

## beyond our domain

BY VICKI STOUT

# Scenic SONORA RESORT

THE SEAPLANE SEEMED TO AMBLE ALONG, GENTLY SUSPENDED BETWEEN SKY AND WATER. Separating the shades of ink were mountainous mounds of evergreens.

The journey was a fitting beginning to a stay at Sonora Resort, a piece of nature's paradise situated on the west coast of Vancouver Island in the heart of British Columbia's majestic wilderness. A true destination resort, Sonora is approachable only by air or water.

In addition to the 50-minute seaplane flight from Vancouver International Airport, a helicopter excursion is in the offering, as is transport by one of the resort's fleet of boats. So often it's the journey, not the destination. With Sonora, it's both.

The collection of rustic cottages turns its face to pristine waters and its back to mountains cloaked in evergreens. Long known as a fishing resort, Sonora has morphed into a chameleon-like haven for adventurers as well as those seeking pleasure from spahhhh inspired luxury. For the adventure-inclined, there are eco-tour excursions, ocean kayaking, grizzly bear watching, aboriginal journeys, white-water rafting, glacial helicopter tours, fly fishing, hiking and walking trails and professionally guided salt and fresh water fishing.

Our visit in October, near the end of the season for this May through October resort, was chock-full of both adventure and relaxation. With so much to choose from, and so little time – a two-night stay – my friend and I opted for grizzly bear watching, an eco-excursion and some time in the spa. The best of all worlds.

Sonora guides dressed us for our grizzly bear adventure in warm wet-suit type apparel, led us to a boat and off we went with Sid Nielsen, a bearded retired civil engineer who looked way more the adventurer than the engineer.

Had we never seen a single bear, the journey itself would



have been enough. We plowed through pristine waters edged by verdant mountains wearing boas of clouds tossed carelessly around their necks. The reflection of sky in water left us to wonder where one stopped and the other began.

From the boat we transferred to a van and headed through forests rife with towering white birch type trees, surrounded by prolific ferns and berry-dotted vegetation. With a holstered gun at his waist and a rifle in his hand, the affable Nielsen led us quietly, practically on tiptoe, through aromatic evergreens to water's edge where, as promised, we witnessed grizzly bears doing their own fishing, sans boat or guide.

Their paws splashed in the clear waters and rose clutching silver streaks of salmon. For the women in the group, it was mostly whispered ooohs and aahhhs at how "cute" the grizzlies are.

"Make no mistake," said Nielsen. "Those cute bears can come across that water and have at us quicker than you can get your wits to run. And besides, they can outrun us."

Still, they were so cute, fishing with their friends and cubs. From the water sightings we moved to "bear stands" which are much, I suppose, akin to deer stands. The difference being, of course, we were not out to harm the bears, just wit-

ness them in their element.

As great as the grizzly adventure was, my vote went to the afternoon's activity, an eco tour, again by boat, again with Nielsen at the helm. We forged through scenery in Johnston Strait that seemed untouched by either time or man. We were up close with sea lions, flocks of birds, even eagles perched on bare limbs. But the greatest joy was just "being" – immersed in this dramatic wilderness. A wilderness to behold, feel, breathe, experience. Treasure.

Despite the day's adventure, or lack thereof, the evenings at Sonora are filled with anything but roughing it. Accommodations are luxurious with a view that begs cozying up in the comfy chairs at windows' edge.

Perhaps the biggest surprise of this world class resort, off in remote British Columbia's majesty, is the food. It is divine. The multi-course meals are fodder for the likes of Gourmet and Bon Appétit magazines. The presentations are sublime. Too pretty, really, to eat. But hey, we've been adventuring, so eat we must. From fresh caught fish to fabulously rich desserts, the offerings are an Epicurean's delight. This place is a foodie's cup of (British) tea ... forget the adventuring.

But ah the spa. With treatments aplenty, for male and



female, luxurious pampering is left in the capable hands of technicians offering everything from massage to European facials to hydrotherapy. And when day is done, nestled in ultra luxurious linens and bedding, sleep comes calling.

### GETTING THERE

Accessible from either Vancouver, Canada or Seattle, Wash. Sonora Resort arranges travel to and from the resort, either by air or boat.

The resort: 20 acres, 80 rooms and suites. Amenities include tennis court, wellness center, DVD-stocked home theater. Open May 15 through October 15.

Rates: \$575 to \$675 per couple per day. Inclusive of three gourmet meals daily and appetizers at Tapas Bar; all beverages (liquor, wine, beer, soft drinks, juices and water) including stocked complimentary bar fridges in each room; use of all amenities at the resort including outdoor heated pool, hot tubs, steam rooms, tennis court, and games room; use of two virtual golf games; state-of-the-art movie theater; access to stocked rainbow fly fishing pond; access to wellness center, yoga/pilates studio, gym, saunas, steam rooms and three mineral pools.

Roundtrip transportation: Seaplane in \$600 range from Vancouver; helicopter similar; boat transportation \$200. Each priced per person.

Contact information: 888.576.6672;  
[www.sonoraresort.com](http://www.sonoraresort.com).

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