

## Into the Wild

Written by Story by Darcy Jo Gaugler

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The Sunshine Coast, an untamed stretch of coastline in Canada, oozes with beauty and adventure. But experiencing it doesn't have to mean hauling backpacks and tent poles.

Touchdown in the Canadian wilderness is via floatplane. Skidding across the bay at Pender Harbor, it's an Indiana Jones-style entrance. Fittingly, our pilot is a laid-back young man, whose every word seems to hint at a playful joke.

Even though it's a mere 40 miles northwest of Vancouver, the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia feels remote. Vancouver is but a bunny hop from the U.S. border (you can almost smell the coffee wafting in from Seattle), yet the area feels refreshingly international.

Nature reigns on the 50-mile coastline that makes up the Sunshine Coast. Civilization has opted not to conquer Mother Nature here. In this region, she's untamed and wild—the undisputed queen of the landscape. I am instantly humbled, feeling smaller and calmer.

But I'm no camper. The chances of me pitching a tent by the bay and eating soggy noodles cooked by a camp stove are nearly nil. Likewise, forgoing the wilderness for the concrete walls of a trendy boutique hotel seems a waste. Luckily, the perfect balance of luxury and nature can be found at the Rockwater Secret Cove Resort in Halfmoon Bay. There, 13 "tenthouse suites" award nature seekers with plush, though canvas, accommodations amid the tangled forest overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Accessible by a 1,500-ft. treetop boardwalk meandering through the arbutus trees, a unique private tent awaits. The downside is that once you crack the door to your mini paradise (with a nearly 360-degree view due to ample windows), you may never want to leave. Imagine comfy down duvets on a king-size bed, heated slate floors, a propane fireplace, a rain shower, chic shoji screens and a hydrotherapy tub (your front seat to an ocean view). There's also a deck with cozy chaises and chairs.

Kevin Toth, who co-owns the resort along with business partner Peter Ruben, told me that sometimes guests check in, hole up with books or loved ones, and then don't show themselves again until checkout time, sometimes days later.

But for some, adventure beckons.

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As a desert dweller in awe of copious amounts of water and greenery, I opted for total immersion. On an approximately three-hour kayak trip outfitted and guided by Halfmoon Sea Kayaks, the boats silently cut through the ocean water as we paddled along. Near the end, we all stopped in reverence when a brilliant sunset turned the whole sky lavender. The giant mountains in the distance were a deep, bruised purple, complemented by fire-orange sunbeams.

I filled my remaining days with some of Rockwater's other activities, sailing and hiking in an old-growth cedar forest with a knowledgeable naturalist guide. Some of my travel companions went mountain biking. (Tip: Spend the extra money to use the recommended guides for these activities. Because of their knowledge and skill, they add significant depth to the experiences.) Other activities nearby include golf, horseback riding, fishing and excellent boat tours of the area provided by Sunshine Coast Tours.

But after too much time in the wild wild west of Canada, city dwellers can find some reprieve at the resort's on-site spa, which has a boutiquey, airy feel. All treatments use Éminence, a 100-percent-organic product line from Hungary. Top off your customized facial with a signature massage in the "spa without walls," where the sounds of the waves and the expert talents of the masseuses will quickly rejuvenate adventure-weary travelers.

After meandering through the charming nearby towns of Sechelt, Roberts Creek and Gibsons, you can toss your shopping bags in your suite and head to the resort lodge for a much-needed fine-dining feast (not to mention a magnificent view). Prepare to get spoiled rotten by the West Coast fusion menu cooked up by Executive Chef Stephen Ewing. Fill your wine glass and stuff yourself with delectable dishes that include delights like tender Pacific halibut (caught just offshore the day before), fresh prawns and wild woodland mushrooms. Most of the ingredients used are organic and locally grown or raised.

Once you've hit a vacation-perfect blend of tired and tipsy, float back to your tenthouse suite and completely relax body and mind in a bath illuminated by tea-light candles. Then let the sound of the soft wind in the trees, the soothing waves and the gentle flapping of the canvas lull you to sleep in your übercomfy bed. When you awake in the soft yellow light of morning to a panorama of the larger-than-life landscape, a feeling of peace is sure to ensue.

As the floatplane lifted off the calm waters of the Sunshine Coast to depart, I watched the glassy, midnight-blue ocean below and the miles of untouched wilderness. Hanging out amid

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the calm and quiet, I was reminded that life can be so much simpler than what we make of it. Then I realized: Simplicity is a choice. And I choose to bring it home with me.

Book It to Canada

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