From Goa to Bali, from Tuscany to rural and coastal Spain, and from Puerto Vallarta to Palm Springs, one key characteristic of lifestyle migration destinations is clear: warm, sunny climates (e.g. see Gustafson 2009; Korpela 2009; Trundle 2009; Williams and Hall 2000). Even within a nation not exactly known for its balmy temperatures, Canada, “the search for a better way of life” (Benson and O’Reilly 2009: 608) is known to concentrate upon its mildest climatic region: southern Vancouver Island and the Southern Gulf Islands. Indeed, as Benson and O’Reilly (2009: 611, emphasis added) simply put it: “the most renowned of lifestyle migrants have chosen destinations in coastal resorts or islands in the sun.” But as we are about to see, if not all that shines and glitters is gold, then not all that is dark and gray is gloomy either.

Take the case of the western side of Vancouver Island, British Columbia (BC), Canada. In Tofino, the region’s best known village, it rains 3306mm\(^1\) per year, on a whopping annual average of 216 days with precipitation. About 100km down the coast the small town of Port Renfrew sees even more rain, topping Vancouver Island’s average rain rankings at 3674mm. In between the two is equally damp Ucluelet—which on October 6\(^{th}\) 1967 is known to have recorded 489mm of rain in a 24-hour period. And incidentally, nearby Henderson Lake, on the mountains behind, also has two Canadian records: one for greatest annual average precipitation (6655mm), and one for greatest precipitation in one single year: 9749mm. But in spite of all this “liquid sunshine,” this region has recently experienced unprecedented flows of migration—thus presenting us with a challenge to our understanding of the role that climate plays in lifestyle mobilities.

The objective of this writing is to describe and understand lifestyle migration in the geographical context of Clayoquot Sound—a region located on the western side of Vancouver Island encompassing the aforementioned towns of Tofino and Ucluelet. This chapter is primarily driven by the need to make sense of how a uniquely wet and relatively cold climate can draw, rather than repel, short-term tourists, residential tourists, and lifestyle migrants. But in broader terms, my aim here is to interpret the significance of climate

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\(^1\) In comparison, London receives 736mm per year, on average.
and weather in the phenomenon of lifestyle mobilities. To this purpose the case of Clayoquot Sound is of great interest because it highlights how lifestyle migrants and short-term and residential tourists alike incorporate climatic characteristics of a region into their own treasured everyday practices, challenging their common values and meanings. As the data show, the redefinition of stormy and rainy weather as a comforting and appealing phenomenon prompts us to focus on the unique meanings of the intersection of different moving forces—such as weather fronts and the flows of short-term tourists and lifestyle migrants—as a complex but relatively harmonious constellation of mobilities.

We draw upon data collected for a broader project focused on the role the weather plays in shaping regional culture (Vannini, Waskul, Gottschalk, and Ellis-Newstead 2012). Our research included bouts of fieldwork conducted over a year in a variety of locations scattered across the BC coast—including Clayoquot Sound. The main purpose of our data collection was to investigate the sensory experience of weather and the meanings and everyday practices associated with it, and primarily to focus on the mundane significance of the most outstanding climatic feature of the region: the rain.

Rain comes in a variety of forms on the BC Coast throughout the year, mostly ranging from long-lasting mist and showers to brief, cold, torrential downpours. On occasion during autumn and winter, especially on the outer coast of Vancouver Island, strong winds accompany wet weather systems creating large swells that crash ashore with notable fury. Such storms acquire particular significance in Clayoquot Sound because they draw out people who eagerly take them in, much like natural spectacles, as part of a loosely organised practice that has come to be known as storm watching.

To understand storm watching my colleagues and I began data collection by inventorying publically available experiences of wet weather and storms, such as narratives and reflections contained in blogs, web-based diaries, and other published writings. We then organized a small regional media campaign. During radio show segments and through newspaper editorials focusing on weather as folklore we invited audiences to share with us reflections on the role that the weather plays in everyday life. In response, we received letters and emails containing narratives, poems, and photographs. We then began to conduct interviews with some of the people that contacted us, and through snowballing. Throughout this time I also travelled extensively to
observe storm watching practices in Tofino and Ucluelet. In all, we interviewed 55 people and observed a handful of storms.

Background

Thanks to blockbuster movies, guide manuals, sensationalist books and novels, popular websites, and frequent news coverage the practice of storm *chasing* has become a popular cultural phenomenon, especially in the United States. But whereas storm chasing has arguably reached an apex in popularity, the much less adventurous but equally interesting practice of storm *watching* has only begun to emerge as a recognizable cultural phenomenon very recently. As the name itself suggests, storm watching loosely refers to the witnessing of a storm from a visual spectator’s position—something typical of storm chasing as well. But whereas storm chasers pursue hurricanes and other severe weather phenomena often by driving or even flying near their very epicentres and at times even by jeopardizing their own lives, storm watchers take in generally less severe storms from safe positions, and at times even highly comfortable shelters (e.g. see figure 1), at no obvious risk to them. While official definitions are scarce, it is commonly understood that storm watching refers to a relatively novel phenomenon prevalent especially on the Northwest Pacific Coast of North America, and more precisely on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

Tofino—and in lesser part Ucluelet—offer both the casual storm watcher and the storm watching ethnographer with features intense enough to have turned this practice into a trademark institution. Indeed, an Internet search for storm watching yields a vast majority of Tofino-related results, both in terms of journalistic coverage and tourism promotion. For example Travel.bc.ca—a popular BC tourism website—defines storm watching in explicit relation to Tofino’s unique climate and links it directly to a handful of hotel accommodations and packages offered by Tofino-based tourist operators. As they write:

Storm watching season extends from November to March. During the storm watching season there are usually 10-15 good storms each month with the peak months of December-February sure to pack the most whoppers. It is during this season that Tofino receives the majority of it’s [sic] nearly five meters of annual rainfall and during storm season this rain often arrives horizontally. Storm watching is a relatively new tourism phenomenon on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, though locals have
been watching, bracing against and surviving winter storms here for millennia. Storm watching doesn’t really require anything of the observer but stillness and wonder. Storm watching is best advantaged from ocean-fronting hotels and B&B’s where a good book, a fireplace and maybe a down duvet across your lap are really all you need to experience the fury and the force of the pounding Pacific Ocean on the other side of your rattling, double paned window. Or for the more adventurous, head out into the storm to experience the power of the wind, to observe the giant waves, and to hear the symphony of the wind and waves.\(^2\)

Figure 1: A Tofino Storm seen from near the Wickanninish Inn. Photo courtesy of April Vannini.

Three reasons in particular can be identified as key contributing factors in making Tofino a storm watching destination. To begin with, Tofino’s luxury hotel Wickanninish Inn is widely credited with having coined storm watching as both an idea in itself—that is, something distinct from merely walking around in a storm—and as a recognizable tourist practice. Secondly, while other accommodation-providers have now begun to promote storm watching and offer related packages, because the practice was allegedly born in Tofino a great deal of storm watchers now associate “authentic” storm watching with outings to Tofino’s

\(^2\) [http://tofino.travel.bc.ca/features/storm-watching/](http://tofino.travel.bc.ca/features/storm-watching/)
beaches. Thirdly, whereas storm watching in Victoria, Vancouver—or mostly anywhere else—as a way of spending a morning or an afternoon is a relatively unorganized and extemporaneous practice, storm watching in Tofino is a more carefully planned performance for the large number of tourists and tourist operators involved, and consequently for the small village as a whole.

Tofino is a small town of about 1,650 year-round residents. Population swells in the summer, though, to about ten times its size. Situated on the very sparsely populated west coast of Vancouver Island, Tofino lies at the western end of Highway 4. Located about 40km south is the only other sizeable village of the area: Ucluelet—a town of about 1,500 people. Tofino and Ucluelet are not easy to reach. Boat access is limited by very strong currents, so no regularly scheduled ships serve the region. Airplane service is also very limited. A small number of regional carriers serve Tofino with direct flights from the south coast of BC, but a small airport and inclement weather severely restrict access. By car, Tofino and Ucluelet lie about 2 and ½ hours away from the nearest urban hubs situated on the eastern side of Vancouver Island. The car journey itself can be rather treacherous. While over one million visitors a year make it to the Clayoquot Sound, the narrow and winding two-lane road is far from providing easy access. Indeed there is a definite feel that once in Tofino and Ucluelet one has reached the end of the road and thus somewhat of a liminoid space.

The landscape is what draws so many visitors to the area. The road journey itself—which many people describe as a modern-day pilgrimage—meanders through old growth forests, steep mountain cliffs, fast-moving rivers, and fresh water lakes. Even before arriving to the coast the journey is a sublime experience for many. Then, when visitors finally reach the Esowista Peninsula the coastal road wedges inside the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve and the UNESCO-designated Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Reserve. There, a succession of large (up to 200 meters in width) and long (up to 6km) beaches flank the road leading into the two towns. For a coast known for its rugged edges, these sandy beaches are especially unique and work as a magnetic draw for surfers, nature lovers, beachcombers, campers, whale watchers, and many other outdoor adventure enthusiasts. While a handful of shops are present in both Tofino and Ucluelet, neither town offers much shopping or related hyper-consumerist escapes. There are no amusements parks, no discos, very few swimming pools, and indeed little of the typical flavors of “triple S” (sun, sand, and sex) tourism. As
someone put it to me, “you don’t come here for ‘triple S’ tourism, but mostly for the ‘triple R’ kind: rain, rocks, and rough waters.”

Both Tofino and Ucluelet reinvented themselves as tourist destinations in the 1990s. As fishing and logging became either uneconomical for most operators, or outright outlawed over the last two decades, Clayoquot Sound residents have opened the doors to tourism as a new way of economic sustainment. American, Canadian, Australian, French, and especially German and other continental and Northern European tourists “invade” Tofino and still in lesser part Ucluelet, mostly from June to early September. Given Tofino’s rapidly increasing status as a surfing destination, young travellers seeking alternative lifestyles have made Tofino a bit of countercultural heaven. They have joined long-time resident First Nation communities and followed in the footsteps of earlier hippies, environmentalists, artists and hermit-types in forming a laid-back, slow-paced, and relatively open-minded community. While many newcomers are eventually pulled back to their points of origin by the necessity of stable employment, a few decide to stay—mostly pursuing jobs in the tourist industry while cultivating more self-authenticating passions and lifestyles after work or as time allows.

With a growing and quite young population, with declining opportunities in the resource extraction industry, and with skyrocketing living costs, the pressure to attract more tourism to Tofino and Ucluelet has been mounting for some time. While far from leaving a light carbon footprint, tourism is viewed by locals as more sustainable than logging—the only other feasible source of employment. But whereas exotic island destinations around the world are better positioned to develop more or larger hotels and fill them with tourists, a strong conservationist mindset combined with strict provincial, federal, and international regulations make it difficult to expand Tofino or Ucluelet in size. Plus there is a logical obstacle to development: Clayoquot Sound tourism is made attractive by the promise of close contact with nature and by the appeal of a slow-paced community living in intimate closeness with the wilderness. So, what could one do to support the local economy? Well, perhaps, rather than attracting more tourists during the short warm season—thus providing more short-term employment for seasonal amenity migrants—it would seem necessary to reinvent what one could do during the long rainy season. Enter the world of storm watching…
The Social and Cultural Geographies of Storm Watching

What is fascinating about storm watching became obvious to me one day in the fall of 2009. The following words scribbled down in my field journal captures one key essence of it:

When is the real storm coming? Two hours on the beach and I’m still waiting for the Real McKoy. The dark, menacing clouds I saw coming from the north a while ago have come and gone. They have made way for slightly stronger winds, but the sky seems to have actually cleared a bit. The weather front the TV said should be here by early afternoon should have arrived by now. It must be late. I’m getting cold walking around aimlessly. I don’t seem the only one getting cold. The couple I saw walking earlier has gone back into the Wickaninnish. Another couple has come out, though. I am certain I saw them out earlier this morning. And if I have, they are not the only ones coming and going. I feel like doing the same too. Coming out and going back in, over and over. It might just be time again to go to my room, get warm and cozy, watch the waves from there, relax long enough to get bored, and then come out again later for a walk before dinner.

At first I saw nothing important in these words. Then I suddenly realized that I was describing a unique “ballet” of movements, rest, and encounters (Seamon 1980). The beach, the Wickaninnish, Tofino, and Clayquot Sound in general became in my mind the stage of intersecting performances of acts of movement. Winds, clouds, waves, masses of cold air, tourists, locals, and I were moving about town, in the performance (see Edensor 2007) of a loosely choreographed “dance”—coming and going, each moving at different speeds, each lasting different times depending on the pushes and the pulls affecting us (e.g. see figure 2).

I had come to Tofino for only a weekend this time. It was a carefully planned outing. I had chosen a late autumn date that was likely to feature a good storm. But weather forecasts do not last very long. Meteorologists are rather successful at predicting weather for tomorrow and the day after, but it is much more difficult for them to nail down what the skies will bring five days from now. Weather fronts move rather unpredictably. What is worse is that their movements do not always harmonise with the outings of short-term tourists (and ethnographers) needing to book accommodations and request the necessary travel permissions from work. So, despite a promising outlook, the really nasty weather had taken a turn for the
open waters. And instead of a monster storm, I and everyone else in town had to be content with waves, winds, and raindrops that were moving pretty fast, but not as fast as everyone hoped. But no one, myself included seemed to mind. To me, storm watching had started to resemble a mellow encounter: a meeting of people, sea currents, and weather fronts moving about a region and coalescing on a fixed mooring, that is, a hotel perched on a rocky bluff.

Figure 2: “Dancing” in the rain. Photo courtesy of April Vannini.

To be sure, the Wickaninnish and its adjacent beach is far from being the only place in the Sound where one can practice storm watching. But what the “Wick” offers in order to lure storm watching tourists captures the essence of this practice very well. The typical “Wick” storm watching package offers a fireplace-warmed suite with view over the waves crashing ashore on a rocky bluff, a three-hour guided nature walk with a local naturalist, two rain hats, two books on Pacific reef and shore life, and two complimentary coffees to be enjoyed in the lounge. Raincoats are also available for borrowing, gratis. With a two-night accommodation the package starts at $875.85 before taxes, incidentally. During my stay at the “Wick”—which almost dried up my modest research grant for the entire season—my participant observation yielded the impression that the cosy amenities offered by the hotel were indeed the sources of the guests’ inspiration
for their activities. Without many exception guests took intermittent walks outside at different beaches, then
would come back inside for a coffee (or patronised other coffee shops “in town”), only to peek outside again
just to get cold enough to crave retiring back to their warm rooms.

Stormwatching from one’s rooms—as I understood from practising it myself and talking with others
about it—was no less enjoyable than doing it outdoors. I, and other guests, took marvel in the waves and the
fury of the wind and the rain by standing on the small covered balcony of our suites to take pictures, or by
sitting on a comfy armchair while cuddling with a book. Storms are clearly visible from the bed too, and if
one leaves the balcony door open a bit it’s easy to hear a mighty, but strangely relaxing roar. I felt rather guilty
the first time I fell asleep in the afternoon to this symphony. When I woke up I felt as though I had missed
out on the world outside, but then I realized that the essence of a storm watching getaway allowed—indeed
even encouraged—taking comfort in one’s shelter and dozing off. Other guests admitted taking long naps
after coming out of their warm baths. If storm chasing is about the rush, the risk, and the recklessness, then
storm watching is about the sleep, the stillness, and the serenity of it all. Here the triple R’s and triple S’s are
inverted.

While the Wickaninnish lodging (and gourmet coffee) prices are prohibitive for most people, storm
watching triple S’s do not need to be so luxurious or costly. In fact, while the “Wick” and other four-star
hotels do well at attracting crowds of tired professionals for a mellow weekend or mid-week getaways, the
rest of the Sound offers storm watching possibilities that do just as well at attracting others, for longer
periods of time even, or for more frequent outings. This exchange with Amelia³, a Toronto-born visual artist
and waitress who has resided in Tofino year-round for five years, explains the difference and its significance:

Amelia: “The marketing department of the Wick and these other luxury hotels are smart. They have
turned a bad rainy season into an occasion for pampering, but storm watching is basically free, really.
All it takes for a walk on the beach or in the forest is a rain coat and a decent pair of shoes. I suppose
it’s better if you end it with a $4 latte at the Common Loaf on your way back into town to run
errands, but the $1,000 is mostly for the local economy.”

³ All interviewee’s names are fictitious.
“Are you saying the tourists are suckers?”

Amelia: “No, not really. Believe it or not I know locals who once a year or so, if they can afford it, might even stay at the Wick themselves. I’ve done it a couple of times too. None of us have particularly spectacular ocean views from our homes, or cosy fireplaces, or unbelievably nice [laughs] marble bath tubs. Most of us have modest homes. So, it’s kind of nice to indulge for a weekend, you know, even for us locals. All I’m saying is that for someone who doesn’t live here that $1,000 is what keeps people like me and most of my friends employed in the winter. And as long as it allows both the tourists and people like me to enjoy life in the area, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it. It’s better than making a living out of cutting trees, or having to go back East, you know?”

Amelia’s insightful observation in one of my very first interviews in Tofino came to me like lightning in a thunderstorm. As I followed up on her thought with other local residents I learned that many viewed storm watching as an essential component of the winter economy of Clayoquot Sound. Reframing the value of “bad weather” allows accommodation industry operators—from hotels, motel, cabin, condo, rental homes, and even campground managers and staff—and ancillary services to stay in business throughout the year. And this prevents many lifestyle migrants from having to move elsewhere for the rainy season. In short, if lifestyle migration is about getting out of the trap of one’s former life, (see Benson and O’Reilly 2009, 2011), the culture and social organisation of storm watching in Clayoquot Sound is about enabling lifestyle migrants to stay away from the “trap” year-round. The case of Jeff and Patricia highlights this phenomenon very well.

Jeff was born and raised in Vancouver, Patricia in Brisbane, Australia. Both in their late twenties, they have now resided in Tofino full-time for three years. They met in Whistler, where they were both working during the winter. Jeff was a ski instructor and Patricia a waitress and musician. As they got to know each other they learned that they both had a passion for surfing and a deep love for life in Tofino. Both worked in Clayoquot Sound during the summer: Jeff in a surf shop, and Patricia in a number of different jobs in the hospitality industry. During my interview with them I learned that Tofino attracted them for some of the usual reasons that render life more meaningful (for some): for the slow and laid-back lifestyle, for the sublime,
idyllic wilderness, for the youthful vibe and feeling of community, and for the calm and quiet atmosphere. In their words:

Patricia: “I used to go to Surfers’ Paradise a lot when I was younger. I know the surfing world when I see it. And I have a bit of a hard time with it. The scene can get on your nerves after a while, do you know what I mean? You can’t live your life in a bikini, going out dancing and drinking every night. It wears out on you. And it feels like it never changes. It feels like it’s sunny every day, there is no change. And the thing about Tofino is that you do get that change in the seasons. Summers are great, but it’s so nice when the rainy season starts. It’s a time to be more introspective, you know? I can take my guitar out on the beach and sing at the top of my lungs and there is no one around to hear me hit bad notes. The rain, the storms, I don’t know, it’s like they allow you to be dark, moody. It’s really the time when I write all my music. I just go out in the storm before work, or sometimes after work, and I can just be alone and be myself.”

Jeff: “And while she does that we at the surf shop are busy renting out and selling equipment. The whole marketing campaign about storm watching has caught the attention of a lot of people who didn’t even know about Tofino and how great surfing is here in the winter.”

Patricia: “But it’s ironic in a way, you know? It’s not like the typical surfing scene. It’s a very sloooow [voice emphasis] one, despite all the caffeine [laughs].”

Weather is an ephemeral, but quintessential component of landscape (Brassley 1998) and regional culture and societies (Vannini et al. 2012). So, not only is the weather “put to work” to fund the local economy and enable lifestyle migrants to sustain themselves (Madden 1999), but rain appreciation and storm watching lend a distinct flavour to Clayoquot Sound’s place temporality. To better understand this phenomenon it seems useful to employ the concept of mobility constellations—to which I now turn.

Constellations of Winter Mobilities

Cresswell (2010) argues that in order to understand different mobilities we ought to focus on their practices, their experiences, and their representations. These different elements ought to allow us to capture different constellations of mobility, that is, different patterns, and different assemblages. Different constellations of
mobility characterize different places, different communities, and different vectors of movement. Constellations of mobility are related to the concept of constellations of consumption, which refers to the assemblages of products and services sought by consumers to enact and express a lifestyle of choice. Cresswell (2010) argues that in order to capture different constellations of mobility we ought to pay attention to their different characteristics, such as speed, rhythm, and feel—as well as others. Speed, rhythm, and feel are characteristics of mobility but obviously of lifestyle as well.

With these three characteristics in mind, in my subsequent interviews and observations I tried to capture the unique quality of winter lifestyle mobilities in Clayquot Sound. What stood as unique, in my mind, was the fact that the practice, experience, and representation of wet, cold, stormy weather was a remarkably positive way of capturing the place temporality (Wunderlich 2009) and way of life of Clayoquot Sound. In simpler words, the people I interviewed and observed seemed to enjoy taking in the storms and the rain because it not only helped the local economy, but it also contributed to giving Tofino and Ucluelet a certain slow, mellow feel. This atmosphere gelled well with both one-time and regularly-returning tourists seeking rest from their winter busyness, and with the lifestyle migrants seeking a quiet, contemplative, wilderness idyll. Thus, rather than push people away, the succession of one stormy weather front after another drew people here. These unique mobilities taught me that the sun is not a necessary component of lifestyle mobilities.

Indeed, my interviews showed me quite clearly that many tourists and residents have learned to dwell here in appreciation of the rain. “What I love about the rain is the growth,” Kathrin reflected, “there is lushness to the growth on the coast because of the rain and temperate weather. For me, rain is a good thing, part of the cycle of life. If we go for weeks or months without rain, I long for a downpour that will force the green sprouts of life out of the earth to replace the dust and brown of death.” Tofino’s moist air is a trademark feature and is unmissable, even by the first time visitor. As Stephen Miller writes on the web for the Canadian Tourism Commission, “it’s not air exactly; it’s about one-third water and salt-spray and hovers in a fine mist that is probably really good for your skin, hanging in curtains that remind me of the aurora borealis. If the sun were out, a thousand individual rainbows would be cast by this tactile atmosphere that can’t quite decide if it’s going to become rain or fog.” The air is so enveloping that the landscape evacuates
the background, the place subsumes the body, “and you realize that all you are is a primate in a rain slicker.”

There is a definite poetics to the rain and the storms. Something else is “in the air” here. Locals integrated the features of the climate into what they call “Tofino Time”: “the endless waves, the geological timelessness of it all, combine to create a deep inner cleansing”—writes Beni Spieler for the local publication Tofino Time—the feeling that you’re not just in a different place here, but also in a different time. The rain helps to make this feeling happen, , continues Beni, even when one is away from home:

I love the way it reminds me of being back home in Tofino no matter where I go. I'm always finding myself thinking of home when it begins to rain. A mixture of nostalgia and longing dripping from the sky and into my heart. There may not be an ocean to stare at, or even a beach to sit on, but I do have grey clouds to clear up my day. Every little drop containing a memory, a healing salve for a wandering soul, a thousand little crystals of hope for a wetter tomorrow. When I was stuck at home doing homework, or whatever it was I did instead of finishing my homework, the rain beating against the roof of my home helped me relax. The gentle drumming, or even the heavy symphonic noise over my head always brought a calm to my soul. In that same way, I feel that rain can cleanse my soul when I'm out in it. Removing all those bad vibes, releasing me of any negative energy.

Some people say they can even taste the rain. Adrienne, for example, writes on her blog that “we have the most fabulous water here […]. Our water comes from the mountains, forests, and streams of Meares Island. […] The forests and soils on Meares hold a fabulous amount of water. They filter and clean it to make some of the best water in the world.” You can directly taste the weather in the water—or in the unique flavours of what temperatures and moist air generate, such as mushrooms, berries, and shellfish—but the weather can also indirectly set the stage for unique experiences. It may be difficult to make business out of water itself, but no journey to Tofino is complete without a visit to a few different coffee places. As Colin observes on his blog: “From years of casual observation (and much experimentation), I have determined that the West coast rain forest is the perfect breeding ground (or brewing ground) for the caffeine mind-set. […]

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4 http://mediacentre.canada.travel/content/travel_story_ideas/tofino_short
5 http://www.tofinotime.com/articles/A-T810-18rm.htm
6 http://www.theheartoftofino.com/2009/06/wet-coast.html
It is grey outside. The wind is howling at a bracing 70 km/hr and the rain is more horizontal than vertical (which is good, because an umbrella would be useless). The coffee is fabulous. This is the perfect day for it. [...] The coffee tastes so good (as does the muffin) because it is so nasty outside.”

On dark, stormy nights the winds often bring Tofino’s power lines down and kill the TVs and the computers. Families and friends sit down to play games in the candlelight. With the power still down in the morning schools are closed down, and many high school kids and adults head out surfing, “laughing”—as Beni Spieler writes for another Tofino Time piece—“at the ‘Wave Hazard Sign’ as it desperately tries to stop you from going out onto the water to spend the day harnessing the turbulent energies of the ocean for some insane surfing.” Or if it’s not surfing maybe it’ll be the perfect morning for just “standing around on the beach fighting with a lighter, and having a laugh with some friends while you dodge driftwood and get chased by the water” taking in “the gentle sound of the rain turning into the violent but inspiring sound of the wind fighting with the trees and everything else in its way for that matter.” Or contemplating “the sight of a wave curling into itself, as if seeking warmth in a vast cold body, before crashing and sending itself further towards its pre-determined destination” or “walking on the sand the day after, all of it flat and smooth, the texture feeling something not un-like walking on cheese cake.”

Rain storms also perform a unique type of drama in the region. In trying to capture this unique feel of the place Greg Blanchette writes for Tofino Time:

Eight days ago it pounded down a celebration: riotous, wild with corn-kernels of ice. Weather pranced like a girl with her hair out behind, laughing. But that girl hasn’t looked back since. Now in the window-glass my face looks gray, trying to remember other kinds of rain. Dreaming of Spring Mist so fine it was darn near holy—stuff you went out special at night to watch floating in streetlight halos. Remembering that practical Water-the-Plants Cloudburst, those friendly Go-In-For-a-Snack Showers. Recalling the October Squall, come to town like travelling German opera, boom, bam, curtain going down on the last act with beams of sunshine, the whole chorus on stage for the finale.

But this stuff… eight unrelenting days of this stuff…! This is Matador Rain, waving gray capes of

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7 http://www.coffeecrew.com/culture/331-the-tofino-blog-1
water in the air to enrage you. Gumboots, rain pants, slicker all useless as paper bags. Making a
mockery of umbrellas, of Gore-Tex… of slipping, dripping sanity itself. Olé, sucker, and a roar goes
up from the whole damn town. Summer showers, those are a punchline, a lark, something to go
Harmless. Bike out to the lake, the little hoodlums won’t catch you there. But this! Man, I’m telling
you, this is Judge-and-Jury Rain. Hanging Rain. Look at Lone Cone out there, half the cursed
mountain gone, beheaded by Attila the Low. The World Wide Weep offering no succour, dishing out
satellite pics one big gray smear from here to the gulags of Kamchatka. Hard Time Rain. Cruel and
Unusual Rain. Don’t-Forget-Who’s-Boss Rain. This is burly, bald-headed Bad Cop Rain, sneering as
he locks you up. Swallows the key, makes sure you see him doing it. Asylum Rain. Eight days …think
about it: What if it just doesn’t stop? Forever Rain. It could happen, you know. Out here, it really
could.9

The rain brings out emotional drama too. “One memory,” writes Sarah in an email message to me,
“early in my marriage, when I seemed more prone to emotional breakdowns, the beach in the rain was my
solace. I would make my way to some deserted shore and sit on a wave-smoothed log, slick with rain and cry.
Here, facing the ocean, the waves would drown out my sobs, the rain would wash away my tears. After a
timeless commune here I would be ready to face my life again.” Tourists and amenity migrants elsewhere in
the world may seek out the sun to play and have some fun, but here storms afford a different kind of
experience, one that allows you to get in touch with sensations and emotions that pour out as intensely as the
rain.

**Conclusion**

As Benson and O’Reilly (2011: 611) suggest, “the destinations chosen by lifestyle migrants tell us a lot about
the lives they wish to lead.” This brief look at the lifestyle mobilities of Clayoquot Sound has shown us that
destinations marked by relatively inclement weather attract both short-term tourists and lifestyle migrants
who seek what sun-filled destinations could easily give them: a sense of peace, relative solitude, introspective

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9 http://www.tofinotime.com/articles/A-T502-08frm.htm
calm, inspiring drama, and soporific, therapeutic relaxation. If indeed “the most renowned lifestyle migrants have chosen destinations in coastal resorts or islands in the sun,” (Benson and O'Reilly 2011: 611) and if most research has in fact followed their migration and typical places, this chapter has shown how the health and lifestyle benefits of climate vary in the rain. While the short-term and residential tourists and lifestyle migrants to Clayoquot Sound generally seek out escape, leisure, authenticity, alternative lifestyles, countercultural ideals, relaxation, idyllic connection with landscape, rejuvenation, sense of community, artistic inspiration, simplicity, and the good life not unlike their sunny and shiny counterparts do, the wetness and storminess of the local climate show us the value of understanding different lifestyle mobilities as different constellations of practices, experiences, and representations—all with different rhythms, speeds, and feels, all for different people with different personal and collective identities.

References


