

"ABOVE AND BEYOND- THE AERIE LUXURY RESORT"

By Ron Kirstein

Just 30 minutes north of Victoria, high atop the Malahat Mountain, sits a world renowned resort. "Aerie", by definition, is the nest of a large bird, such as an eagle, built on a cliff or other high place. A member of *Relais & Châteaux*, The Aerie Resort is an exclusive Mediterranean-style resort offering 29 luxurious rooms and suites, fine dining, conference and spa facilities to guests year round. This spectacular resort is nestled high above a massive ocean fjord (Saanich Inlet) and perched on the side of Vancouver Island's coastal mountains.

The resort is surrounded by 85 acres of fabulous gardens and majestic mountainsides, the natural habitat of bald eagles. The Aerie's exquisite setting, personal elegance and awe-inspiring vistas are simply unforgettable. Its unique location, innovative programs and emphasis on top quality service has established it as one of the finest resorts in the world.

The Aerie has managed to combine the warmth and charm of old world hospitality with very high standards of service excellence. The Aerie has blended intimacy and sophistication to make it a perfect spot for a romantic getaway or a relaxing vacation.

The awards and recognition go on and on and justifiably so. The Aerie has been the recipient of the coveted AAA Four Diamond Awards for the past five years. The Aerie was voted the Number 1 "Top North American Resort" and ranked 34th overall in the "100 Best in the World" in Conde Nast Traveler Magazine's prestigious 2002 Readers' Choice Awards.

The splendor of the Malahat inspired the resort's owner, Maria Schuster, and her



The Aerie Resort Vancouver Island BC

(Photo courtesy of the Aerie)

My first visit to the Aerie was years ago, not too long after it had first opened. My wife and I were on a camping trip at Rath Trevor Beach in Parksville when we noticed the signs for the resort and pulled in. We wandered into the resort wearing our dusty shorts and T-shirts from our back-to-nature weekend, but were greeted warmly and asked if we'd like to come into the dining room for lunch. Too embarrassed to enter in our grubs, we said we had just dropped in for a peek. So they asked us if we wanted to look around. They told us to check out any of the rooms with open doors and to enjoy our visit! We were flabbergasted by the sincere hospitality of the staff and thoroughly enjoyed our first self-guided tour.



family, to design a breathtaking mansion that is reminiscent of those in Southern Europe.

View from the Penthouse - Saanich Inlet - Finlayson Arm

(photo courtesy of Ron Kirstein)

"ABOVE AND BEYOND"



Living Room in the Penthouse Suite

(Photo courtesy of Ron Kirstein)

were spectacular. The seven course dinner was fit for a king and queen, complete with *amuse bouchee*, 3 appetizers, a *sorbet* palette cleanser, then the main course and dessert. The "*amuse bouchee*" was a seafood consume which was followed by a lobster and prawn salad. We then darted back and forth between the three menu offerings, garden market (all local products), seafood and vegetarian. My mouth was alive with a host of new and interesting flavors. About halfway through the meal we were given a "*sorbet* palette cleanser" preparing us for the home stretch.

What an incredible journey! My desert was a strawberry sorbet combined with chocolate mousse, layered between thin layers of pastry, all resting on miniature slices of blood-red oranges. I am always so amazed at the creativity of gourmet chefs. "Happy Anniversary" was written in chocolate across the desert plates.

Thoroughly satiated, we ambled up the hill to our suite and curled up in front of a nice warm wood fire that was all prepared and ready to

go. A couple of matches were all we needed.

Our second visit was a few years later when we went up for our Wedding Anniversary. We enjoyed our romantic dinner in the dining room and a beautiful bedroom in the main building. The dinner was one of the very best that I have ever had! This March we have just been back again and I would like to share our experience with you.

It was barely sprinkling as we pulled into the parking lot, but nevertheless a young man ran out to the car and held an umbrella over my wife, Linda. The reception staff was very friendly and they gave us a tour of our suite. On the pillow

Bird Watching: Check out "Just Birding", a local bird watching company, or charter John Forde's Whale Centre. John has excellent knowledge of local birds.

Golf: Go to Long Beach Golf Course.

Ahousaht: Take the water taxi to this Native Village and walk the boardwalk trail.

Cougar Annie's Garden: Fly in to these exciting and unique horticultural gardens and learn about the history of this unique lady. Ocean Outfitters (250-725-2866) also provides day visits to Cougar Annie's garden on Wednesday and Sundays. Their boat departs Tofino at 10:00 am, returning at 4:00 PM.

Tofino Air can fly you there (1-866-486-3247)

Roy Vickers: Visit Roy's Eagle Aerie Gallery and check out the Native Art of world famous artist Roy Henry Vickers in the traditional cedar longhouse gallery in Tofino

was a printed Greeting, welcoming us to the Inn for our Anniversary Celebration, and it was signed by the owner. We were given the royal welcome with a 4-day weather forecast, concierge tips, and general up-to-date information.

Our suite was comprised of a large living room that would easily seat 15-20 people, a kitchen behind the good-sized, well-stocked bar, a wood burning fireplace, a dining nook, enough storage for a six-month stay, the bedroom, ensuite bathroom and a 2 person soaker-tub. The bedroom was raised about 4 feet above the rest of the suite and from the bed you could see down Finlayson Arm (Saanich Inlet). This magnificent 700 feet deep ocean fjord is surrounded by 1000 foot high densely forested hills. We felt like we were in heaven looking down on earth. Three decks wrapped around the spacious suite: one overlooking Saanich Inlet, one facing sunrise and one facing sunset. After the sunset, we could see the lights of Port Angeles, USA, at the base of the majestic Olympic Mountains.

Dining is an equally important part of the experience at The Aerie Resort. Executive Chef Christopher Letard, offers French cuisine with a Pacific Northwest influence taking full advantage of the abundance of locally grown products from seafood to game to fresh morels and berries. Every dining experience includes the chance to sample British Columbia's finest wines, and dessert often includes a taste of the world's best chocolate from Bernard Callebaut.

We booked an early dinner to ensure that we could enjoy the views from the elegant dining room that also faces Saanich Inlet. The views were spectacular. The seven course dinner was fit for a king and queen, complete with *amuse bouche*, 3 appetizers, a *sorbet* palette cleanser, then the main course and dessert. The "*amuse bouche*" was a seafood consume which was followed by a lobster and prawn salad. We then darted back and forth between the three menu offerings, garden market (all



Wood burning fireplace in the Penthouse Suite

(Photo courtesy of Ron Kirstein)



Dining Room with views towards Saanich Inlet

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As advertised, this is truly a luxury resort. So many added details make you feel both incredibly welcomed and pampered. The Aerie's owner and staff made this year's Anniversary one of the best ever.

They are above and beyond, simply the best!