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The Seductive Song of Sonora

By Lauren Kramer

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When it's flood tide in the Yuculta rapids, the whitewater is fierce and whirlpools swirl in a frenzy around the yellow zodiac. Inside this 250-horsepower vessel, passengers cling to the safety rails with a combination of awe and excitement as they bounce over and between the fast-moving currents.

We're 150 kilometers north of Vancouver in British Columbia's Calm Channel in the waters surrounding Sonora Island where the mountain faces are still thick with verdant forest and deer tread cautiously in the shadows. Bald eagles are swooping for fish around us, their white heads proudly scanning the ocean for their next meal, and as black-faced Napoleon's gulls ride the surf we're treated to the brief sight of harbour seals, their whiskered faces surfacing to check out the scene.

Sonora Rresort's ecotours are a treat that marry nature tours with adrenaline-pumping ocean rapids. Through our headphones, Aaron, our guide and captain, delivers a narrative that includes seals, birdlife, fish and the neighbours whose mansions we pass by.

"That one belongs to the Ritchie brothers – you know, the auctioneers," he says casually, pointing to a carefully landscaped mansion overlooking the water. "Look in-between the trees and you'll see the landing strip they share with the Wwashingtons of Wwashington Marine Group."

But it's impossible to be envious of such opulence when you're staying at the Sonora Rresort. One of the only luxury all-inclusive resorts in the province, Sonora is a treat for honeymooners, with plenty of outdoor excursions, decadently outfitted bedrooms, a fully stocked bar and an all-day menu where even the most casual items like salad nicoise are given pizzazz and infused with a unique style by Chef Matthew Stowe.

Later, sitting at the poolside, we're sipping iced beverages from the bar while watching the swirling currents on a hot August day. Bull kelp and opaque water hint at a rich subterranean garden, while the aromas emanating from the kitchen suggest that the night's six-course tasting menu is well underway.

Here, honeymooners dine in the Tye Lodge on Nova Scotia lobster, roasted Berkshire pork loin and a chocolate coolant with honeymilk sorbet among other delicacies. It's going to be a tasty evening for resort guests, many of whom are just starting to return from the afternoon's activities.

One group went kayaking near Rendezvous Island while another tried fishing in Denham Bay. The hiking group that crossed the bay for a guided walk on Stuart Island is discussing the beauty of the rainforest, while the spa is humming with activity as masseuses and beauticians finish up their body wraps and facials for the day. In the games room, couples are deeply involved in games of pool, shuffleboard and simulated golf.

The resort, which sits on 25 acres of this 469-square-kilometre island, was purchased five years ago by London Eenterprises, a subsidiary of the HY Louie Company. Its new owners injected \$80 million to upgrade the 20-year-old property, outfitting it with a spa, conference facilities and new lodges, and more than doubling the capacity.

We're curled up in the Yuculta Lodge, named for the rapids just beyond our window. Our room is elegantly decorated in Wwest Coast style, with a wall of river rock surrounding the gas fireplace and flat screen television, a slate-tiled bathroom with Acca Kkappa toiletries, satellite TV and a complimentary bar well stocked with alcohol, pop and munchies.

It's difficult to resist venturing into the great outdoors, though. The fishing in this region is second-to-none,

and since the resort staff takes care of every last detail, guests can just hop on board one of the Grady Wwhite speedboats and cast their lines into the water. There's a trout pond on site for those who don't have sea legs, and between the ecotours and the grizzly excursions, which are led by members of the Homalco First Nations, there's plenty of opportunity to see wildlife.

At the end of the day the resort's spa offers the ultimate place to unwind and soak in the beauty and serenity of the westcoast. I surrender to a remineralizing wrap that promises to infuse my body with a combination of sea-based elements and exotic oils like ylang ylang. Later, sunbathing by the spa's three hot mineral pools, the salty ocean breath wafts over the resort. And just beyond the dock, the swirling tides begin their frenetic dance.

If You Go:

Sonora Rresort is open May through September, with rates ranging from \$475 per couple per night in low season (May-June 15) to \$825 in high season (July to mid-September). Honeymoon packages are available with strawberries, champagne and free room upgrades. Info: www.sonoraresort.com; 888 576-6672.

Sonora Rresort is part of the Discovery Islands that include the more populated isles of Quadra and Cortes.

Getting There: There are three ways to reach the island: you can ride BC Ferries to Nanaimo, drive to Campbell Rriver and arrange a resort pickup by boat to escort you the remaining distance. Or you can fly to Campbell Rriver from Vancouver International Airport and take a boat to the island. The third and fastest option is to take a helicopter from Vancouver International directly to Sonora Rresort's heli-pad. London Air Services offers helicopters and planes that can be chartered upon request. Info: www.londonair.ca; 604 272-8123