

# Sea to sky's the limit in Squamish

**Squamish: It's a town that takes its name from the Salish Indian term for "mother of the wind." Chances are that its legendary blows tugged the sails of Discovery when explorer George Vancouver put into nearby Darrell Bay in 1792. And we know for certain that avid kite surfer Sir Richard Branson spent an afternoon here soaring on its ample thermals.**

Vancouver was on a historic map-making voyage. Billionaire Virgin Group founder Sir Richard was also on business when he took time out for some kiteboarding in a place that bills itself as the outdoor recreation capital of Canada.

So just how does a place become the outdoor recreation capital of this sprawling country when, 45 minutes north there's the goliath mountain resort of Whistler and, 45 minutes south, there's Vancouver, regularly featured high in the heap of most-livable-cities surveys?

"The slogan was

thought up by local citizens and has been officially adopted by [municipal] council," said mayor Ian Sutherland.

"So I guess it's self-proclaimed within our community."

And the claim, emblazoned on a wooden sign on the outskirts of town, is not without merit: There's climbing and hiking, windsurfing and kiteboarding, whitewater rafting and scuba diving; for those less robust, there are six golf courses and, in winter, the opportunity to witness an enormous gathering of bald eagles.

Fair to say, though, that Squamish is an unremarkable town in a remarkable setting. Before adventure tourism took hold, this was a mining and logging town. And while slick new real estate developments with plenty of fir and dark basalt rock seem at home nestled

higher up in the woods, it's the small town strip-mall vibe that greets most visitors when they

stop for a coffee and maybe a bite of breakfast before they hit the slopes. Friendly folks abound, but stop into the

wrong bar on the way home and you might expect an AC/DC soundtrack to play while Patrick Swayze busts the door down then busts some heads à la *Roadhouse*.

But look up and around and you'll be hooked.

Situated at the tip of Howe Sound, the town is dwarfed by rugged mountains and the colossal Stawamus Chief, towering almost 2,300 feet and said to be the world's second largest freestanding piece of granite.

The glacial-silt from the Squamish River swirls, mixes and settles into Howe Sound, turning the

saltier and less murky ocean water an opaque milky blue as it rides out to sea. This is what greeted Captain Vancouver when he traded with the Sko'mish people, who had staked their own claim about 5,000 years earlier.

And if the recreational highlights below aren't enough to claim an official Outdoor Adventure Recreation Capital of Canada title, there's also kayaking (sea and river), canoeing, fishing, mountain biking, ice climbing, ski touring and snowmobiling to add to the mix. (The dramatic Whistler Bungee, a primal scream-inducing 160-foot plunge over the glacier-fed Cheakamus River, is also only about 30-minutes north by car (1-877-938-9333; [www.whistler-bungee.com](http://www.whistler-bungee.com)).

Proof in the pudding, to be sure. Probably why, as Mayor Sutherland said, "No one has ever challenged us on it."

Maybe that's a sign.

- Graeme McRanor,  
24 hours

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