

Lake Cowichan Visitor Centre - Summer 2025 summary

by Evan Croteau



Main points:

- Lake Cowichan Visitor Centre opened Apr. 2 this year, earlier than usual
- Evan Croteau & Megan Tuck ran visitor centre for 2025 season
- operating hours were Thursday-Monday 9-5:30 (closed for lunch on single-staff days)
- summer 2025 numbers were very similar to previous years
- 3,815 visitors as of Aug. 25, on track to pass 4,500 visitors by Sep. 27 closing date
- busiest day in several years was Aug. 2 (Sunfest Saturday) with 91 visitors
- only visitors who entered building counted for more useful totals
- successful side project of rehoming Ohtaki gifts to museum for public enjoyment
- building maintenance included repairs to lights & plumbing

Trends & patterns:

- approx. 56% of visitors were domestic
- 25% from Europe, Germany being largest country of origin, followed by France & UK
- remaining 19% mostly from Australia, Mexico, US or locals
- young adults an increasing share of visitors
- improved signage & information around town & on Google Maps reduced frequency of wayfinding questions from visitors
- visitor centre a tourist attraction in itself; log cabin & surrounding gardens regularly receive compliments from visitors
- park vandalism less of an issue than in previous summers

- Holt Creek Trestle reopening followed by influx of cyclists
- new attractions popular with visitors included bakery, bike rental & disc golf course
- wildfire-related closure of new Bamfield highway led to modest increase in visitor numbers in August
- our most popular paid attractions remain tubing, dining & concerts at Laketown Ranch

Most popular activities:

- 24% hiking
- 17% Circle Route
- 16% camping
- 14% tubing
- 14% beaches
- 7% cycling

Visitor numbers summary table:

Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug. (<25th)
361	619	767	1,068	1,000

Things to consider:

- visitor numbers remaining steady each year despite increase in online tourism research
- domestic visitors remain our largest source of tourism, continued emphasis on advertising Lake Cowichan within Canada is useful
- many brochure providers have gone paperless starting this year (BC Parks maps no longer produced despite popular demand)
- paper products an appreciated resource by visitors, printed maps essential for visitor safety due to lack of cell service in many popular wilderness attractions
- providing changerooms for customers is normally standard at water-based businesses; lack of changerooms & ad-hoc parking organization led to tedious visitor experiences for tubers, with many having to change in park washroom stalls, porta-potties or the parking lot
- parking enforcement provided in previous summers would be helpful to have again next year to keep parking lot safe & tame for visitors
- Saywell Park washroom supplies were often not refilled on time, leading to uncomfortable situations for visitors. Giving the responsibility of maintaining the washrooms to visitor centre staff next year would reduce this problem since we are on-site all day to regularly check them
- free amenities, especially our parks with water access, remain our most popular attractions. Finding ways to increase visitor spending (i.e. modestly-priced paid parking at a select few locations, with exemptions for residents) would help compensate for their heavy use of local taxpayer-funded infrastructure