



Getting Over the Hump

Majestic humpback whales return to the Pacific Northwest in massive numbers

By the time commercial hunting of humpback whales was banned in the Salish Sea (the network of straits in southern British Columbia and northwestern Washington) in 1966, the creatures had been hunted down to a population of about 1,600. But over the last five decades, since the International Whaling Commission granted humpbacks worldwide protection status, their numbers have grown steadily.

Nowadays, the northeastern Pacific Ocean teems with an estimated 21,000 of the baleen giants, who spend the spring and fall there gorging on krill, zooplankton, and small schooling fish.

Want to get up close and personal with these nautical acrobats? From Port Renfrew, at the southern terminus of Vancouver Island's West Coast Trail, the new Wild Renfrew Adventure Centre offers daily ocean wildlife

tours on inflatable Zodiac boats. (Passengers often see pods of as many as 30 humpbacks breaching, tail-slapping, and lunge-feeding.) Meanwhile, on Pender Island, Dog Mermaid Eco Excursions has launched a floatplane safari as a less invasive alternative to noisy boats, which have been known to disrupt whale songs and feeding. After all, who wants to interrupt the Humpy Dance?

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