

# ► LUXURY TRAVEL

## At British Columbia resort, luxury begins with a 'good day'

By Joe Rosen

Seeing is believing when Kevin Toth, part-owner and president of Rockwater Secret Cove Resort in Halfmoon Bay, British Columbia, says "Luxury revolves around service rather than product."

To prove the point, Toth — a hotelier with 17 years of executive experience with Fairmont Hotels & Resorts properties in Quebec City; Halifax, Nova Scotia; and Jasper and Edmonton, Alberta; and Whistler, British Columbia before establishing roots in this picturesque setting four years ago — is more than eager to shed his management persona when it is necessary to pitch in and help around the house.

It comes as no surprise, then, to see him bus tables when things get hectic around dinnertime at the resort's gourmet restaurant, lend a steady hand checking in guests to ease a modest crush at the reception desk and even offer use of the resort's

back-office, wired Internet connection when the wireless hookup in the lobby sputters and fails.

For one thing, Toth said, "I never ask my staff to do any task that I would not do myself."

As for his service ethic, he added, "There is no sense having Italian marble bathroom floors and 700-thread-count Egyptian sheets and at the same time have guests line up to check in or have a room attendant who does not bid you good day.

"The fundamentals of luxury should be in the foundation of exceeding expecta-

tions. That's luxury guests appreciate."

Exceeding expectations is no problem at Rockwater. Located astride peaceful and picturesque Halfmoon Bay about 40 miles north of Vancouver on British Columbia's increasingly popular Sunshine Coast, the eight-acre property (formerly Lord Jim's) was purchased in 2004 by a group that included Toth. Since then it has undergone

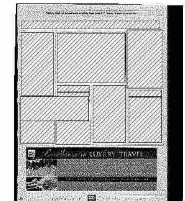
a transformation that has literally changed the face of the terrain on which the resort sits without despoiling the spectacular native flora and fauna.

How so? Instead of simply expanding outward, Toth and his partners decided to reach for the heavens by constructing 13 ecologically sound tent-house accommodations, connected by a zigzagging, 2,000-foot boardwalk of no-slip wooden planks set treetop high in the wilderness known as Secret Cove. The idea, according to Toth, was to tread carefully in the forest and leave as small a footprint as possible.

"When we started the project, we hired a biologist who helped us understand the important fauna aspects and wildlife habitats that we should be sensitive to," he said. "In addition, we have not allowed on the site any mechanical vehicles, such as bulldozers, that would potentially destroy the landscape."

In all, only seven trees had to be removed to make way for the new construction.

Although Rockwater features waterfront cabins suitable for families and friends as well as newly renovated poolside rooms with sundecks and Jacuzzi tubs, it is the allure of the luxurious tent-house suites





PHOTOS BY JOE ROSEN

perched in relative privacy among the spectacular red-barked arbutus trees that sets the resort apart.

All of the wood-and-aluminum-framed tent-house suites measure 360 square feet or so, more than ample for a couple on a romantic getaway or retreat. And don't be misled by the word "tent": These minimalist, Japanese-style accommodations have about as much to do with leaky, wind-whipped camping tents and inflatable cots as Rockwater's high-end Spa Without Walls (more on that later) has to do with the TV show "Survivor."

Each suite, for example, has a cream-colored canvas roof and walls that feature roll-up window shades, enabling guests to look out though and over tree branches to the waters of the Malaspina Strait.

Inside these handsome units are a propane-fueled fireplace; overhead fan; hydrotherapy tub for two with built-in lights that shuttle from red to green to yellow to enhance the relaxation effect; separate rainfall showerheads; heated tile floors; upscale bed linens; audio equipment, with an eclectic assortment of CDs; king-size bed; a toilet and closets that are hidden by sliding wood

and fabric shoji screens; and terry robes.

The picture is completed by a private veranda separated from the suite by double French doors. The walk-about veranda, which easily accommodates a lounge and a small table with two chairs, is a perfect spot from which to take in the lush scen-

ery while enjoying a cup of coffee and the fresh-baked goodies that come in a complimentary breakfast basket delivered to your tent-house door each morning.

Missing among the usual roster of hotel amenities, you might notice, are the following standard items: TV, Internet connection, telephone. Their absence denotes Rockwater's desire to create, in Toth's words,

"a special place of relaxation and reflection. We hope that we could create a romantic environment where couples could reconnect and, according to feedback, we have achieved that goal." (Toth said he is in the process of installing high-speed Internet in the tent-house suites.)

Already high-tech are Rockwater's meetings and convention facilities, which include a secluded conference room with built-in audiovisual equipment and enhanced by natural lighting. The 900-square-foot venue can accommodate as many as 80 people, while the resort's heated pool, dining room and barbecue layout are available for use by conference attendees, as is Rockwater's Spa Without Walls.

The open-to-nature spa facility (including a tent house for use in winter) is located beyond prying eyes on the edge of a cove. It features high-end Eminence Organics skin-care products and offers treatments that range from massages to manicures.

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Business and leisure guests alike can also arrange to rent one- or two-person kayaks to explore the area's waterways (kayaking lessons are available at the resort), while horseback riding and golf are available nearby.

Rates for Rockwater's tent-house suites start at \$251 per night April 1 to June 15 and \$403 June 16 to Sept. 14. Fall and winter rates are also available.

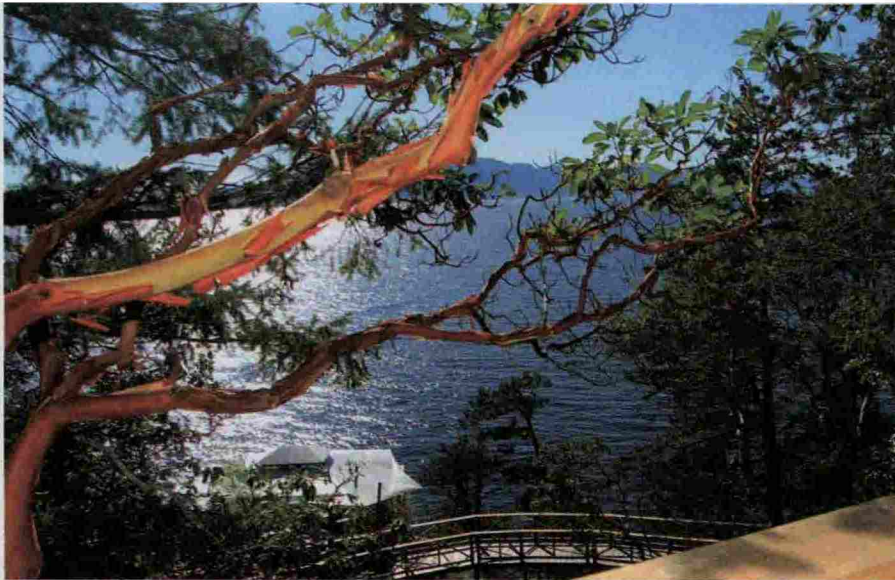
For more information, go to [www.rockwatersecretcoversort.com](http://www.rockwatersecretcoversort.com).

## GETTING THERE

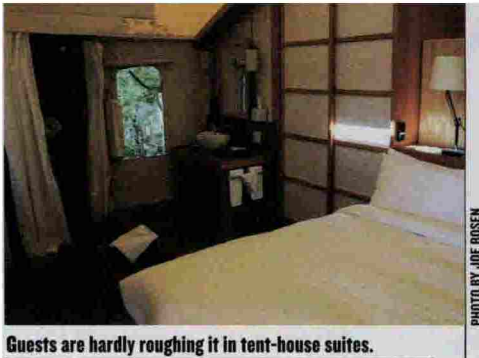
To reach British Columbia's Sunshine Coast, so named because it boasts an annual total of between 1,400 and 2,400 hours of sunshine (that averages out to between four and six hours a day), visi-

tors usually depart from Vancouver and take a 40-minute ferry ride from the Horseshoe Bay terminal to Langdale on the Sechelt Peninsula. Rockwater is another 45 minutes north by car from the ferry.

One fun alternative is taking a float plane flight from Vancouver's harbor or from the international airport straight to Sechelt. **- J.R.**



At Rockwater Secret Cove Resort, ecologically sound tent-house accommodations are connected by a zigzagging, 2,000-foot boardwalk of no-slip wooden planks set treetop high in the wilderness known as Secret Cove. The idea, according to part-owner and President Kevin Toth, was to tread carefully in the forest and leave as small a footprint as possible.



Guests are hardly roughing it in tent-house suites.