



SINK INTO SERENITY

ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

BY SUZANNE MORPHET





A column of cold water pummels the top of my head, tingling my spine and making me gasp for breath. Tilting my face away from the full force of the deluge, it suddenly transforms into a gentle shower, illuminated by soft blue lights.

If someone had told me last year at this time that I'd soon be enjoying a luxurious spa in Campbell River on Vancouver Island's east coast, I probably would have laughed. As any Islander can tell you, Campbell River is a blue-collar town. When locals aren't outside working, they're outside playing. Strathcona Provincial Park is in their backyard and the sheltered waters of the Inside Passage are in front. The river itself is one of the best places to fish for salmon in all of British Columbia.

Yet a prominent local family had a vision for something other than logging and milling wood for pulp and paper. When a popular golf course came up for sale in 2017, the Mailman's bought it. "We decided that we wanted to diversify and do something a little different," says Amanda Mailman, whose father has built a property development and management empire that stretches as far east as Ottawa.



IMAGE: © MICHAEL VANAREY



“And now, here we are, standing here,” she smiles. ‘Here,’ meaning Naturally Pacific Resort, a new 100-room hotel overlooking the beautifully manicured golf course on one side and Discovery Passage on the other.

Designed to be a destination hotel, it offers not only generously sized rooms with patios but also an elegant restaurant—Carve Kitchen & Meatery, which features local proteins and produce along with an impressive wine list—an indoor swimming



IMAGE © SHAWN TALEBOT

pool, outdoor hot tub, a fully-serviced patio with fire pits, Velocity Lounge and Driving Range (with Toptracer technology), a fitness facility, and—most importantly for this writer—a spa that means business.

“Take a deep breath,” says Sue-Anne, my therapist at Immersion Spa & Wellness after rubbing my temples with a calming mix of lavender, peppermint, and cajeput essential oils. “And another,” she instructs, as I sink into serenity in the darkened treatment room.



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For the next hour, I'm Miss Bliss, as Sue-Anne scrubs my body with Turkish salts, removes them with warm, moist towels, brushes me from head to foot with a dry brush, and finally, massages fragrant Neroli oil into my skin. From the blossom of the bitter orange tree, its uplifting scent lingers on my skin long after I leave the spa feeling utterly relaxed.

Wellness can be found in places other than a spa, of course. Laurel Cronk guessed rightly that people would want to discover this part of Vancouver Island on two wheels when she started Island Joy Rides 13 years ago. Her multi-day tours along back roads and on nearby islands were a hit, combining scenic cycling routes with fresh food, waterfront hotels, and unique cultural experiences. Recently, she's added kayaking tours from her waterfront home on the Campbell River.

When my husband and I join Laurel for a sunset paddle through the river estuary, we're amazed by the life around us. Salmon jump, and curious seals surface like submarines to spy on us. A couple of bald eagles bicker noisily from atop a fir tree, while a blue heron focuses on fishing from the grassy bank.

The water is astonishingly clean and clear, considering this estuary was once a heavily used industrial site with three sawmills and a log sort. "So big machines in and out of the water, and all the logs had creosote so that they wouldn't deteriorate," explains Laurel as we pause in a spot known as the Mill Pond. "And then all the bark would fall off, so it was just an absolute mess."



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Recently, volunteer groups have pitched in to clean up the estuary, removing contaminated soil, planting trees, and building trails for biking and walking.

Pausing again as the sun sinks behind the mountains, Laurel leads us through a meditative exercise. We close our eyes and she asks, “Can you smell the river? The plants? Can you feel the air on your cheek? The kayak underneath you? The clothes on your body? Take your tongue and rub it over your teeth.”

To round out our wellness weekend, there’s one more place we must visit – Meraki Cafe.

It’s a new venue that offers eating, drinking, and shopping in one inviting space overlooking Campbell River’s waterfront. A joint effort by three businesswomen, Meraki Cafe offers an exclusively plant-based menu.

Diving into a satisfying curry, I feel fully alive and content. Something I read back at Naturally Pacific comes to mind. It was a sign by Kerstin Florian, the Swedish skincare line, and it said, “I am at peace with all that has happened, is happening and will happen.”

It’s a powerful message and one I happily take home.