

***Good Fishing off Victoria Starts Now***

**Fishing off Alaska and even much of British Columbia doesn't really get going until the summer season. Too bad, because fishing off southern BC can be good all year – surprisingly good in Victoria during March.**

“We can usually count on good fishing for halibut by the middle of March, and some years fishing is good all month,” says Adrian O'Connor of Reel Obsession Sportfishing operating out of Victoria. Fishing for this species peaks in April and May. Right now is just the beginning of the best season.

Salmon fishing for Chinook off Victoria is also coming on in March. It will be better later in the year, but fish are there to be caught, and few anglers are fishing for them during this early season. Actually, salmon season for Chinook peaks in late spring; coho follow through the summer and early fall. In March early season Chinook typically weigh from 7 to 14 pounds and some are up to 20 pounds. Mature summer fish are larger with a fair number of “tyee” in the catch (a salmon weighing more than 30 pounds is called a tyee).

For halibut, the best months are April and May, but March can be good, with fish that are smaller and the catch dominated by 15 to 35 pound chicken halibut. A few 100 pound or larger fish are caught in April and May.

***Fishing***

Halibut often lay waiting for good on the bottom, where they make a quick ambush of a bait passing overhead. Other times they follow a scent trail. Most fishing for halibut is done while at anchor by putting the bait at the peak of a 180 to 300 foot pinnacle. When that doesn't produce fish, experienced guides like O'Connor can often find these fish lying in much flats.

Tides in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where Victoria anglers fish, are very high and produce strong currents. It is almost impossible to keep a bait on the bottom at these depths in such fast flowing tides, so timing is important. Of course, tides fluctuate from high to low (or the other way around) about every six hours, so you will have good fishing some time during the day.

Salmon run 60 to 150 feet deep in spring, so trolling downriggers is the best way to get a bait or lure down to them. Many anglers use a large flasher about 25 feet behind a downrigger weight and a bait in a nose harness or a lure five to six feet behind the flasher.

O'Connor says finding schools of bait fish or krill on his fish finder is the key to finding salmon that will bite. Anglers catch fish from just off the dock at the harbor in West Sooke (a suburb of Victoria, where O'Connor berths his boat) to 10 miles from the dock in either direction. Anglers fishing out of Victoria can also find fish short distances from the harbour.

### ***Tackle***

O'Connor uses 80 pound test line when fishing for halibut and ties on a 130 – 200 pound monofilament leader. He baits up a herring, sardine, octopus, squid or a combination of these baits. When using a baitfish, he employs a double-hood rig with the front hook punched through the bait's head and the trailing hook near its tail. With baitfish he uses size 10/0J-hooks, and with oth4r bait he uses 10/0 to 12/0 circle hooks.

It takes a lot of weight to hold the bait on the bottom in the 180 to 300 foot depth where halibut are found. One-and-a-half to two-and-a-half pound weights are typical.

For salmon, he uses 15 pound test line in the winter through March and then changes to 25 to 30 pound test line as larger fish are caught in the summer months.

### ***Getting There***

Several charter boats operate out of Sooke and East Sooke, both about a half-hour drive west of Victoria, and some start their charters in the inner harbour in downtown Victoria.

Charter boats here normally take up to four people and cost \$600 to \$1,000 Canadian dollars (about \$540 to \$900 US) for a day of fishing.

You have a number of options to get to Victoria. By automobile, take a car ferry from Vancouver or Port Angeles, Washington. You can also fly directly to this city. You don't necessarily need a ferry reservation, but it does assure that you will get on the one you want.

Ferries run hourly, morning to night, from Vancouver to Victoria or Nanaimo. For reservations call (888) 223-3779 or visit [welcome@bcferries.com](mailto:welcome@bcferries.com). Reservations for the Port Angeles ferry that runs daily to Victoria can be made through [www.cohoferry.com](http://www.cohoferry.com).