



SEASIDE RENDEZVOUS

Rockwater Secret Cove Resort.

by **Cameron Johnson**

Only a 30-minute floatplane ride (or a 90-minute drive and ferry ride) from Vancouver, the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia encompasses 86 scenic kilometres of beautiful beaches, quiet forests, and small, colourful communities. And it's here, just north of the town of Sechelt, that you'll find Rockwater Secret Cove Resort.

It is secluded as its name sounds. Located in aptly named Secret Cove, the resort comprises 38 rooms. There are the usual hotel rooms. There are a few cabins. And then there are the Tenthouse Suites.

Raised, wooden boardwalks twist and wind through spindly arbutus trees over a steep, rocky incline that rises up out of the water. Lit by dim lamps, these treetop paths lead through a stone archway near a trickling fountain to the 13 Tenthouse Suites. Although the Suites feature canvas walls and ceilings, they contain all the comforts of home.

"Except there are no TVs," says Kevin Toth, the affable co-owner of Rockwater Secret Cove Resort. "That's part of the deal.

"Of course, once in a while, if there's a Stanley Cup game or a championship or something, somebody will just *need* to watch it. And we do have a flat screen available [in the lodge]. But we've only received positive comments about not having TVs in the suites." Which isn't altogether surprising. For the discerning visitor who wants a taste of nature and tranquility, television sets would be an unwelcome distraction.

In 2004, Kevin joined business partner Peter Ruben in purchasing the 7.4-acre property (which was then known as Lord Jim's, and geared mainly toward men on fishing trips), and decided to change the focus to provide guests with both a unforgettable getaway and the chance to try all manner of outdoor activities.

The result is a resort that is the ideal base for taking in the Sunshine Coast, as well as being a perfect romantic getaway for couples. That's where the Tenthouse Suites came in. "We saw this steep area and thought about building some cottages," says Kevin, who lives onsite with his wife and two children. "But we really couldn't do that without damaging the land. So we came up with the idea for the Tenthouses."

Each suite includes a king-size bed, a propane fireplace, delightfully heated tiled floors, and a BainUltra hydrotherapy tub, which has a chromatherapy mode that illuminates the tub in various bright, vibrant colours.

And despite being located right on—in fact, almost over—the water, where the storms and windy weather can get rather powerful, the tents are remarkably sturdy. Of course, they rattle and shift in the wind, and the patter of rain can be loud—but that's all part of the charm, and a reminder that although it's not camping, per se, nature is right next door. "I've been out there in storms when the wind's been over 100 kilometres an hour and it feels like the world is coming apart," says Kevin, "but afterward there's not even a scratch on them." Storms, in fact, make for spectacular shows, for which guests in the Tenthouses have perfect seats.

With a good book and a cup of tea, relaxing out in the sun on the veranda or inside listening to the rain is sublime, it is perfectly peaceful and meditative. It's the ultimate Rockwater experience—and it's obvious, as several employees remarked, why a lot of guests don't leave their Tenthouses until they check out.

That said, there are a number of activities that make the prospect of leaving your tent tempting. The resort's Spa Without Walls boasts a wide selection of massages, facials, and pedicures, which you can experience while looking out over the ocean. And at the resort's restaurant, executive chef Ben Andrew creates a terrific menu big on B.C.-grown ingredients.

There are a myriad of activities, and the charming staff at Rockwater are there to help organize your personalized itinerary. The communities along the Sunshine Coast are brimming with art galleries and artisanal crafts, and the area's gorgeous weather, beautiful forests, and proximity to the ocean make it a great spot for all sorts of excursions. Sunshine Coast Tours runs boat trips up to Princess Louisa Inlet, and knowledgeable guides provide commentary on the flora, fauna, and human presence of the steep-walled fjords. Kayaking and horseback riding are popular options, and the resort employs a team of experienced sailing, hiking, and biking guides. Not to be missed is an excursion on the resort's sailboat, the 47-foot *Caledonia II*, to cruise up and down the coast. A gourmet packed lunch provides the perfect touch on a romantic day on the ocean.

All in all, Rockwater is an unrivalled destination, whether you go to explore the area and try out any number of outdoor adventures, or whether you go to just relax on the private verandas, sometimes spotting a seal or a sea lion frolicking in the strait.

Just leave the remote control at home. ●