

THE RICHMOND NEWS

Travel

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BRITISH COLUMBIA

Sonora Resort a magnificent getaway haven

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Nature lovers are in for a treat at elegant Bute Inlet all-inclusive

We are flying over Desolation Sound heading to Sonora Island; the rugged unspoiled beauty of the fjords and inlets that dot our crossing stuns us. Even though it starts to rain, it's absolutely breathtaking as we descend into Sonora Resort, just north of Campbell River within the mouth of the Bute Inlet.

On final approach, the Turbo Beaver floatplane skims across the fast swirling current to touch down and land at the Sonora Resort dock — in the famed Inside Passage of B.C.'s coast. The sheer power of the current is awe inspiring to watch. I can't believe salt water can travel so swiftly — in this inlet, it runs like a fast flowing river.

A friendly dock crew immediately greets us and the Sonora experience begins. We head into the resort where appetizers and drinks await. The staff here thinks of everything; even our fishing licenses are ready for our signatures.

Dennis and I head to our suite to drop off our bags and we smile knowingly at each other. The elegance of the room is only matched by the dazzling views offered from our large window. In the swirling tidal waters below, seals and sea lions play in the current, while the eagles soar above the nearby shores of Stuart Island. As we take in the natural beauty of the outdoors, we watch as these birds of prey swarm like flies to feast on the abundant small fish forced to the surface by the tidal rip. Sonora is a magnifi-



Sonora Resort (left) as seen from across the water on Stuart Island. A white-sided dolphin (right) leaps out of the water while swimming in a fishing boat's wake.

MICHELLE HOPKINS/RICHMOND NEWS

cent haven for nature lovers.

As tempting as it is to stay in our suite, we venture out to take a tour of the grounds. Dennis, a self-described fishing fanatic, has to find the trout pond he's heard about. It is stocked with rainbow trout and he casts his first fly with much fanfare! Catch and release is the theme of the day.

Then it is time to head to the dining room for an early dinner.

As it's an all-inclusive, the alcohol is free, but there are a number of gorgeous wines to choose from, should you want to imbibe in a more expensive bottle.

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Menu: Full of seafood options

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There's nothing better than sipping a glass of Okanagan's Mission Hill Estate cabernet sauvignon (Sonora's house wine) while overlooking some of the greatest views on the West Coast.

We can choose from the five-course gourmet menu executive chef Matthew Stowe has put together. This evening, we select from such delicacies as octopus carpac-

cio or chilled Chilliwack sweet corn veloute (a mouthwatering mix of house smoked oysters, local spot prawns, basil pistou and leek confit).

For our entrees there's Nova Scotia lobster, seared Sooke trout or potato wrapped Thiessen Farms squash chicken roulade. Dessert is a refreshing chilled summer berry consommé.

At only 27, Stowe, who trained at the world-renowned Culinary Institute of America in New York City, is a decorated chef with a newly minted cookbook, *The Tastes of Sonora Resort*.

A B.C. native, Stowe is passionate about sourcing out the freshest ingredients and as often as possible, serving local seafood on the daily a la carte menu. Suffice to say, we eat like royalty at Sonora. In fact, we had a chance to pick up some of his secrets during a three-hour, interactive cooking class. We came home armed with five new, mouth-watering recipes.

In addition to the culinary delights, the resort is a destination for the fishing warrior. Angling is a highlight for Dennis and he is privileged enough to go out twice. Although we aren't fortunate enough to catch a salmon (another guest proudly showed off his 20-pounder to us), our fishing guide, Henry, is able to find a pod of more than 100 white-sided dolphins. He slows the boat long enough

to entice the playful dolphins to frolic in our wake.

One dolphin made a full leap out of the water and Dennis captured it on film — what a rare pleasure it is to witness these intelligent mammals at play.

That night, we attempt to stay awake to enjoy a movie in the 12-seat, state-of-the-art theatre. Maybe it was the snug chairs or the fact that we had a full day, but neither of us could keep our eyes open.

The next day dawns bright and sunny. After another fabulous meal, served by staff who are literally at your beck and call — they are friendly and so helpful — we put on our sunscreen and waking shoes and head out for a hike.

(In fact, I was asking for the *Vancouver Sun* and the manager of the resort made sure it was on the next plane in).

After a two-hour hike on this otherwise undeveloped and pristine island, the grotto-style mineral pool beckons us. Perched on the side of a rock, it offers stunning views of the Yuculta Rapids and surrounding mountains. We sit and allow the minerals to soothe and rejuvenate our tired muscles.

On our final day, we take part in an Eco-tour in a high-speed RIB (rigid inflatable boat) through Desolation Sound and the Arran rapids. With us is a couple from Italy and their two children, as well as two other couples.

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Bear: Lucky few get photos

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With cameras ready, we are all eager to sight a black bear.

In broken English, our fellow Italian guest tells us with much excitement that she has spotted a small black bear on the side of the hill. The bear actually sits long enough for a lucky few to snap pictures of him before he retreats into the woods.

If that wasn't exciting enough, we watch as a few dozen eagles, perched on treetops, take flight and soar above us.

Our guide Aaron Nagler — known by the resort staff as “the voice” because he speaks beautifully and eloquently — is incredibly knowledgeable.

Throughout the guided tour, he explains the eco system and the abundance of wildlife we are feasting on.

As we go through Orford Bay, Nagler tells us the Homalco First Nations people would return here every summer to fish the abundance of chum, pink and Coho salmon that ran through here.

No trip to a resort is complete unless you have a spa treatment.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The solarium at Sonora Resort is a perfect oasis to sit and enjoy a good summer read.

Dennis and I were pampered at the deluxe Island Currents Spa at Sonora with a couples' tension-relieving massage. OK, you are probably asking yourself, “How could they possibly need a tension relieving massage?” Perhaps not, but it was blissful nonetheless.

There is so much to do here, or if you prefer, you can simply relax — and we did, in the charming and cozy solarium.

Although, we could have ordered a small

repas, we did enjoy a glass of wine while reading our novels in oh-so-comfy chairs.

As we board the float-plane heading for home, I entertain the fantasy that surely dances in the minds of every visitor who has ever visited this first-class resort — what would it be like to spend a week or more to linger in this luxurious oasis amidst a wilderness setting?

We promise ourselves that one day we will try to return.