

The Clayoquot Wilderness Resort

## SUPER AND NATURAL

BY CHRIS MCBEATH

Nature in all its glory is part of the draw for these luxurious West Coast destinations

If your meeting planning is looking for a sense of adventure, then what you'll find in British Columbia are facilities that deliver experiences as diverse as the province's topography. One-of-a-kind destinations sit on remote islands, atop mountain plateaus, beside rain forests and everything in between. Well-known destinations like the Wickaninnish Inn certainly epitomize the West Coast experience, but there are others, not so evident on the meeting planner radar screen, that deserve a look-see.

The Clayoquot Wilderness Resort is rapidly climbing to top spot on meeting agendas. Accessed only by floatplane or via a half-hour boat trip out of Tofino, this

extraordinary resort lies on the edge of the Clayoquot Biosphere reserve and offers a myriad of eco-activities and incorporates an inherent sense of eco-sensitivity in everything it does. That includes the ability to create team-building projects that support the environment, such as building a new stream for salmon to spawn or helping with bear or whale research. The resort is actually made up of two areas: a luxurious floating lodge nestled in Quait Bay and an outpost on the mouth of the Bedwell River. The lodge includes 16 bedrooms, comfortable lounges and is adjacent to an elegantly rustic spa and a self-contained, First Nations inspired cedar longhouse

meeting venue for 10 to 100 guests, complete with state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment and wireless satellite Internet. The newly expanded outpost is a half-hour boat ride away and puts guests in the very heart of B.C.'s wilderness, but with the opulent comfort of staying in a series of lavish Rockefeller-styled safari tents.

Sonora Resort, Spa and Conference Centre is another upscale, stand-alone destination. While Sonora still boasts a fleet of Grady Whites (and others) for fishing and wildlife viewing excursions, its spa, traditional longhouse and multi-room conference centre (opening this summer) make it a real getaway treat. "The world

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of Sonora really is your oyster," says Joanne Burns Millar, president of Pacific Destination Services. "Even with the recent expansion, it still has that feeling of wilderness and hasn't compromised one iota of quality. It is an amazing one-stop shop for event planners."

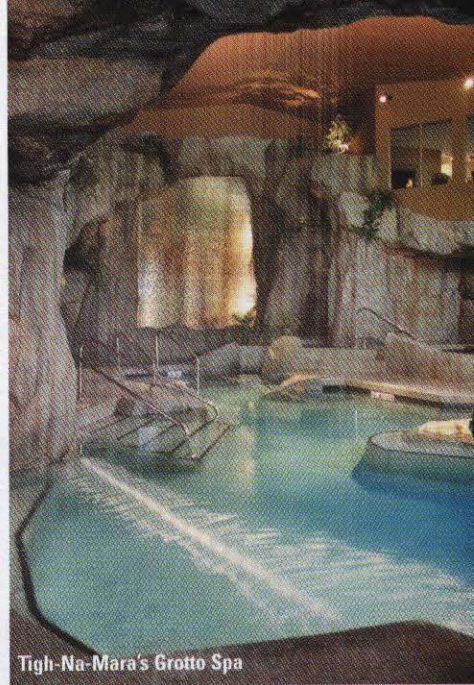
For six consecutive years, Vancouver Island has been rated the Best Island, North America by the readers of *Conde Nast Traveler*, as well as Best Island in Continental U.S. & Canada by readers of *Travel + Leisure* in its 2005 annual World's Best Awards.

In terms of gathering spots for meeting or incentive groups, one of the most exciting developments is Bear Mountain Resort, which officially raised the Westin flag at the end of January. As the island's newest premier golf resort, Bear Mountain takes its tees seriously. With its proximity to Victoria, the resort's 18-hole Nicklaus designed course is a perfect adjunct to city itineraries. The first nine holes of the second golf course should be ready by 2007. By 2008, Bear Mountain will be the first 36-hole Nicklaus designed golf resort in Canada. Meanwhile, a six-storey clubhouse opens this spring, which includes a spa, fitness studio and 6,000 square feet of divisible conference space.

For smaller groups, check out the five-star Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa, a contemporary West Coast style resort located on the waterfront just south of Victoria. A member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, Brentwood Bay has 33 guest rooms, a quality spa, and a well-equipped meeting area for up to 36 people where amenities include state-of-the-art audiovisual with large plasma screen and wireless Internet access. Floor to ceiling doors open onto an outdoor terrace, pool and garden. For a change of

pace, you might want to hold a meeting in the glass-domed eco-cruise boat that docks at the property year-round.

Tigh-Na-Mara Resort lies on 22 acres of beachfront property alongside authentic rustic log cottages, ocean-view condominiums and luxurious spa bungalows. Aside from its numerous outdoor activities – exploring Horne Lake Caves nearby is just one option – Tigh-Na-Mara's Grotto Spa is spectacular. An 8,000-square-foot addition makes it one of the largest spas in Canada. And since men now make up almost 30 per cent of all spa goers in North America, there's a real opportunity to create some dynamic unisex programs that incorporate spa health and wellness. "We were very impressed with the level of service, the food and flexibility," says Janice Karasiuk, claims manager with



Tigh-Na-Mara's Grotto Spa

ICBC Nanaimo. Karasiuk recently organized a two-day regional managers' meeting at the resort. "Our program included some leisure options and the spa was an unexpected hit – it really was one of the best experiences."

"Poets Cove on Pender Island is probably one of my new favourite secret spots," confides Vivienne Frakas, president of Rare Indigo based in Vancouver. Snuggled away on this artsy, rural southern Gulf Island, the resort has undergone

## OUT OF THE BOX LOCATIONS

- **Mission Hill Family Estate Winery** One of the earlier wineries in the Okanagan, Mission Hill has been instrumental in putting B.C. wine on the world map. The property offers a terrific lake-view location for dinner for up to 70 persons or 200 guests can enjoy an outdoor reception.
- **Red Rooster Winery** The reception area in this Naramata winery lends itself well to group gatherings not only for its quality wines but also for its ever-changing offbeat art displays. One permanent piece, "The Baggage Handler," caused such controversy when originally installed as an outdoor sculpture in Penticton, that it had to be removed. He was in need of a new home and was subsequently welcomed to the Red Rooster.
- **Sunmore Ginseng Spa in Kamloops** An offshoot to the very successful ginseng factory, this spa is better equipped than most to cater to groups. All rooms are uncommonly large, and that includes the reception area off of which you'll find a small wellness library and an Asian-style bistro where guests can enjoy various cultural tea ceremonies.
- **Rocky Mountaineer Executive Dome Car** With two new routes hitting the rails in 2006, Rocky Mountaineer enthusiasts are no longer confined to the three-day haul up to the Rockies and beyond. Now, there are shorter trips to add into your meeting mix: the Whistler Mountaineer – a three-hour experience between North Vancouver and Whistler, and the Fraser Discovery Route that travels between Whistler and Jasper, via Quesnel.
- **Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort & Spa** Overlooking Osoyoos Lake, this development is a First Nations success story. The winery, Nk'Mip Cellars, is the first of its kind in Canada and is the new hot spot for rentals – since Osoyoos is the Okanagan's desert region. Come mid-summer, there'll be additional meeting space for up to 150 people, an open-concept terrace, a full spa and an outdoor pool.

a stunning transformation in recent years, making it a quality escape for executive retreats and groups of up to 100 people. "It's all brand new with so many things to do, including a wonderful restaurant, a fantastic activity centre, a terrific spa and great outdoor areas for specialty events," Frakas enthuses. An easy and picturesque floatplane ride from both Vancouver and Victoria makes Poets Cove a good destination for day itineraries, while its accommodation – a mix of 22 guest rooms in the main lodge and multiple-room cottages and villas – can accommodate a variety of preferences.

In the heart of the Cariboo, British Columbia's cowboy country, Echo Valley Ranch Resort & Spa is one of the more unusual destinations you'll come across. Lying amidst four different geographic regions called biomes, Echo Valley's range of eco adventures are extraordinary; few places can offer landscapes of mountains and marshlands, desert canyons and boreal forests all within a batter's reach. Add a touch of Thai styling and you quickly see why Echo Valley is so interesting. Meetings take place in the modern, multi-purpose Baan Thai pavilion (the only one of its kind in North America), designed by the architect of the Thai royal family. Staff can incorporate any number of customized team-building exercises or outdoor activities or guests can enjoy the ranch's extensive spa, which showcases some of Thailand's finest healing practices. Between 26 and 40 guests stay in beautifully appointed



Echo Valley Ranch Resort & Spa

lodge accommodations or private cabins; facilities include Internet, games room, indoor pool, a fitness centre and more.

A little further north, Elysia Resort lies along the shores of Quesnel Lake, the deepest fjord lake in the world and gateway to some of the province's best lake and river fishing. But if fishing isn't a crowd pleaser, jet boating down the Mitchell River, past gold-mining ghost towns and old prospectors' shanties, is nothing short of exhilarating. "Elysia Resort is easy to get to and really is a no-brainer for us because they look after everything," says Dave Bellon, president, PriMetrica Inc., based in California. Bellon chose the resort for an outdoors-oriented executive retreat. "Everything is really comfortable – the food is fantastic – and they are able to create a perfect program to suit everyone's preferences and abilities. Many of us are urbanites so [we] rarely fish but that didn't

matter – Quille Farnham is one of the savviest and patient guides I've ever met."

Located between Kamloops and Kelowna, on the shores of the Little Shuswap Lake, The Quaaout Resort isn't always top of mind yet it offers value and a peaceful setting that's steeped in First Nations history. The 72-room resort includes several Native interpretive areas including teepees, a kekuli (winter home) and a traditional sweat lodge, all of which can be woven into a meeting program. Numerous outdoor activities such as swimming, canoeing, biking, golf, trekking and whitewater rafting are offered to round off a stay. Then there's the on-site golf course, currently under construction and scheduled to open in 2007, but with the hope that nine holes may be ready for play later this year. In keeping with the region's history, Quaaout does a good job with its native cuisine – Bird in Clay is a favourite, and the conference centre also incorporates several Native elements in its design. It provides space for up to 500 guests. And don't be surprised if Ernie Philip becomes part of your event. A professional international tribal dancer and competitor for almost 40 years, Philip is a full-blooded Shuswap Indian who is like a cultural ambassador, sharing his heritage through dance, humour and storytelling.

—Chris McBeath is a Vancouver-based freelance writer.

## WHISTLER UPDATE

With the 2010 Olympics a handful of years away, is it any wonder that Whistler is gearing up in more ways than just snow sports? New hotels include **Pan Pacific Village Centre** (August 2005) and **Adara Hotel** (January 2006); upgrades and meeting expansions include **Crystal Lodge**, **Sundial Boutique Hotel** and a complete face-lift has turned the Delta Whistler Resort into a **Hilton** property. If Whistler's on your meeting radar, the resort has a range of adventure opportunities to do your group proud, whether it's planning a party for 1,500 people some 6,000 ft. above sea level, picnicking on a glacier, or any number of backcountry adventures via ATV, snowmobile, snowcat, Hummer or 4X4. Guided tours of the glacier are still hard to beat for the ultimate executive challenge (participants are outfitted with boots, crampons, ice axe, harness and rope) and if you've not yet "zipped," Cougar Mountain's Skyline and Zipline Eco Adventures offer thrilling high-speed rides along cables through ancient cedar forests and across river canyons.