

Chasing Salmon in Milbanke Sound, B.C., Canada

Milbanke Sound, British Columbia. "Want to know how you catch the biggest salmon? Nancy's nails!" Our guide Troy points at his wife's sparkly red toes, eyes twinkling with mischief.

My niece and I exchange a skeptical look, while my dad examines her toes with polite interest. Nancy laughs at our expressions and says, "It's true! Promise."

And it is. Her favorite nail polish also happens to be the color of choice for attracting large Chinook salmon. Nearly every boat at the lodge boasts a few lures hand-painted with those cherry sparkles, and two nearby guides lament the fact the color is now discontinued.

As we cast off from the dock, I can't help but notice my niece vibrating with excitement. The thought of landing "the big one" grabs her imagination. She leans over and says, "It needs to be more than eighteen pounds. That's how big Carson's was." I smile at the display of sibling rivalry and tell her not to worry. I've got a good feeling about today.

Three Generations Together on the Water

As we speed our way to the salmon grounds, my mind travels back to my first time salmon fishing. Over twenty-five years ago, my father and I began our annual tradition at a remote lodge in the Alaskan wilds. In little more than an hour, my first fish was on the line. And thirty seconds later, I had officially caught "chrome fever."

I remember that feeling so clearly. My heart raced as the reel *zinged*, line streaming away from me as the fish made a run for it. It was a struggle to keep the rod tip up; my little ten-year-old arms were barely strong enough.

The dance went like this: I'd reel, and it would run. And then I'd reel again.

Each of us was doing our best to outsmart the other but, eventually, I won. My cheeks hurt from grinning, and I remember seeing the joy mirrored in Dad's face.

Troy's voice breaks my reverie. "Let's get 'em down!" he says, bustling about the boat, readying gear and bait. Dad helps him on the opposite side, while I continue steering.

The Natural Beauty of Milbanke Sound

Glancing over the rail, the beauty of my surroundings steals my breath. To call the place ethereal is almost a disservice. Small rocky islands thrust up out of the water, with a thin layer of sediment hosting stands of defiant, wind-battered trees. A trio of eagles is circling - one mated pair, and an

interloper attempting to fish in their territory.



"Look! A sea otter!" My niece is now pointing off to the left, towards a kelp bed tucked into a small cove. Sure enough, an otter floats lazily amidst the bobbing kelp tops.

"Yeah, he really likes that spot. Pulls in for a nap and hooks himself to the kelp, so he doesn't float off." From Troy's casual delivery, it's clear this an everyday occurrence for him. My big-city brain struggles to comprehend sharing a workspace with the oceanic creatures we only see in zoos.

As the sun throws diamond sparkles off the water, my dad and I share a smile. "Life is good," he says, resting an affectionate hand on the top of Kaylee's head. And he's right.

Salmon Fishing in Milbanke Sound

As if that were a signal, the left rod tip begins to dance. Before I can think, I'm leaping into action, intent on setting the hook before the fish can vanish. Once the rod is out of the holder, a quick, firm

tug confirms it: the fish is still there.

"Kaylee, this one is yours!" I give the rod over, leaving one hand at the top to help keep the tip up in the air. The tugs are strong and evenly spaced. Based on the strength of the head shakes, I can tell this is a nice-sized fish.

"Reel, reel, reel!" Troy is shouting instructions while Dad says, "Nice job, Kaylee!" I can't help but recognize the ear-to-ear on her face. After all, it's a match for my own.

Our return to the docks at day's end makes it official. Kaylee caught a twenty-three pound Chinook, her personal record. (And yes, it's bigger than her brother's).

Visiting King Pacific Lodge

Bringing in a top fish is always a great way to start a fishing trip. But even if you only manage to land a few, visiting King Pacific Lodge is well worth it.

The operation's attention to detail shines throughout your entire trip. Starting at Vancouver's South Terminal, a chartered plane awaits to fly you to Bella Bella. From there, you'll board a Sikorsky 76 helicopter, and it's a scenic fifteen-minute chopper ride out to the floating lodge.

Built atop a recommissioned barge, the lodge gets towed into the sound at the start of each season. However, don't let the humble underpinnings fool you. The unusual architecture still provides space for numerous luxuries including on-site massage, a pool table, hot tub, and more. Everything about the place is meticulously planned and luxuriously finished.

After a long day on the water, the dining room offers a warm welcome back. A well-curated wine list is available, and we enjoyed pairing them with gourmet preparations of black cod, lamb, and venison at dinner. Any food allergies (communicated in advance) were easily handled by the skilled chefs in the kitchen.

The amber of richly carved wood inside the well-appointed rooms creates a cozy and relaxing environment. Choosing between the soaking tub with sound views, and the body jets inside the slate tiled rain shower makes for a tough choice. But it's helped along by a basket of L'Occitane bath products, which even include thoughtful touches like lip balm and hand crème.

One More Chrome Beauty

Alas, our time together seemed to fly by all too fast. Before we knew it, the last day on the water had arrived. My dad and I chose to go out early with Troy, attempting to locate one more chrome beauty before departure. It ended up being just the two of us; Kaylee opted to avoid the rain and maximize shut-eye instead.

Our morning was productive, and we enjoyed releasing a few smaller Chinook. But just as we're about to call it quits, Dad's rod tip starts wiggling.

With a quick hook set, he's soon wrestling the crafty salmon. And it's definitely a fighter. No sooner does the fish near the surface than it turns and dives down deep again. Long flashes of silver and the line it's peeling off the reel tell me one thing: it's a keeper.

After a twenty minute battle, the three of us huddle at the front of the boat. Dad looks down at the fish thoughtfully and asks, "How big would you guess?" Before Troy can respond, my father says something I'll never forget: "It can't be more than twenty-three pounds. You understand, right?"

It's Not Just about the Fishing

Troy scratches his head thoughtfully. "Yep, I think we can make that happen."

Kaylee's there to greet us as soon as we pull in, excited to hear about the morning. As we disembark, dad's fish hits the dock. A flash of dismay crosses her face, "Wow, that looks pretty big."

Handing the fish over to the crew, Troy converses quietly with the dock manager. One by one, our catch is weighed until only the big one remains in the box.

Whether by accident or design, the scale is facing away from us when it goes on the hook. "Twenty-two!" the dock manager calls out. "Looks like Kaylee got the biggest fish on your trip."

I give Troy a big hug, and dad shakes his hand. My niece's face is alight with excitement. She's practically jumping up and down when she says, "Aunt Jaimi, do you think I'll catch the biggest fish next time, too?"

My smile is a match for hers, and I catch my dad's eye. He laughs, taking her hand as he says, "Well, it certainly sounds like we're coming back here next year!"

Yes, indeed. It looks like we hooked another one.



Good To Know About Milbanke Sound:

- Milbanke Sound and the surrounding area offer fishing grounds for more than just salmon. Halibut, yellow-eye, ling-cod and rock fish abound.
- The plethora of fish provide attractive food sources for orcas, sea lions, otters, and eagles. Plus, the islands themselves play host to deer, wolves and more.
- The weather remains cool during the summer, with occasional rain showers. Dressing in layers ensures comfort during whatever the day throws at you.



More About King Pacific Lodge:

- The spacious lodge comfortably accommodates thirty-four guests at a time
- Room configurations vary; standard rooms, small suites, and a two-story apartment are all available
- Boats, bait, and all gear are provided for guest use
- Trip price includes basic fish processing; smoking and canning is also available
- All fish are cleaned, processed, flash-frozen and boxed as soon as they hit the dock. Upon returning to Vancouver, you can collect your fish boxes at the airport.
- If not returning home immediately, several nearby hotels offer freezer storage for fish. Or, you can arrange for the lodge to ship your catch directly. If you opt for direct shipping, additional costs apply.

For More:

- King Pacific Lodge, <http://kingpacificlodge.com/>
- British Columbia Tourism, <http://www.hellobc.com/>

Confetti Travel Cafe

Travel, culture, connection

<https://www.confettitravelcafe.com>

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