poppy Bistro for lunch.

If shopping's not your thing, or you just wish to zone out, you may visit Transfer Beach Park, a beautiful treed beachfront a short walk south of the marina on the paved Dogpatch Trail. In the summer, families gather to swim in the bay's sun-warmed shallows, to romp around the children's play areas, get a bite to eat at the snack bar or ice cream stand and to enjoy outdoor concerts at the 1,000-seat seaside amphitheater with its stellar view.

Events are year round in Ladysmith. Check out the Chamber of Commerce website for events and schedules. We understand Christmas is truly special here when thousands of visitors come from December to mid-January to be dazzled by the amazing spectacle of the Festival of Lights illuminating the streets, storefronts and homes. ✈️



PLAN YOUR VISIT:

LMS Marina:
www.lmsmarina.com

Chamber of Commerce:
www.ladysmithcofc.com