

B.C. spots help Olympics crowd relax

Here are some special B.C. spots to unwind when the Games are over

Suzanne Morphet Special to the Star

Being a spectator at a Winter Olympics isn't all fun and games. After standing on a windy ski hill or sitting in a chilly arena for hours on end, you're going to need some pampering. Here are a few places to rejuvenate that are within a two-hour drive, ferry or plane ride from Vancouver and the 2010 Olympics, which begin in just over three months.

Rockwater Secret Cove

Resort

When new owners took over this resort and built 13 luxury 'tents' they never expected them to be used year-round. After all, even B.C.'s Sunshine Coast gets some snow in winter. But 'camping' is luxurious any time of year when you've got a king-size bed, slate floors with radiant heating, a hydrotherapy tub and a fireplace.

"Guests arrive and we don't see them again," co-owner Kevin Toth says.

A 1,500-foot boardwalk winds between red-barked Arbutus trees and along a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The tent at the very end of the walkway is so popular – it's exceptionally private – it hasn't been empty a single night since June 2008.

It's tempting to stay put, but the dining room overlooking Secret Cove deserves a visit. Chef Ben Andrew buys seafood right off the boats of local fishers and each fall picks his own mushrooms.

One evening, we feasted on a seven-course dinner that included a halibut and spot prawn risotto followed by Cornish hen with gnocchi, morels and foie gras jus. Each course was paired with a local B.C. wine.

Don't miss a facial in the resort's spa with Nazigul Syms. Trained in her birth country of Kazakhstan, where facials are considered routine care, 'Gulya' will restore your skin with Eminence organic products and her own brand of massage.

www.rockwatersecretcoveresort.com

Galiano Inn and Spa

Each of B.C.'s southern Gulf Islands has its own charms. Galiano Island's are found in its white shell beaches, dramatic sandstone cliffs, sheltered bays and at its luxury resort – the Galiano Inn and Spa.

The Inn overlooks the ocean and is within walking distance of the ferry, so you don't even need a car. Rooms are spacious and equipped with real wood-burning fireplaces. Some have full kitchens and outdoor baths.

The Madrona Del Mar Spa offers a surprisingly large menu of treatments for a small resort on a tiny island. Choose from wraps, warm stone therapies, scrubs, pedicures, facials, reflexology and massage.

Some treatments are unique, such as the hemp seed sugar scrub or the chocolate butter crème wrap, where you're massaged with a combination of organic dark chocolate and shea butter, then wrapped in warm blankets.

The spa also has a mineral sea flotation bath, where you float effortlessly in a pool of warm water. The water is similar in buoyancy to the Dead Sea because it's saturated with mineral salts, but you're in a private room with soothing lights and music.

The Inn's dining room – Eat – is another delight, offering West Coast cuisine beautifully prepared with fresh organic ingredients from the island, whenever possible. The restaurant has won two gold medals for its selection of B.C. wines from small wineries.

www.galianoinn.com

Brentwood Bay Lodge

and Spa

Brentwood Bay on Vancouver Island is best-known as home of the world-famous Butchart Gardens, but now there's another reason to visit. The cedar-and-glass Brentwood Bay Lodge and Spa has just 33 rooms looking west over the Saanich Inlet.

It's small enough to be intimate, and so beautifully designed that it won a commercial real estate award when it was built. (The municipality was sufficiently impressed with the landscape at the Lodge that it hired the same designer to redesign the village's neglected main street.)

When it opened in 2004, the resort's Arbutus Grille and Wine Bar was named one of the top five "Best New Restaurants" in Canada by *enRoute* magazine and the resort's sommelier, Brian Storen, was named Sommelier of the Year.

When it's time to relax, there are lots of options: swim in the outdoor heated pool (open year-round) or head to the spa for a treatment, including a pedicure where you squeeze grapes between your toes while you sip a glass of wine.

In fact, you can visit half a dozen different wineries on the Saanich Inlet or catch the Brentwood Bay to Mill Bay ferry for more wineries on the other side of the Inlet.

The Inlet is known for its abundant marine life and clear water. Rent a kayak or go scuba diving; the lodge is an internationally accredited PADI dive resort.

www.brentwoodbaylodge.com

The Sidney Pier Hotel

and Spa

The 55-room Sidney Pier Hotel is the place to recharge in one of the most spectacular seaside communities in all of B.C.

In recent years, the town has beautified its waterfront, adding walkways, green space, flower beds and piers.

The hotel – built in 2007– is an attraction itself, with its gleaming glass walls and an outdoor café that's popular even in winter.

Most rooms have ocean views and some have balconies: Look east to snow-covered Mt. Baker in Washington state, or south to the Olympic Mountains.

Rooms come in a variety of sizes, all with elegant bathrooms and luxurious bedding. Suites boast kitchens and gas fireplaces.

On the hotel's main floor is Haven Spa. Treatments are marine-inspired and spa products are blended seasonally using fresh, local ingredients.

The menu at Haro's Restaurant + Bar is also distinctly local but changes with the seasons. The chef sources local meat, dairy, produce and the freshest seafood possible.

Make time to visit the new \$8-million Ocean Discovery Centre next door to the hotel and see the amazing diversity of life in the ocean off Sidney.

www.sidneypier.com