



Clayoquot Wilderness  
Resort (and right)

A scenic view of a forested hillside overlooking a lake. The hillside is covered in dense green trees, and the lake is in the foreground. Several small white tents are visible on the shore, suggesting a campsite or retreat. The sky is overcast.

# Wild thing

In the fiercely protected wilderness of British Columbia, two luxury eco-retreats allow you to revel in spectacular and untamed nature without sacrificing any creature comforts.

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**B**LACK BEARS FEASTING on clams and salmonberries, grizzlies bingeing on salmon and crustaceans, bald eagles swooping on hake, raccoons gorging on blueberries. With Canadian wildlife exhibiting such discerning tastes, it was only a matter of time before the human population would want a share of the bounty abundant in the forests and seas of British Columbia. Now it's possible to venture into the wild without roughing it at mealtimes – definitely the best of both worlds.

Like New Zealand and Tasmania, British Columbia is an oasis of pristine wilderness. Part of the state's interplay of mountains and ocean stretches north from Vancouver in a network of islands, of which Vancouver Island is the largest. The geography of this 450km by 100km area is a secret shared among the lucky few: some places are so remote and so committed to protecting the local wildlife they welcome only a very limited number of guests. Adding to the sense of exclusivity, the excellent local wines resulting from the island's microclimates are produced in such minuscule quantities they barely satisfy the demand from Vancouver's best restaurants, never mind an export market. So for the best of the region's hidden delights, you simply have to rug up and go.

Be prepared for bracing temperatures. Many places operate May to October, but even in high summer early mornings can be brisk, despite having fortified yourself with a rib-sticking classic Canadian breakfast of blueberry pancakes with maple syrup. ➤



**Clayoquot Wilderness Resort**  
(clockwise from top left): tent  
among the trees; supplement hiking  
with biking; arriving by seaplane



**BRITISH COLUMBIA** CANADA

The most practical and romantic way to travel is by seaplane. Departing from Vancouver, short scenic flights allow you to land at island destinations feeling like an intrepid explorer. Looking down on bays and inlets below, the topography becomes clearer; the remoteness protecting this area from development easier to grasp. Here and there, logging has left scars on the mountainsides but, following years of conflict between the forestry industry and environmentalists, much of the area is now protected.

Beyond the Southern Gulf Islands and the sleepy surfing town of Tofino on the west coast, Clayoquot Sound was hotly contested in the 1990s (Midnight Oil played there to support green protesters), but is now a UNESCO biosphere containing the largest area of intact temperate rainforest on Vancouver Island.

In the early morning, the sound feels majestic, ancient and inviolate, shrouded in mists that gradually melt away to reveal its dark water; the glassy surface broken only by the occasional emergence of a porpoise.

The welcome at Clayoquot Wilderness Resort is a little unorthodox, beginning with a briefing on bear country etiquette: "Nothing to be alarmed about, just a few pointers". Apparently you should never leave any food in your tent (styled in a kind of inviting frontier chic with a gas fire for added cosiness) and, if you should meet a black bear (reassuringly, there are no grizzlies in this area), just take a step back and slip sideways, crab-like, till you are safely out of the way. Don't run, and definitely never turn your back. Right. The chances of such an encounter are not out of the question, although the resort's pack of English hunting dogs keep most intruders at bay. Still, it's hard not to wonder, soaking in the wood-fired hot tub by moonlight, sipping a nightcap of Kettle >



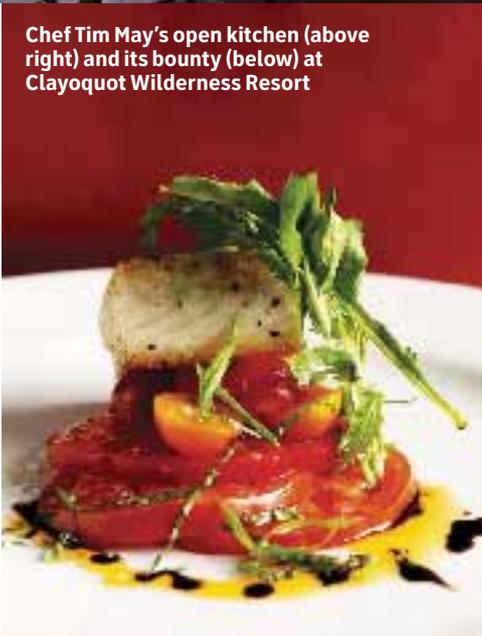
“ If I were a bear, I'd head straight for the cookhouse

Tent town: Clayoquot Wilderness Resort; Clayoquot Sound (above)

BRITISH COLUMBIA CANADA



**Chef Tim May's open kitchen (above right) and its bounty (below) at Clayoquot Wilderness Resort**



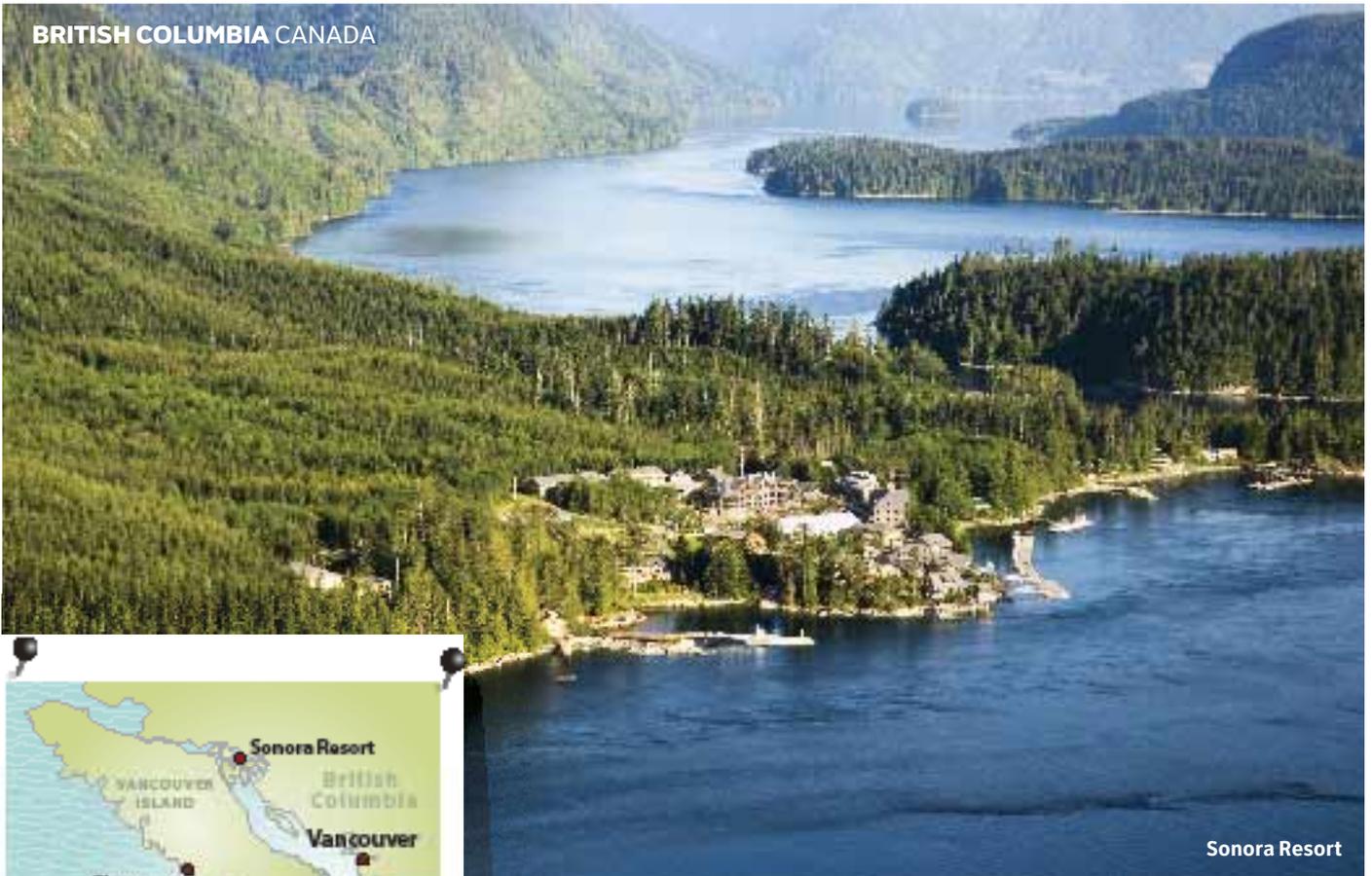
Valley Starboard (a rather more-ish fortified wine), what you'd do, if one suddenly appeared. No point in thinking about that other local resident, the elusive cougar, because, as the saying goes, if you see one, it's already too late.

Personally, if I were a bear, I wouldn't waste any time on the tents, I'd head straight for the cookhouse where the real action is. Chef Tim May runs a superb open kitchen under the log cabin's vaulted cedar roof. The menu includes locally sourced and mostly organic ingredients, freshly baked bread, hearty helpings and inspired wine pairings. There's house-cured wild salmon, oysters and smoked bacon, wild halibut, and a tempting help-yourself counter of snacks, pastries and addictive trail mix to take with you hiking, biking, kayaking, horseback riding, fishing, whale-watching or on a wildlife safari.

Dressed in protective, luminous orange survival suits (not the most flattering of outfits, but you'll be grateful for them and the woollen beanies and mittens provided when the wind comes up), we head out on the water in a small Zodiac. We encounter bears searching for shellfish at low tide. Unconcerned by our presence, they let us get close enough to hear their claws scratching at the rocks they are overturning on the beach.

Further out on the open chop and swell of the ocean (sea spray providing a mini facial, as a prelude to the gentler version at the Healing Grounds spa), large fur seals lie sunbaking, waving their flippers and slipping beneath the waves as we approach. A gray whale breaches just ahead of us, and on another beach, giant starfish the size of dinner plates cluster on a rocky outcrop. This is not a bad way to build up an appetite for the hearty seafood chowder back at base camp. >

BRITISH COLUMBIA CANADA



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY SONORA RESORT



## // At the right time of year, this is the ideal place to spot migrating orca whales

### STAY

#### CLAYOQUOT WILDERNESS RESORT

Clayoquot Sound, Tofino, British Columbia. (250) 726 8235.

[www.wildretreat.com](http://www.wildretreat.com)

Three-, four- or seven-day all-inclusive options, including seaplane transfers and indulgences such as massages. From \$5745 a person.

#### SONORA RESORT

Sonora Island, British Columbia. (604) 233 0460.

[www.sonoraresort.com](http://www.sonoraresort.com)

From \$605 a day.

 For airfares call Qantas on 13 13 13 or visit [qantas.com](http://qantas.com)

For holiday packages to Canada call Qantas Holidays on 13 14 15.

Committed to an ambitious long-term program protecting the spawning salmon of the Bedwell River, as well as the local elk, raptors and bears, Clayoquot Resort is at the forefront of conservation policy and practice in the area, and sets a benchmark for ecotourism. With only 20 guest tents and exceptionally dedicated staff, this kind of experience comes with a hefty price tag, but it's reassuring to know that there are parts of the world where tourism and sustainability can make such a harmonious marriage.

Less extreme, and for those who prefer their four walls solid rather than canvas, Sonora Resort off the east coast of Vancouver Island among the Discovery Islands is the answer. This luxury fishing lodge, ringed by snow-capped peaks, is an hour by boat from Campbell River. If you want to catch a salmon, this is the place to do it; and once you have hooked your prime sockeye or chinook, the resort will arrange for it to be canned or smoked for you. At the right time of year, this is also the ideal place to spot migrating orca whales with their distinctive triangular fins and, from August to October, the famed grizzly bears, best seen from observation towers on land belonging to the Homalco tribe of the coastal Salish people, who act as local guides.

There is plenty of action on display without moving further than the terrace of the resort's outstanding dining room – sipping Cowichan Valley wine, sampling delicacies garnished with edible flowers and berries from the forest, you could be lucky enough to witness a spectacular feeding frenzy of hundreds of bald eagles sparked by a tidal whirlpool pushing fish to the surface of the water. Meanwhile, just metres away, unconcerned seals cavort among the rocks. On a leisurely afternoon boat ride, torpedo-like black and white Dall's porpoises, attracted by the wake, speed up to leap out at the prow in a free show that no camera is fast enough to capture. Memories will just have to do. 