

“House by the Sea” A Parksville Paradise

Tigh-Na-Mara Resort

by Ron Kirstein, Edited by Linda Kirstein

Christmas and New Year’s Eve are over and it is time to get back to business. We decide to visit Tigh-Na-Mara Resort near Parksville to discover yet another Vancouver Island get-away. As we travel the Malahat Drive there is a blanket of fog over Saanich Inlet and we stop at Split Rock Lookout. The view is mystical. Trees and mountaintops peak above the thick fog bank, so white that it looks like an alpine snow field. What a gorgeous sight!



**Meeting at the Beach – Photo Courtesy
of Tigh-Na-Mara Resort**

We arrive a bit earlier than expected to be greeted by a delightful young lady at the reception desk. She advises us that our room will be available shortly, so we walk through the Gift Shop to check out the beautiful Cedar Room, the Copper Lounge and the spacious, well equipped Conference Centre. It accommodates up to 300 guests in 13 meeting rooms. I can’t imagine a better place to hold a workshop or conference. After a short time, our room is ready. We get our first taste of how

professionally Tigh-Na-Mara is operated. A pocket guide of “Resort Information and Maps” fits in my shirt pocket and unfolds to reveal maps, dining and Grotto Spa information, attractions, local Parksville and Qualicum Beach information, and more... very impressive!

We drive a short distance through the beautifully treed property past individual cottages. Our destination is the low rise beach-front Gabriola condominium. The 22 acre property is enormous yet you are never very far from access to 3 kilometres of sandy Rath Trevor Beach with the warmest ocean swimming available in Canada. There are 192 traditional log constructed accommodations with 50 Spa Bungalows, 41 Private Log Cottages, 12 Forest View Studio Units and 89 Oceanfront Condominiums.



The Gabriola Beach Front Condo

We are greeted by a complimentary bottle of wine, chocolates and more information about the resort, first class treatment indeed.

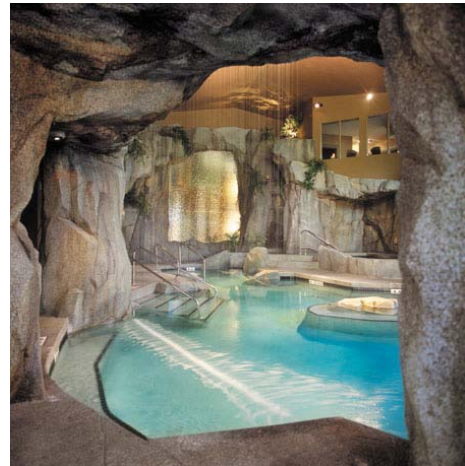


The condo is spacious and includes a living room area with wide screen TV and gas fireplace, comfy couches, kitchen, dining table, Jacuzzi tub, king-size bed, bathroom with walk-in shower, and all the amenities we need. Our balcony overlooks Craig Bay, with views of Texada, Lesqueti, and Balenas Islands. Be sure to be up early for a spectacular sunrise.

Our View Room
Photo Courtesy of Tigh-Na-Mara

We are off to our appointments in the Grotto Spa. Linda chooses a Coastal Wonder Pedicure and I choose the hour-long massage. We are greeted

by the Spa Manager who checks us in. A staff member takes us to the locker rooms and gives us a detailed explanation of what to expect. We are advised to take advantage of the Mineral Pool, with minerals imported from Hungary, before we go to our treatments. Inside our lockers, we find a warm comfy robe, sandals, a towel, lotions to use after the soak, and even a small plastic bag for our wet bathing suits - they think of everything! The locker rooms are also equipped with everything you might need to use afterwards... designer shampoo, conditioner, body lotion, hair products, hair dryers and irons too!



The Grotto Mineral Pool
Photo Courtesy of Tigh-Na-Mara



The Tree Top Lounge
Photo Courtesy of Tigh-Na-Mara

The Grotto Spa is amazing and stunning. The 20,000 square feet make it the largest resort spa in British Columbia. The Spa emulates a natural stone grotto and contains a wall of gently cascading water, an invigorating glacial plunge cascade waterfall, a small hot pool and the main feature, a 2,500 square foot mineral pool that detoxifies and rejuvenates. After our soak, we are directed upstairs to the 3rd floor Tree Top Lounge to relax and enjoy coffee, teas, water and fresh fruit. The atmosphere is gentle. Adjoining is the Treetop Tapas & Grill and a separate

lounge for ladies only. While relaxing, I complete my health screening form for my therapist. In a short while Reighlynn and Ivy, our treatment staff arrive to greet us and take us to our respective treatment rooms. Ivy, my massage therapist reviews my medical information, asks a few pertinent questions and then begins to weave her magic. Magic fingers, warm towels, scented oils and sprays and beautiful calming surroundings quickly transform me to something akin to butter under a heat lamp. The downside to a great massage is that it has to end. After the massage, my voice drops an octave telling me how well it worked. The resort advertises “experiences that go beyond the expected” and they do deliver! I go back to the lounge to meet Linda. Her pedicure includes an additional hand and arm massage. She



The Tree Top Tapas Lounge and Grill
Photo Courtesy of Tigh-Na-Mara

thoroughly enjoys herself and describes Reighlynn, her aesthetician as very professional and easy to talk to. We enjoy a cup of tea and relax awhile before returning to our condo.



Ron enjoying the view

The sun is shining and it is 12 degrees

C while we enjoy the views from our third floor deck. Since it is January, we hardly expect this weather. We wonder what the rest of Canada is doing. Actually, we know what the rest of Canada is doing. If there was a choice, they would be with us, for sure.

After enjoying a glass (or two!) of wine, we are off to the Cedar Room for dinner. Our professional server Jennifer is knowledgeable and attentive and she makes some great suggestions. She recommends a British Columbia wine, Cedar Creek Merlot. Jennifer



Great food is on the menu
Photo Courtesy of Tigh-Na-Mara

brings us some warm, fresh and delicious multigrain bread accompanied by sundried tomato butter, and this is just to get our palette warmed up. Then we make our first mistake of the day. We both order scallops. Linda tells me we should each order different appetizers for variety and share! As I taste my scallops, I tell her that I am not prepared to share something this good. The scallops are superb and cooked perfectly to order. Each plate has four large scallops on a bed of sweet potato puree with a richly seasoned diced apple glaze. For my main course, I choose a sirloin steak in 5 peppercorn sauce with garlic mashed potatoes and seasonal veggies, topped artistically with crispy fried onions. Linda chooses a perfect medium rare bacon wrapped beef tenderloin with garlic mashed potatoes and baby carrots. There is not a scrap left on either plate!

Now that we are satiated, I agree to share two desserts. We pick a lemon flan with fresh fruit and a chocolate espresso bombe. Both desserts are delicious. We start with the lemon flan because we anticipate the bombe will overpower the lemon taste. The lemon curd is sublime and the fruit is fresh. The bombe is “explosive” and thoroughly delectable. At this point, we could share our desserts with two other people, but we don’t.

The food is well worth a return visit with ample quantities and friendly, professional service. The surroundings are warmly decorated and comfortable. We sample restaurant meals all over Vancouver Island and we often wonder if the next one can get any better. It does at Tigh-Na-Mara.

We are back in our room and anticipate a good night’s sleep after such a relaxing and wonderful day. We crack open the balcony door to capture the sound of gentle waves lapping against the shore. Life is good. We are off to sleep.

I wake early to catch the sunrise, but alas, it is a cloudy but warm day. We are off to the Cedar Room for breakfast. Trevor, our server is cheerful and helpful for so early in the morning. Every staff member we encounter on our stay is so friendly, polite and approachable. We are truly impressed. This surely reflects well on the management of the resort.



Chocolate Espresso "Bombe"
Photo Courtesy of Tigh-Na-Mara

Linda chooses a Farmer Mornay and I choose the Tigh-Na-Mara “Big Breakfast”. Mistake number two. There is enough food for a basketball team. It includes a pancake, fried potatoes, two Hillier (local) sausages, two strips of bacon, toast and two eggs. It comes on a platter almost as wide as the table. Talk about having ‘eyes bigger than your stomach’. The multigrain pancake is Frisbee-sized. Needless to say, I go down in flames. It is very good and I truly enjoy what I can eat. Linda’s delicious Mornay includes poached eggs with sautéed Portobello mushroom, tomato and spinach in a Mornay sauce on a split scone with yummy fried potatoes and fresh fruit.



Scenic Golf Course Nearby

After breakfast, we revisit the Grotto for another divine soak in the mineral pool. It gives us time to reflect on the amazing time we have had at Tigh-Na-Mara. Although our stay is only overnight, we both feel like we have been here for a couple of days. It is a memorable experience that will remain with us until we can next visit.

From previous trips to the Parksville area, we know there are lots of fun things to see and do. The resort can keep guests busy with an indoor pool and fitness centre, the Grotto Spa, yoga classes, tennis, basketball, walks on the beach, swimming in the ocean, relaxing along the shore, walking and cycling trails, oyster picking, barbeques and much more.



Spectacular View of Mt. Arrowsmith from Little Mountain

You can golf at a number of nearby golf courses, spelunk at the Horne Lake Caves, tour the beautiful Milner Gardens, absorb the spectacular views at Little Mountain, kayak, sail, fish, walk through old-growth trees at Cathedral Grove, visit the spectacular falls at Little Qualicum & Englishman Rivers, and visit the Coombs Country Market (the best little tourist trap in the world), where you can't

leave until you try a cone from their massive ice cream bar.



Coombs Country Market Ice Cream Bar

Tigh-Na-Mara is Gaelic for “House by the Sea”. Start planning *your visit* to this Parksville Paradise today. You won't be disappointed!