

Left Coast Luxury
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The Pender Islands are just a short distance away from Victoria. It takes us forty-five minutes by BC Ferries through Moresby Passage. On our way, we pass through Swanson Channel, which is frequented by three local pods of Killer Whales, especially between May and September. Linda and I keep a keen eye out for them as we watch the incredible scenery go by. After our quick Ferry ride, we dock at Otter Bay on Pender Island, or the “Penders” as the locals call these Islands. *Note: put your cursor on the pictures to find out what you are looking at!*



From Hope Bay, we travel by car to Poet’s Cove. Pender is mostly rural with only one significant housing development, Magic Lake Estates.



The two Penders (north and south) were once joined by a wide neck of land known as the Indian Portage. A narrow canal was dredged in 1903 to benefit steamship travel through the Gulf Islands. The islands remained separated until a one-lane bridge was built in 1955. The bridge crosses over one of the most scenic parts of the Penders.

After a fifteen kilometer drive, we’re in the “lap of luxury” at Poets Cove. At the reception desk, we meet some super-friendly and accommodating staff. Curiously, I ask a number of the staff, “Why is the resort called Poet’s Cove?”

Over the next two days, no one can come up with an answer, but the stunning beauty, incredible architecture, design and furnishings, the peacefulness and serenity of the resort make it easy to accept the name. Poets would understand and so will you!

As we explore the resort, we uncover a feeling of warmth and comfort. The design and construction help create that special feel. The solid wood, granite and stone and soft colours blend together perfectly. The result is a

welcoming atmosphere of warmth and comfort, just like home! The staff are ultra-friendly and the amenities superb! There are three types of accommodation at the resort, the largest being the Villas, next the cottages, and the smaller, but more than adequate Lodge rooms.

Each of the accommodations is superbly decorated and has all the amenities you will ever need. All of them have views of the Marina and Bedwell Harbour. It's easy to see why any poet worth her weight in salt would find this beautiful, romantic, and comfortable resort truly inspirational. The resort combines European class with West Coast charm and the result is nothing short of phenomenal.



Going the extra mile is evident in the design and construction (heated bathroom floors, solid wood doors, wooden blinds, bedside fireplace, granite counter tops, private hot tubs and more) to the welcome card, chocolate truffles, individual bathroom toiletries, and specially folded towels. Our cottage has a deck heater, barbeque and hot tub. We find it easy to complete the exit survey that's on our dining table. It feels like someone really cares.

Our resort stay would not be a resort stay without a treatment in the Spa, so we book a massage and a pedicure in the *Susurrus Spa*. *Susurrus* means a "whispering sound." The Spa is spacious with six treatment rooms and is tastefully decorated in soft sage and olive green. The spa is professionally managed. Outside on the deck is a sandstone steam cave complete with a large waterfall and a Jacuzzi at the bottom. Service choices include facials, body wraps, body polishing, manicures, pedicures, massage and beauty treatments. We head in to get relaxed and indulged. As we emerge afterward, almost simultaneously, we can see the contentment on each other's face.



After a dip in our private hot tub, we spend a restful night in our cottage overlooking the marina. We awake the next morning and head for breakfast at the *Aurora Restaurant*. This dining room is luxurious and the staff is very attentive. The breakfast is excellent, serving some of the best “bennies” on the west coast! Later that night we return for dinner and “wow” what a dinner! Our waiter, Andres, provides great insight into the menu. We follow his suggestions and are rewarded with a superb meal. As we sit in front of a warm fire, sipping superb red wine, with Andres serving us excellent food, it’s easy to tell we were at a first class resort! Everything about Poets Cove is first class.



A visit to the activity centre surprises us with what is available at Poet’s Cove. Past experiences have provided us with nearby whale-watching and fun visits with the resident Dahl’s Porpoises that play just outside Bedwell Harbour. The activity centre offers whale watching, eco-tours, vineyard tours, fishing, sailing, scuba diving and kayaking. The resort has two swimming pools and a well-equipped fitness centre as well.

In addition, the Pender Islands also have lots of activities to offer. Island activities that we discover include golf, disc-golf, hiking, swimming, beach-combing, cycling, kayaking and canoeing, and visits to the myriad of crafters and artisans living on the Penders. You can ask for a brochure to locate all of the artists and galleries here. To rub shoulders with the locals, check out the community centre. Often there is one type of fair or another going on and they are very entertaining. We are surprised at what we find at the Christmas Craft fair! There are also close to forty beaches to explore on the Penders. It is hard to imagine being bored here.

In the summer, many of the people who come to Poet’s Cove travel by private boat. Travel to the island is available by BC Ferry, float plane or water taxi. The marina is fairly quiet during our off-season stay. Most of the guests we encounter came by Ferry.

Although our stay has nothing to do with the Marina, except for providing a wonderful backdrop to our accommodations, we find that it is one of the top-ten anchorages in the Western Hemisphere complete with a hundred and

ten deep water slips for boats up to a hundred feet. It's also the site of a Canada Customs office for boater convenience. The marine store stocks books, charts, basic boating items, and the market where boaters can purchase meat, fresh baked goods and produce. There is a Laundromat and showers available as well and boaters can use the pool and hot tub. There is also a barbeque area outside on the patio. Retail clothing is also available. Seems like Poet's Cove has thought of everything - no surprise to us!



To complete our visit to the Penders, we visit a number of businesses. The first is "Blood Star Gallery." We'd noticed Susan Taylor's and Frank Ducote's artwork in the dining lounge at Poet's Cove, so we have to check out their gallery. The gallery is on the south end of Pender Island and has incredible views of Mount Baker, truly an inspirational setting. Paintings, drawings and folk art by Susan Taylor and Frank Ducote are inspired by the sea and their island surroundings.



We check out a couple of Bed and Breakfasts next. Frank and Michelle Hiebert, the new owners of Sahhali Oceanfront Luxury Bed and Breakfast enthusiastically showed us the renovations to their spectacular accommodation high on Oak Bluff with incredible views. The suites they offer and the cottage that is available are second to none on the Island.

Then Carol Hoffmann, the amiable hostess at “Ferndale B&B” was most gracious to show us her place even though she had a full house of guests. Spacious bedrooms and a comfy guest lounge are the highlights of this B&B.

Next, we travel to the Northeast shore to “A Place of Your Own” B&B, operated by Ken and Jean Daley, very friendly hosts. This accommodation has a private suite on the lower floor with a private entrance. It looks out on Navy Channel and has a deck near the water for kayak or canoe storage. It is a great place to kayak as it faces a protected channel where Mayne Island is very accessible.

Then we stop by “Renaissance Gallery”, a great place to purchase some unique homemade jewelry or search for unusual antiques. Then we’re on to Peter & Tessa Emmings’ Arcadia by the Sea, an older resort with a heated pool, hot tub and tennis court and a few small cabins. This would be a great place for a family vacation. We stop by Hope Bay Marina to observe where Pender Island Kayak operates from. This is a great little protected spot to launch a kayak adventure. We stop by the Pender Island Pharmacy at the Driftwood Centre. In addition to fulfilling our pharmacy needs, we find this to be a very well stocked little store, with something for everyone. I know my wife would not get out of here



without a few purchases. I buy a newspaper; she buys some novel Christmas

After our day of exploring the Penders, locals direct us to the **Islander Restaurant**, on North Pender near the Ferry Dock, for dinner. This quaint little restaurant in a renovated house on the water serves exceptional food. Georgina, the owner, is a first-rate chef and a superb hostess. During the off season she makes a real effort to bring the community together. Some of her events include a “guest chef” night, “starving artist” night and a pajama party. Visiting tourists are welcome at these events. Our meal is delicious and the deserts are divine. Sadly, the next day we head for the ferry dock to head back to Victoria. For years I have been hearing about the very special hamburgers served at “The Stand” at the Ferry Dock. Believe me, I am not disappointed. It’s one of those delicious hamburgers that you have to gnaw away at the side of because you could never get your mouth open that wide. This more than fills the bill for lunch and we are on our way home.



The Penders have a warm sub-Mediterranean climate, lots of parks and hiking trails and almost forty beach access points. South Pender Island has only about 10% of the population, is less settled, has fewer roads and lots of natural unspoiled vegetation. Poets Cove is on South Pender.

North Pender has most of the population. There is no town center, but there is a small shopping area (Driftwood Centre) with a gas station, restaurants, a grocery store, a drug store, liquor store, bank, bakery and a few other businesses. North Pender has lots of open farmland, rolling hills, lakes and lots of forested areas.

These two islands are great for family vacations, weekend getaways, romantic interludes, business seminars, weddings, and retreats. The islands have a combined population of around 2000 and this doubles in the summer

when seasonal residents arrive.

Things to do while you are on the Pender Islands:

1. Get a map and explore the many craft shops, art studios, and private galleries that are dispersed throughout the islands.
2. On Saturdays, shop for local produce and crafts at the Farmer's Market at the Community Centre.
3. Bring your kayak to the Penders. If you launch at Bedwell Bay on South Pender or Medicine Beach on North Pender, you will have about a 30 minute paddle to Beaumont Marine Park. You can also launch at Grimmer Bay, Port Browning, Miracle Beach, Gowlland Point at the foot of Craddock Road, and Hope Bay Marina. There are nearby islands that you can kayak to. From north Pender to Mayne Island is about 20 minutes. Kayak tour and rental services are available at Poet's Cove and at Hope Bay Marina.
4. Pender Island has a 9 hole golf course and also a Disc Golf Course.
5. There are close to 40 beach accesses for you to explore and enjoy on the Penders. Mortimer Spit is one of the best beaches and it is located close to the bridge between the islands. It is a beautiful spot and is used infrequently. One of the most popular spots is Hamilton Beach on North Pender at Port Browning. Travel via Bedwell Bay Road south from the ferry dock to reach Hamilton Beach. There is a pub, café and picnic tables at Port Browning, so expect more people. Try Razor Point beach by following Razor Point Road east of Port Browning. If you want warmer water, go to Magic Lake or find the pristine Roe Lake. On the south end of Pender there is a beach park at Gowlland Point. It is a pebble beach with scenic views of the San Juan Islands, the Olympic Mountains across Juan de Fuca Strait, Monarch Head on Saturna Island and the majestic Mount Baker rising up in Washington State, just south of Vancouver, BC.
6. There are lots of hiking trails on the Penders. One of the best viewpoints can be found by hiking up the trail at Mount Norman Regional Park. Take Canal Road west where it divides and continue a short distance to the trailhead. From the trailhead it is a steep walk uphill along an old logging road. Make sure you go on a clear day so you're not disappointed with the view. At the top you will find an observation platform with a bench where you can rest. The views from here are to the west and spectacular. Other trails can be found at Magic Lake Estates, Mt. George, Mt. Menzies, and Oak Bluffs.

Be sure you ask lots of questions while you're on the Penders. Try to find a

way to get out on the water so you can truly enjoy the benefits of island life. Sail, boat, kayak, scuba dive or go whale watching, but be sure to get out on the water!

P.S. If you don't already know, the west coast of Canada is often referred to (in jest) as the "left coast."

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