

SAVOR THE SEA IN COMOX, B.C.

BY TRACY BEARD



THE SHORELINE AND WATERS off

Vancouver Island's Comox Valley region have built a reputation as the aquaculture capital of Western Canada. Located on the island's east coast, the valley is home to the largest seafood festival in Western Canada—the B.C. Shellfish & Seafood Festival. What began 12 years ago as a single dinner showcasing British Columbia seafood has evolved into an extravaganza with multiple events packed into 10 days. This year, the festival will be held from June 8 to 17.

Not only do local fishers and farmers harvest high-quality seafood from the nearby waters, but also farmers harvest a rich bounty of produce from the land. Locals and visitors from as far away as China come to the festival and enjoy the exceptional salmon, oysters and more than a hundred other seafood species gathered from this part of the Salish Sea.

Each year, the festival hosts various events, including chef demonstrations and competitions. Attendees can enjoy wine stops intermingled among the culinary stations while local musicians fill the air. One event, Fresh Fest, displays the talents of local and international chefs, who staff stations where they prepare a single dish served on small plates for approximately 300 guests.



Crab and shrimp stack by Locals Restaurant

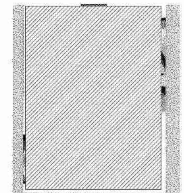


Chinook gravlax macaron by chef Xavier Bauby of North Island College

For a peek at what might be in store for the 2018 festival, expected to be largest yet, consider some of the 2017 highlights. The 2017 Fresh Fest event at Coastal Black Winery showcased 11 top-level Canadian chefs who prepared artful seafood selections, from innovative sturgeon pastrami to simple fresh-shucked oysters. Exquisite dishes drawing inspiration from Indian, Spanish and Asian cuisines dazzled the eyes and satisfied the taste buds with each bite.

For the first time, in 2017, Campbell River hosted the Salmon Capital Seafood Taste, bringing in donations for the Campbell River Hospital Foundation. This event afforded chefs the opportunity to dive to new culinary depths; for example; Chef Xavier Bauby of North Island College took a leap and created a successful and unique bite made up of a macaron stuffed with apple goat cheese and Chinook gravlax.

In 2017, 40 Knots Winery hosted the Seafood Showdown, a gala dinner that highlighted the artistry and culinary talents of three chefs throughout a 10-course dinner paired with wines. Guests judged the dishes, and, at the end, awarded a first prize for the best dish. (In 2017, Chef Andrew Shepherd won first prize for his Cowichan pasta crab and shrimp ravioli with wild



morels, spring onions and brown butter.)

The festival's **B.C.** Seafood Expo event provides a forum for educational and informative sessions of interest to both consumers and industry insiders. Keynote speakers discuss the ins and outs of the seafood industry, while corporations host booths with trained personnel eager to explain programs and products.

Opportunities abound for visiting local farms. Tours to Hardwicke Island Salmon Farm give guests a first-hand look at life on a salmon farm. Visitors learn about oyster harvesting at the famous Fanny Bay Oysters, owned by Taylor Shellfish Farms. Practical information is available on the prevention of sea creature extinction at Manatee Holdings Hatchery. This new knowledge, along with the institution of sustainable practices, can create change and preserve the sea urchin, geoduck and sea cucumber populations, making these delicacies accessible for future generations.

The 2018 festival will deliver multiple events, mouthwatering food and wine and a wealth of information. This festival creates a time and place where wineries, farmers, distributors, buyers, restaurants and local and international consumers can all take part in a collective celebration around an abundance of delicious and diverse seafood.

Tickets for the B.C. Shellfish & Seafood Festival sell out quickly. Find out more at bcshellfishfestival.com. Learn about visiting the B.C.'s Comox Valley at discovercomoxvalley.com. 