

THE SIDNEY WATERFRONT EXPERIENCE

by Lisa Cole

Unlike some people who seem to breeze through the process of getting their wisdom teeth out, I had a difficult time of it. My face swelled to twice its normal size and the pain was unbearable. And, as soon as I started feeling better, I had to catch up with several project deadlines. Needless to say, when the work was done, I was feeling frazzled. I needed to get away for a day, to unwind and let my face heal. Luckily, I live in Victoria, BC, where one doesn't have to go far to escape the busyness of city life. When Sidney's Waterfront Inn, Ocean Palm Spa, and Beacon Landing Pub teamed up to offer me a twenty-four hour getaway, I took them up on it.



**Sidney Waterfront Inn
and Beacon Landing Restaurant**
Photo Courtesy of the Sidney Waterfront Inn



Deluxe Waterfront Rooms
Cannery Building - Sidney Waterfront Inn
Photo Courtesy of the Sidney Waterfront Inn

Sidney by the Sea is a beautiful little seaside town on the Saanich Peninsula of Vancouver Island, just twenty minutes from Victoria. With its laid-back, leisurely pace, it makes for the perfect escape, whether you're coming from Vancouver or Victoria, Seattle or Los Angeles, or anywhere!

The Sidney Waterfront Inn has been a family-owned business since 1963, when the Paquette family purchased the old Hotel Sidney and surrounding properties. It has undergone many transformations over the years. My room is in the "Cannery Building," a recent re-addition to the Inn. The old cannery stood in this very same spot back in the early to mid 1900's. Run by JJ White, the clam cannery was very successful and exported worldwide. It was such a source of pride and joy for Sidney that, after 1914, the locals celebrated a festive "clam week" every year.

Denis Paquette rebuilt the Cannery in 2004 and now it's home to ten gorgeous rooms with oceanfront balconies, not to mention several businesses - including the Ocean Palm Spa and Beacon Landing Pub.

My room is cozy and inviting. The ocean view fills my window to overflowing. Outside, the wind picks up, ruffling the waves. Across the water, Washington's snowcapped Mt. Baker is so clear that I feel like I can reach out and touch it.



My Room
Photo by Ron Kirstein

My room's green, gold, and burgundy colour scheme is so warm and cozy that I just want to curl up in the King-size bed and take a nap. There's a hideaway sofa-bed for extra guests, a fireplace, a well-equipped kitchenette, a flat screen TV and a DVD player. The bathroom has a large jetted soaker tub with a window that overlooks the room as well as the view outside.

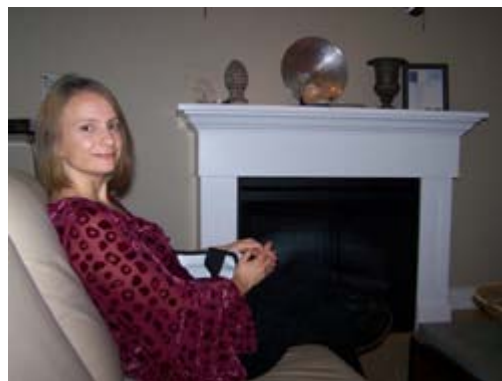
I unpack my things and set out for the Ocean Palm Spa, just down the hall.



Making Tea in my Kitchenette
Photo by Ron Kirstein

The *Peninsula News* Reader's Choice recently voted the Ocean Palm as "Number 1 Spa on the Peninsula," and last year, *Canadian Geographic* listed it as Number 4 of all the top spas in Canada.

When I walk through the doorway, I feel like I'm suddenly in another world. The lighting is soft and easy on the eyes. Gentle music is playing. I feel like I've stepped out of time. Everyone seems to be moving in slow motion.



Ocean Palm Spa Lounge
Photo by Ron Kirstein

I settle back on the sofa in the Lounge. I sip my tea, warmed by the fireplace. Co-owner Lesley Langfield greets me. She has opened several spas across Vancouver Island, including "The Grotto" at Tigh Na Mara Resort in Parksville, one of the most notable spas on Vancouver Island, aside from the Ocean Palm.

Lesley tells me that Denis Paquette approached her and co-owner Chris Wootton in 2004 when he was rebuilding the Cannery, saying he was hoping to include a Spa in the new building – would they be interested in opening one? That was the Ocean Palm's genesis. Well received from day one, each year it is getting busier.



Spa Director Lesley Langfield gives me a Tour

Photo by Ron Kirstein

The green and gold tones of the Inn have followed me in here; but, in this gentle lighting, it's as if all is underwater. Everything flows. Beautiful artwork adorns the walls, including life-like male and female torso sculptures by Miles Lowry, made from cast fiber and painted in oceanic green hues.

In the changing room, I find a gift of Ocean Palm Hydrating Lotion and Body Wash in my locker. There is a card from Lesley: "Welcome Lisa, may your experience at Ocean Palm Spa be extra special." Over the years, I have visited and written about many travel and tourism-related businesses across the Island, but I don't think I've ever been welcomed with so much hospitality and kindness.



With Massage Therapist, Loretta Pedersen

Photo by Ron Kirstein

I change into a bathrobe and slippers and lock up my belongings. Lesley introduces me to Loretta Pedersen, my massage therapist for the afternoon.

Loretta is a holistic practitioner certified in Jin Shin D Acupressure, LaStone Therapy, and Jade Therapy Stone Massage. I'm in for the "Ocean Palm Oceanic Experience," with a few generous upgrades – a Jade Stone massage and a Hydradermie Plus facial.

I can't wait to get started.

My treatment begins with sea salt exfoliation, then Loretta applies a Spirulina body mask. My skin absorbs the lavish application of protein, minerals, and nutrients as I lie swaddled in a “cocoon” of blankets. It is so warm and snug in here, I don’t know if I’ll ever want to come out.

Loretta gives me a neck and facial massage, spending a little extra time on my face after I tell her about my recent wisdom tooth extraction. *Ahhh...*



Soaking up the Spirulina Body Mask
Photo by Loretta Pedersen

I shower to rinse off the Spirulina mask (there is a shower in my treatment room – how convenient!), then Loretta recommences with the Jade Stone Massage. Life is good!

“Jade is the stone of the heart, of compassion,” Loretta tells me. The smooth green stones are heated and chilled. The extreme temperatures work together to draw out tension, especially the area between my shoulder blades. As Loretta works, I drift in and out of a blissful sleep.

Afterwards, Loretta introduces me to Tasmin Dhanowa, a very skilled esthetician who will be doing my facial and pedicure. Tasmin leads me into the Facial Room with all of its high-tech equipment. I must admit, I have never been much of a facial fan, believing my skin is too sensitive to handle too much attention all at once. Relaxed by my massage, however, I set these preconceptions aside and entrust myself to Tasmin’s capable hands.

Tasmin tells me the Hydradermie Facial is the “Rolls Royce” of facials, a favourite of Oprah’s. It utilizes electro-therapy and high frequency in order to ionize and oxygenate the skin, allowing for maximum penetration of natural softening agents. The Hydradermie Plus treatment also includes eye, lip, and neck rejuvenation. As I sit back and enjoy the ride, the memory of my wisdom tooth trauma fades away altogether. When I look in the mirror later, it’s as if the past ten years have been lifted from my face. Wrinkles and dull skin are gone, replaced by a shining, radiant complexion. My old opinion of facials has dissolved along with the old skin. I’m hooked!

Tasmin leads me to the Pedicure area where several massage chairs sit in a row, separated by billowy white curtains for privacy (or to envelop groups that come here to share the experience). I sit near the glass fountain and Tasmin brings me another cup of herbal tea. The sound of running water soothes me as my feet soak in a warm sea bath. The chair massages my back as Tasmin treats my feet to a vigorous salt scrub, shapes my cuticles, and rubs away my calluses. She wraps my happy feet in a warm Spirulina mask and gives me an aromatic foot and lower leg massage. Then, she removes the mask and finishes off by polishing my toenails.



Pedicure Area
Photo by Ron Kirstein



Happy Feet at the Ocean Palm Spa
Photo by Lisa Cole

When it's all over, I can't seem to get out of my chair. I'm so relaxed that I feel like I have no bones left. I think I might need someone to wheel me back to my room. Fortunately, it's just down the hall. There's no need to change into my street clothes; I keep my bathrobe and slippers on and slip down the hall. I take a nap in front of my fireplace...

I wake up feeling refreshed and renewed and hungry. I get dressed and head for the Beacon Landing Pub for dinner.

Outside, a storm is brewing. Rain pelts down. The wind swirls autumn leaves around. Once again, I'm grateful that I don't have very far to go. Inside the Pub, the soft golden lights and large fireplace warm me. The smell of hot food makes my mouth water. There's a large, horseshoe-shaped bar, mahogany and wicker chairs. Very romantic! I sit in a comfy booth that overlooks Sidney Harbour. White-capped waves are crashing on the sand.

Toya, my waitress, brings me a glass of Merlot to sip as I study the menu. Seafood and Italian recipes are the Beacon Landing's specialties, and they have lots more to offer as well. I order the Baked Maui Onion soup as an appetizer. It arrives in the blink of an eye. Very tasty. Then it's on to the Shitake and Basil Stuffed Chicken Breast with lemongrass red curry and coconut sauce. Scrumptious!



Beacon Landing Pub
Photo by Lisa Cole



Jetted Tub with View to Room and Ocean
Photo Courtesy of Sidney Waterfront Inn

Back in my room, I light candles in the bathroom and take a long bath. I watch the storm outside the window. Lights flicker on the water, threatening to go out. Later, I fall asleep to the sweet music of storm waves drumming on the beach.

I awake to a calm ocean. The clouds open and the sun beams down for a moment. It's as if Heaven has come to Earth. I open my door and find a breakfast basket outside, stuffed with fruit, yogurt, juice, muffins, and today's paper. I drink tea and munch breakfast with my patio door open, watching the sights. Seagulls are fishing. Sooty black cormorants preen and stretch their wings. A seal's head emerges from the rippling water, then disappears.



Breakfast Basket full of Goodies
Photo by Lisa Cole



The Morning Sun Beams through the Clouds
Photo by Lisa Cole

I go for a long walk along the Waterfront. I wander up Beacon Avenue and stop at the bustling Bakery to pick up a few goodies. I visit the armistice display at the Sidney Museum and chat with the delightful volunteers. I window shop at the bookstores, wanting to linger a little longer in this place of gentle pace.

By check-out time, I feel like a new person. I've been here for less than twenty-four hours, but I feel like I've been here for a week. My skin feels soft, shiny, and new - like baby skin (almost). I feel rested and lulled by the rhythms of the sea. Staying at the Inn, luxuriating at the Spa, dining at the Pub . . . all have combined to create the ultimate "transformative" experience. I return to Victoria with renewed vigour and zest for life, ready to take on the world. I look forward to my next visit to Sidney by the Sea.

Packages and Gift Certificates

When you check into the Sidney Waterfront Inn, you'll receive a complimentary \$10 Voucher to redeem at Ocean Palm Spa.

Christmas is just around the corner! The Sidney Waterfront Inn and Ocean Palm Spa offer great Gift Cards to make Christmas shopping easy.

For more information, visit:

Sidney Waterfront Inn and Suites:

<http://www.hotelsidney.com/>

Ocean Palm Spa:

<http://www.oceanpalmspa.com/>

Beacon Landing Pub:

<http://www.beaconlanding.net/>