

Travel Scoop

The Newsmagazine
for Members of
The Travel Society

Vol. 20, No. 4 May 2002

BC's Laid-Back Sunshine Coast Abounds With Pleasures

by Judi Lees

BC writer Judi Lees, who's a friend of Editor Ann, moved from Vancouver to the Sunshine Coast a few years ago. Correspondence soon revealed that she was loving her new home more with each passing day and season, so we asked her to send us a report for potential visitors.

"You're getting coast fever," said my neighbour, peeking out from her luxuriant garden. She's referring to the fact that I'm heading for a hike in the woods rather than writing at my computer. Little does she know that I'm also contemplating paddling my kayak on this blissfully bright, warm day. Later that afternoon, I gasped in delight as an eagle swooped in front of our kayaks to raise a large salmon out of the ocean. It landed on a boulder about 40 metres away to lunch on its prey; I sat silently, savouring the sight. A short while later, I noticed a heron along the shore and then watched two seals cavort nearby. If this is coast fever, I am a happy victim.

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Doors nearly always stand open in Halfmoon Bay (Lees)

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TravelScoop

The Newsmagazine for Members of
The Travel Society

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May 2002

Vol. 20, No. 4

From your Editor's desk...



There is something new afoot in the travel industry that all travellers should know. As you are no doubt aware, major suppliers of travel services - hotels, cruise companies, airlines, etc. pay commission to travel agents. Recently, however, major U. S. Airlines have scrapped base commissions for airline tickets issued in the U.S. and Canada. And now Air Canada has followed their lead. Effective in April, travel agent base commission payments cease for all tickets sold for domestic, transborder and international travel on Air Canada (but not Tango). The Association of Canadian Travel Agents (ACTA) has rejected a suggestion that agents boycott Air Canada, stating they do not wish to inconvenience their customers. However, you should not be surprised if your agent suggests you purchase your own Air Canada tickets via phone or online or if they raise service fees.

No doubt this is only the beginning of this story. ACTA is planning a variety of strategies to address this situation, including possible legal action, a meeting with Transport Minister David Collenette and a public relations campaign to explain how the situation will affect you - the consumer.

And yet more bad news from Air Canada that does indeed directly affect the consumer. AC has doubled its domestic fuel surcharge, yet another pill to swallow on top of the recently levied Security charge. The fuel surcharge has now increased from \$7.50 per one-way flight to \$15 on all tickets issued for travel within Canada as of 11 April. According to officials, the adjustment is due to escalating fuel prices.

After the bad news I must end on a brighter note. Spring, though erratic this year, really is here. Time to think about getaways and summer plans. I hope some ideas in TravelScoop set you dreaming and planning. *Bon voyage!*

coming in June

- *The Library Hotel*
- *New Zealand*
- *On Safari*

Update Items

Economical rail products for travel in 2002 throughout Europe and the U.K., including railpasses, Rail 'n Drive passes, premier trains such as Eurostar, and the complete line of BritRail products, are described in Rail Europe's new 24-page, 4-colour *Europe on Track* brochure, available now by calling 1 800 361 7245. The brochure contains a handy 'Pass-Finder' chart to help you determine the best railpass to suite your specific travel plans, together with answers to frequently asked questions. New products this year include a two-country pass (France and Italy), passes for Eastern/Central Europe, a Seniors' pass for the Balkans, tours and day-trips in Switzerland and the U.K. and much more. Information and bookings also available at www.raileurope.com

The new 2002 tariffs for leasing a Renault vehicle in Europe are now available from popular André Burtaire of European Cars Service in Toronto. *(I can't tell you how many times I receive glowing comments on André and his service. One subscriber wrote, "Even if we had never used any of the other tips in TS (though we have!) discovering André alone would have made our subscription worthwhile." – Ed.)* Tel/fax: 416 366 2413, e-mail: andre@european-cars.net, www.european-cars.net

A piece of news that brought a smile to the faces of us here in the TS offices: the Fairmont Waterfront hotel has a new employee on its payroll occupying a very sociable, high-profile position. His official title is 'Hotel Ambassador' and his name is Morgan. If you're visiting and feel lonesome you can call the hotel operator and it's Morgan's job to visit you, or you can take a walk together. You'll be popular if you decide to do the latter, because Morgan is a black Labrador retriever. So, if you miss your four-legged family member when visiting Vancouver for business or pleasure, just remember to call for Morgan. His services are complimentary. (www.fairmont.com)

This Month's Winning Scoop

In our last issue (page 20) we mentioned that the Kenya Tourist Board now has a representative in Canada. So when Yvonne Harrison popped in to our offices with some articles she had written we were delighted to learn that she had already been to Kenya. Here is her report on a famous game lodge.

Trekking to Treetops

by Yvonne Harrison, Leaskdale, ON

Would I wake up in the morning at Treetops and feel like a queen? In 1952 when I was in elementary school I remember reading that Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip went to a Kenyan lodge in the treetops. Upon awakening one morning there, she was told she had become Queen as her father had died in the night.

It was a sad, yet romantic, story and I promised myself that if I ever travelled to Kenya I would visit historic Treetops Lodge. The original lodge, constructed in 1932, was actually built in the branches of a fig tree, but the four rooms were destroyed during the Mau Mau uprising. The new, 50-room lodge is no longer up in the trees but is built around a few trees and between two waterholes. The structure stands on stilts and is rather strange and very rustic in appearance.

The Lodge is located in Aberdare National Park, just 25 miles south of the equator. Reservations *must* be made ahead of time as driving individual vehicles to Treetops is not allowed. Guests meet at the Outspan Hotel in Nyeri and from there, after a bountiful buffet lunch, vans transport all the guests to Treetops, about a half hour's drive away (unless you stop for animal sightings!). Upon

Members are Rewarded for Sharing!

TS rewards members for all submissions published.

The Winning Scoop receives a 1-year membership extension.

Your Scoops receive a 3-issue membership extension.

Favourite Places receive a 3-issue membership extension.

Reader Reports receive extensions depending on length.

Submission Guidelines: TS welcomes reader submissions but cannot guarantee they will be used. We reserve the right to edit submissions should they be used. It is very important to include specific travel details: costs, discounts, addresses, telephone and fax numbers, etc., for the benefit of other readers. Submissions can be sent by mail, e-mail: brit@interlog.com or on diskettes

arrival an armed guard treks with the group from the drop-off point to the Lodge. There are blinds to run to if a wild animal did approach. Once in Treetops no one is allowed to leave the building as animals are in close proximity.

As dusk approaches the excitement level begins to rise, for that is when the thirsty creatures start arriving. We enjoyed being in the bottom section of the bunker, where we were at eye level with many elephants, cape buffalo, ostrich, hyenas, water bucks, warthogs, baboons and so on. Later in the evening, after a tasty beef dinner served at refectory tables with bench seats, we sat on the veranda two storeys up, wrapped in blankets and cradling our drinks or mugs of hot beverages as we watched the action at the waterhole. (The bar remains open until midnight, while coffee and tea are available at all times, free of charge.)

It was interesting reading the old scrap books full of yellowed newspaper clippings telling the history of this famous lodge. There were also thick log books with every night's sighting record of the animals that come to drink. Each room had a buzzer that could be turned on if the occupants wished to be awakened if any new species arrived during sleeping hours. As it was, we stayed up very late watching the animals

from the observation deck and then got up for the sunrise, so we only spent about two hours sleeping anyway.

The rooms are very small, so guests must leave most of their luggage in storage at the Outspan hotel and just bring a small overnight pack. The beds are very comfortable and completely made up ... no sleeping bags needed! The shared bathroom facilities are at the end of the hall.

It was cool when we awoke very early the next morning. After a quick coffee and a cookie we left at 7:00 a.m. to return to the Outspan hotel where a sumptuous buffet breakfast was waiting for us. I felt exhilarated leaving this historic, unique 'hotel', though still just myself and not a queen! But how could I awake a queen, when I was not a princess when I went to sleep?

We arranged our visit to Treetops through the internet and via e-mail. Several companies appeared when I requested search engine Google to find an "African Safari". We chose AWA (www.east-africa.com/awa) as we liked their helpful reply to my initial query by e-mail. (I wondered what AWA stood for. African Wilderness Adventures, maybe? But on enquiring of our contact – Charchi – I learned a tribal word! Gikuyu is the language used by the Agikuyus, the majority tribe among Kenya's 43 tribes. And "awa" is the Gikuyu word for "father".) The price of US\$415 for two included pick-up from Nairobi airport, one night in the Covenant Guest House in Nairobi, transfers to Nyeri, and the stay at Treetops. We also had to pay a US\$27 each park fee.

Your Scoops

Ann Was Right About Cyril!

For the third time in two years we were planning to spend time in Africa. We are involved in two projects in Uganda, East Africa, and like to plan other African trips when our work is complete. In 1999 we went on safari in Kenya and in 2001 visited Victoria Falls, Zambia. After deciding to return to Uganda in February of this year, our thoughts turned to where we should visit next. It was then that we read with interest Ann Wallace's articles on South Africa in *TravelScoop* (September, November and December issues 2001) and decided it was time to visit there.

On Ann's advice we contacted Cyril Payle of Geometric Tours by e-mail and told him of our plans to visit South Africa for a week or two at the beginning of March. We expressed interest in Cape Town and the Garden Route, mentioning the articles in *TravelScoop*. Within two days we received a welcoming reply with information about the tours he offered and expressing interest in showing us his beloved country. The only apparent drawback was that he felt he needed four people for a tour. Since we would be out of the country for a month and travelling to South Africa directly from Uganda, we agreed to accompany any other participants he could find. Within a few days, Cyril sent us a suggested itinerary for a 9-day tour of the Garden Route along with some time in Cape Town and a few additions which looked really appealing. When we requested airport transfers coming and going, a day in Cape Town to rest up from



our Uganda schedule as well as three days following the tour to spend with an acquaintance in Cape Town, he readily incorporated these requests into our itinerary. And when we sent him the name of the person with whom we would be staying in Cape Town, he also contacted her and informed her of the day and time of our arrival and when we would be leaving.

We were never sorry that we went along with Cyril's arrangements. He made reservations at the Ritz Hotel in the Sea Point area of Cape Town for our first two nights in Cape Town, met us at the airport and took us to the hotel. The next morning he took us on a quick tour of Cape Town, and made suggestions for our afternoon on our own in the city. He had been unable to find other travellers to accompany us so agreed to take just the two of us at no extra expense. It was to be a truly private tour.

On the second morning Cyril picked us up promptly at 8.30 and we were on our way for an interesting nine-day adventure. Our journey took us east out of Cape Town, first a bit north through beautiful river valleys and rugged mountains and then southward to travel along the Indian Ocean as far east as Addo Elephant Park, approximately 50 km beyond Port Elizabeth. We then returned all the way along the coast back to Cape Town.

Every day we visited places of interest too numerous to mention - botanical gardens, wineries, caves, farm museums, spectacular resort towns, wilderness parks, etc. We travelled in Cyril's minibus through mountain passes and over deep gorges.

Accommodation at night varied from a luxurious spa the first night to comfortable camp cabins and included beautiful resort hotels and a most luxurious guest house in Mossel Bay. Breakfasts and dinners at night were included in our accommodations and in the Wilderness Camp Cyril did the cooking himself, treating us to barbecued chicken and salads he prepared, using the camp facilities.

We visited mission stations, historical museums and even spent a night on an ostrich farm where we got to taste both smoked and roasted ostrich meat served by our charming hosts. We had many opportunities to chat with peoples of different cultures about their life and their hopes for a peaceful future in their beautiful country.

March is not the best time to visit South Africa - the whales visit the seacoast from June to November and it is in September that the protea blooms are at their best. Nevertheless, we found Cyril's South Africa a fascinating country to visit. His years working with Conservation Services have made him a very knowledgeable guide and this, along with his friendly personality, added to our enjoyment of the days spent in his company.

At the end of the nine days he delivered us to our friend's house and three days later picked us up in good time to get us to the airport for our long flight home. And all this for only C\$2,384.00 for the two of us! Yes, the rand is at a very low level now and this makes South African travel a real bargain.

At no time during our stay in South Africa did we feel unsafe, although we did not visit any areas alone that are considered out-of-bounds for tourists. Using the services of a company such as

Geometric Tours allows you to experience this diverse country and get some understanding of their problems while enjoying the rich culture and learning some of the history of its people. Geometric Tours can be contacted at: 14 Suker Street, Bellville South, Cape 7530, South Africa, tel/fax: 011 27 21 951 3378, e-mail: gemtours@mweb.co.za

*Ben and Norma Fear
Guelph, ON*

Japanese Hospitality

We *both* enjoyed reading about Beatrice Magder's experiences in Japan in the last issue, even though one of us cannot travel with 5W! However, there is a way couples can enjoy that unique Japanese hospitality, and that's by staying in a traditional *ryokan*. Of course these come with a price tag, but the properties vary from small and simple to highly sophisticated. *Ryokan* are Japanese inns that are usually owned and run by families and many of the properties have been in the same family for generations. They are dedicated to preserving and demonstrating Japanese culture through architecture, décor, gardens and food. The lady of the household - the *okami* - is responsible for her staff and for running the inn and there are thousands of these properties all over Japan.

The larger properties are increasingly being incorporated into group tours, or individual travellers can request information from the Japan National Tourist Organization at 416 366 7140, www.jnto.go.jp or www.japantravelinfo.com

*Sandra and Douglas Whitehead
Toronto, ON*

Fun on the Thames

I enjoyed reading the recent article on boating in Holland, as it brought back happy memories of a trip my husband and I took on England's River Thames for six nights in June a few years ago. Here are a couple of stories to show how you'll be welcomed on the waterways of England.

We travelled from Thames Ditton to Wallingford, near Oxford. We took a train from central London to Surbiton (a suburb) and then covered the short distance to Thames Ditton by taxi; got a few supplies and away we went. However ... we hadn't gone very far when clouds of black smoke started to come out of the engine. My husband pulled the boat over to the bank, I grabbed my bag with our passports and money and we went to ask the owners of the property over which we were trespassing if we could use their phone. They were so very kind and after we'd phoned for a mechanic from the boat rental company they gave us tea and, a little later, after our host had declared "boating goes better with gin", gin and tonics!

Once the repairs were completed we got underway again. We had never seen a lock before (not too many of them on the prairies) and we encountered quite a few. But we managed, often with the help of a patient lock keeper. They are used to tourists. It was an enjoyable and leisurely trip every mile of the way with lovely countryside and interesting stops such as the site of the signing of Magna Carta and the Kennedy memorial.

We had another adventure in Wallingford where, after browsing

around the town, we managed to get ourselves locked into the grounds of the old castle there. We finally stepped gingerly through a flower bed and rapped on the back door of a small house tucked into the corner of a stone wall. The kind owner's first words when she saw us were "Oh, we've caught some more, have we?!" She then proceeded to tell us some of the history of the town, before letting us pass through her home and out onto the street.

Next day it was back to London by bus and then, after a night in London, back to Calgary. It had been a good trip and we'd go again.

Alice Jean White
Stettler, AB

Partners Wanted!

Our Travel Society tours are becoming more and more popular and we frequently have requests from singles wishing to share. Hitherto we have organized this in The Travel Society's offices, but then we had an idea! Why not have a 'singles wishing to share' space here in *TravelScoop*. So here we go ... a single lady is looking for a partner to share on our Australia Great Trains & Wineries tour departing 17 October 2002. And a gentleman would like to share on the China Yangtze tour 5 October 2002. If any of you would like to join them, please give us a call and we'll put you in touch. In Toronto, dial 419 926 2500, long distance is toll-free at 1 877 926 2500.

Return to Bisbee

A few years ago, while visiting friends in Arizona, my wife and I took a short trip to Bisbee, a mining town from the late 1800s in the south-east part of the state. Unfortunately, an overnight storm knocked out the power in Bisbee for almost 24 hours, and we enjoyed only a lovely dinner (before the storm) and a candle-lit stay in the Copper Queen Hotel. We vowed to return, and, unlike many other such promises, actually fulfilled our vow this past January. Again, we just had time for an overnight stay, which was a shame ... Bisbee has too much going for it to see and enjoy in such a short time. Nevertheless, we did what we could!

On arrival, just before 11:00 a.m., we parked at the Copper Queen Plaza, below the hotel and just off Route 80, where we signed up for the one-hour tour aboard the "Warren Bisbee Railway" trolley bus. We were treated to an entertaining and informative ride up and down hill through the former saloon areas, past the present artists' boutiques, by the open pit copper mines, and around the prosperous-looking "suburb" of Warren. This is a great way to see the town initially and to decide on further walks. The cost was \$10.00 for adults and \$7.00 for children. There were five tours daily on the week-ends in January. (All prices US\$.)

We had decided to stay at the Main Street Inn this time, located in another of Bisbee's late-1800s buildings. (In fact, nothing new has been built in Bisbee since the 1950s!) Some rooms have been combined into suites, one of which we enjoyed: two queen bedrooms, a small shower room, a large sitting room with sofa and rockers, T.V., a

counter, sink and small fridge, and a table with two chairs by the bay windows overlooking Main Street, where we sat and enjoyed our complimentary continental breakfast! Very relaxing and highly recommended, although not inexpensive, at \$135.00. There is another suite at \$140.00, at the back of the complex, plus six other rooms which share washrooms, priced from \$70.00. A warm sun porch runs the full width of the building at the back

The owners, Randall and Kaayla, also run a gold shop on Main Street below the Inn, and offer a discount (15%) to guests at the Inn. My wife splurged on a pair of lovely earrings, as a souvenir of our stay. We also received some welcome advice on where to eat. Dinner at the Café Roka across the street (reservations made by our hosts at the Inn) was absolutely wonderful! Chef and owner Ron Kass (hence the name of the restaurant) offers a menu featuring only four-course dinners of soup, salad, sorbet, and entree (a choice of about 8 items). There is a modest dessert menu, but we really had no room! Our total bill for two, without wine, was \$50.00. The café is listed among the top 100 restaurants in Arizona.

In the afternoon we walked mostly along Main Street, with its fine art and craft shops. Our tourist efforts concluded with an underground tour of the Queen Mine. Visitors don slickers, hard hats, battery packs and attached lamp for a ride into the old copper mine on the cars once used by miners. Retired miners act as guides. There were three stops along the way to show the mine face and the equipment used over the years, and to tell the history of the indus-

try in Bisbee. The tours last an hour. We did not feel any claustrophobia, but were happy to have warm jackets and gloves for the year-round 47°F temperatures. Price is \$10.00 for adults. There are five tours daily and it's just a 10-minute walk from Copper Queen Plaza.

There are three walking tours in town: Main Street, Brewery Gulch, and High School Hill. Maps are available from the tourist office located on Subway Street. All require varying amounts of up-hill (and down) at a mile high! There is a mining museum, a heritage house, a library, courthouse, and churches worth visiting, plus a lot more shopping than we had time for. Bisbee, with its hotels and restaurants, is also a good home base for local touring; Tombstone and Mexico, among other attractions, are just minutes away. Do make time for Bisbee if you're touring in Arizona. We may even return again ourselves one day!

More information available from: **Bisbee Chamber of Commerce:** 1 866 2BISBEE. **The Main Street Inn** can be contacted at: 1 800 467 5237; 1 520 432 1202 e-mail: mainstreetinn@theriver.com, www.mainstreetinn.net.

The Copper Queen Hotel (celebrating 100 years in 2002 with mystery dinner theatre 4 July and 31 October) tel: 520 432 2216. Rooms \$75 to \$106. Another interesting place to stay is **The Inn at Castle Rock** tel: 1 800 566 4449. Rooms \$59 - \$87, bed and full breakfast, private baths, eclectic decorations, no phones or T.V. in rooms.

Bisbee Trolley: 520 432 7020.
Queen Mine Tours: 520 432 2071.
Café Roka: 520 432 5153

Stan Farrow
Scarborough, ON

Reader to Reader

Dear Ann and TS readers

We are planning a three week trip to Cuba to *see the country*. We'd like to spend a couple of days on Varadero Beach, and then move on, travelling all over, staying in 4-star hotels if possible and exploring with the following itinerary:

1. **Havana**, to see the city and take day trips to explore western Cuba. We understand Air Canada Holidays has a 7-day combo hotel package where one can stay at a Melia hotel on Varadero Beach and then move on to a Melia Hotel in Havana. We would then like to drive along the southern coast to Trinidad area.

2. **Ancon Peninsula** to explore **Trinidad** and surrounding sites by car. We would then like to drive on to Santiago de Cuba

3. **Santiago de Cuba** and **Holguin**, to explore these areas and surrounding sites. We understand that Air Canada Holidays again has a Melia combo hotel package. We would then like to visit the beach areas along the northern coast on our way back to Varadero

Have any readers done such a trip? We would love to hear from you ... any experiences, suggestions, and recommendations on such an itinerary would be appreciated, together with news of hotels in the areas, Paladars (meals in private homes/small restaurants run by Cubans), knowledgeable travel agents/ tour operators, etc. Please contact us at

DGfThornhill@rogers.com We think it's going to be a challenge as neither of us speaks any Spanish!

Thank you

Gayle & Dean Feltham
Thornhill, ON

continued from page 1

The Sunshine Coast is a bucolic, green belt along BC's west coast that is separated from the rest of the world by the towering Coast Mountains to the east and the Pacific Ocean on the west. Ferry rides at each end – the lower section of the Sunshine Coast stretches 80 km from Gibsons to Earl's Cove – give it a decidedly island feel. The fact that it's only a 40-minute float on island-studded waters that resemble a Toni Onley painting, from Horseshoe Bay in West Vancouver to Langdale on the Sunshine Coast, means that it is close to Vancouver's cosmopolitan pleasures, but light years away from the traffic and bustle of the city.

From the ferry terminal, highway 101 meanders through stands of Douglas fir, hemlock and cedar, past long sweeps of beaches and a smattering of small towns. Travelling up the coast, most of the best post-card scenes are hidden from sight: fabulous fjords with sculpted shorelines of granite, off-shore verdant islands and lovely, mossy trails that, as well as sky-reaching, second growth forest, boast lustrous, red-barked Arbutus trees. Neighbourhoods are a mix of pretty summer cottages and posh homes tucked into the woods or overlooking the ocean, and are populated by loggers, fishers, craftspeople, writers and artists; in short, those who seek the simple life. In summer, its population of about 27,000 burgeons to a quarter more as week-end cottage owners and visitors arrive to enjoy the idyllic climate. Its name is no tourist marketing gimmick, the region boasts on average 2,400 hours of sunshine annually.

With all this going for it, it's a beguiling surprise that the Sunshine Coast is not spruced up for tourists. Just off the ferry, **Gibsons Landing**, arguably one of Canada's prettiest small towns with charming shops and galleries and a boat-adorned harbour backed by mountains, has a folksy appeal. It's familiar to Canadians as the setting for the long-running *Beachcombers* television series. **Molly's Reach** is still a popular restaurant overlooking the ocean and there's talk of reviving a *Beachcomber* show. At **Roberts Creek**, you cut down from the highway to admire gardens and waterfront parks, and visit funky restaurants and craft galleries. At the **Gumboot Garden Café** the food is great and local artwork is on display. **Davis Bay** offers a long stretch of waterfront that can be walked; there's great java at **Pier 17** with a classy gallery upstairs and fish and chips that can be enjoyed

along with the sunset.

The village of **Sechelt**, set on an intriguing land formation as the **Sechelt Peninsula**, joins the mainland at a narrow neck of land, sheltering an inland sea that was gouged out of the landscape eons ago by a massive ice formation. This is home to the Sechelt Nation, a thriving community that is part of the Coast Salish Nation. Entering Sechelt, stop at **The House of Hewhiwus** that includes a Native gift shop, museum and theatre. Also, walk along the waterfront starting at **Snickett Park** with its intriguing rock formations carved by crashing waves and follow the shoreline east to take in the row of exquisitely carved totems that face the ocean. Sechelt has a number of good restaurants, a charming community art gallery and don't miss the gardens at Rockwood Lodge. (The Annual Festival of the Written Arts in August is held here in a heritage building.)

Explore the tiny communities of **Halfmoon Bay**, **Madeira Park**, and **Garden Bay**, as well as the beautiful settings of **Secret Cove** and **Pender Harbour**. Don't miss the delightful general store at Halfmoon Bay. Further along, communities face island-dotted natural harbours of dazzling blues and greens that cry out for a *National Geographic* photographer. Any number of side roads lead to woodsy provincial parks, tranquil coves or a wink of a village. (From

It's close to Vancouver's cosmopolitan pleasures, but light years away from traffic and loustle of the city.

Sechelt, it's another 54 km to **Earl's Cove** and the ferry to **Saltery Bay** and the northern section of the Sunshine Coast.)

A visit to the Sunshine Coast is the epitome of R&R: a mix of outdoor activities with some gallery hopping, seafood savouring and stays in accommodation that range from fishing lodges and small inns to cottages and B&Bs. There's something special about an oceanside cottage or a B&B hidden in the woods and they are all here. (Most of the following properties are listed on the www.bbsunshinecoast.com website, if not their individual site is given. And for those not on the internet, phone numbers – some of them toll-free – are listed. Range of prices reflect both room categories and season; if there's only one price it's year-round.)

A fine introduction to **Gibson's Landing**, the first stop from the ferry terminal, is **Marina House B&B**, a 1931 heritage home that faces the mountain-flanked harbour. The top floor of the three-level house is three guest rooms plus a well-stocked library corner, a

lounge with balcony and an adjoining breakfast room. It reminds you of an English Inn with West Coast scenery. Some guests sail up to the back door and call it home for a few days. Sarah's room borders a garden, Mary's is quaint with twin beds and Molly's is the one where you wake up beside the ocean. Tel: 1 888 568 6688, \$85-\$110; all prices given are for doubles B&B. Also in Gibsons, you may choose to stay in a garden retreat at **Wellspring Cottage B&B**. A charming one-bedroom suite was originally an artist's studio and welcomes you with handmade quilt, ocean views and a gazebo hot-tub. There's a full kitchen and a double sofa bed and children are welcome. Cost ranges from \$85-\$95; ocean views are free. Tel: 604 886 1249. Also in Gibsons, **Caprice B&B** is a lovely spacious home lovingly cared for by hosts Jeanette and Lois. As you breakfast in the sunny dining room you look out on a glorious park-like setting. There are three large guest

rooms; two of them downstairs. All the rooms have antiques or excellent reproductions. There's a swimming pool, hot tub and a perfectly placed bench under a towering cedar where you can sit and contemplate the ocean. Tel: 604 886 4270, \$75-\$110.

Further along the coast, don't miss a visit – and a stay – on the **Sechelt Inlet**.

Beachcomber Marine Spa and Cottage is a new, hillside home that faces a dramatic ocean and mountain scene. It's designed with romance in mind. The ground floor features two suites that open onto sunny patios and gardens. They have with fabulous furnishings and dreamy bathrooms. Nothing has been spared when it comes to anticipating guests' comforts, right down to the heated bathroom floor and a separate spa room. Picture a walk on the beach, followed by a massage or a soak in the deep tub and then a drink on the deck. There's a lovely common area, while closer to the beach is Beachcomber cottage, should you yearn for total privacy. There's lots of tranquil space here. Tel: 1 877 399 2929, \$119-\$139.

Another romantic retreat is **Wildflowers B&B**.

Tucked into the forest, Wildflowers is what dreams are made of: two self-contained suites, both spacious with fireplaces, mini kitchens and patios. Then imagine tiled floors, elegant furnishings and bathrooms, with perks like robes, wine and chocolates along with exquisite decor touches from Bali, Tuscany, Mexico and Turkey and you'll start to get the picture. Hosts Doug and Darcy Long are world travellers whose cottage showcases the fine furniture and textiles they have brought home. You'd swear you had escaped to a Tuscan villa or sunny hacienda as your suite looks out upon a picturesque pond fringed by forest. Breakfast is served in your cottage and it's memorable. Tel: 604 885 7346, \$135-\$150.

As you travel up the coast past Sechelt, **Tuckers Inn** is a huge house on a hill – on acreage with streams and wildflowers – that is great for families. There's

three bright rooms; one is a full suite with private bedroom, another has a king size bed that can be made into twins. A charming young family are upstairs and will show you around the large garden and point the way to the beach, a short walk away. The large room has a mini kitchen and robes and handy snack baskets are provided.

A massage room is being added. Tel: 1 877 266 9567, \$69-\$139.

Want to run away to the ocean with your family? Look for **Burchill's B&B by the Sea** where a self-contained cottage sits above an idyllic bay and opens to a deck and swimming pool. The charming three-bedroom cottage was the summer home of Jack and Milly Burchill. Now they live in a lovely home here and share this perfect setting. The cottage has a small master bedroom and two rooms with bunks, a full kitchen, huge stone fireplace and sunset views. The fridge is stocked for breakfast. Family getaways don't get any better than this. Tel: 604 883 2400, \$100).

Along the coastal drive you'll spot signs to **Lord Jim's Resort Hotel, Sunset Cove Cottages, Silver**



Gibson's Landing, one of Canada's prettiest towns, boasts a picturesque harbour (Lees)

Sands Resort and **Lowe's Hotel Resort**. These are all popular properties. However, the gem of the Sunshine Coast in many people's books is **Ruby Lake Resort**, owned by a gregarious Italian family. There's award-winning cuisine in the restaurant and ten honey-hued cottages on a lagoon. Furnished in rustic pine with cheerful fabrics, all the rooms are spacious and come in a variety of configurations. There's a 'king' complete with plush robes, some have mini kitchens, others fully equipped ones, and all have loads of sleeping space making them great for families and groups of friends. The *pièce de resistance* here – aside from the restaurant that is reached by walking a floating bridge – is the setting on a five-acre sanctuary that teems with life. On any given day you'll spot songbirds, eagles and a variety of waterfowl including the exotic-looking wood duck; 82 bird species have been recorded here. A woody, covered gazebo is made for lazy hours. A new addition this spring is The Dreamcatcher – two deluxe lake-front suites that are ideal for romantic time with soaker tubs, fireplaces, private entrances and decks. (Tel: 604 883 3602, www.rubylakeresort.com \$99-\$254 and ask about special packages.)



A typical Sunshine Coast neighbourhood (Lees)

A visit to the Sunshine Coast is about being outdoors and a wide variety of activities can be found here. If golf is your game, there are four courses. (On the Pender Harbour fairways, it would be unusual not to see elk!) A rite of passage on a coastal sojourn is a visit to **Skookumchuck Narrows Park**, located on the north-east edge of the peninsula. You follow an easy four-kilometre, forested trail to reach Skookumchuck rapids – a rush of tidal water forced through a narrow, shallow channel that is the fastest ocean rapids in the world. When the churning water is at its highest, thrill-seeking river kayakers play in the wild whitewater. Check the tides and time your visit so you arrive about 30 minutes before high tide. You sit on boulders to watch the tide rise and then enjoy the antics of the water daredevils. Most of them are pretty good at staying upright.

Do take care as the Skookumchuck is dangerous at any tide change. There are two fenced viewing areas suitable for families or those with pets, so make use of them to be safe.

This is boat country: sign up for a fishing, sailing or sightseeing charter or join a kayaking excursion. An outing with **Halfmoon Sea Kayak** means a paddle to hidden inlets, islands inhabited by seals, and to one of BC's best beaches on nearby **Thormanby Island**, while **Kayak the Coast Ecotours** will introduce you to the **Sechelt Inlet** and their native pictographs and bird sanctuaries.

For a memorable cruise, visit **Princess Louisa** inlet. Aboard the *Malibu Princess* – a three-deck, 126 ft, 200 passenger vessel – you ogle incomparable scenery as you travel up the **Sechelt Inlet**. Past a mosaic of green shrouded mountains, and lichen-spangled boulders, you cruise through a narrow inlet that Captain Cook mistook for a river, and into **Princess Louisa Inlet**. It's a shame the intrepid explorer missed this magical enclave where mountains tower and waterfalls – sometimes as many as 60 – adorn granite faces like lacy curtains. This day trip is capped off

with a salmon barbecue. \$95 pp.

These waters are equally enticing when seen from down under. In fact, the Coast is ranked among Canada's best places to scuba dive because of the diversity of geological features and marine life. "Divers come from all over the world to see the great array of marine life including the giant pacific octopus and the deep walls of fragile cloud sponges," says Tony Holmes who, along with wife, Ruth, owns **Suncoast Diving** in Sechelt.

Further along the Coast near **Madeira Park**, **Georgia Strait Dive & Eco Tours** will arrange dive, fishing or kayak excursions aboard their 37 ft. cruiser. (There's also The Beachhouse, a two-bedroom suite with full kitchen right on the wharf facing **Gerrans Bay**. It isn't fancy, but you can't get any closer to the

Canadian Cornucopia

compiled by Ann Wallace

We know many of our readers like to remain in Canada during our golden summer months. So whether you stay close to home, or travel across our vast land, we hope you find some of these ideas and recommendations useful. *Bon voyage!*

Alberta

With a copy of Travel Alberta's fine *Vacation Guide* in your hands you're sure to start dreaming. Whether it's mountain adventures, explorations of First Nations' culture, Cowboy and Badlands Trails, dinosaur events or UNESCO sites, Alberta's offerings are unique. Call 1 800 661 8888 for your copy.

Alberta and British Columbia

Talking of mountain adventures, here's an idea that will translate into memories of a lifetime. No that's truly not a cliché in this case ... for the idea is summer heli-hiking. Wait ... don't think it's not for you! It's for anybody who can walk. *Canadian Mountain Holidays* lift their guests each day by helicopter from their five mountain lodges up into the mountains for a day amongst spectacular scenery. Once there you have four choices: you can sit down and relax with a book or maybe your paint box; you can join a leisurely meadow walk with a guide who is knowledgeable about the region and its flora and fauna; you can join the more active group on a hike that will take you over some rough terrain, probably to a higher elevation; or you can try your hand at climbing under the guidance of expert teachers who ensure your safety at all times with modern securing equipment. Families and people of all ages are welcome, and safety is the company's number one priority, from checking the mountain weather each morning to assessing individual aptitude for the activities offered. I met with one of the company's representatives recently and she told me it's wonderful to host mature guests who are looking forward to telling their grandchildren they have been climbing. Daily rates vary according to season, lodge and room type, but all include accommodation, three meals

daily, wine with dinner, use of lodge facilities, equipment for activities, guides and the helicopter rides. For full information call 1 800 661 0252 or visit www.cmh-hike.com It all looks *wonderful!*

British Columbia

Calling the adventurous to the wild coast of BC! Active Journeys has launched two unique Canadian summer tours: *Sea Kayaking in the Gwaii Haanas* and *Sea Kayaking in the Waters of the Orca*. The former is a 9-day tour (priced at C\$1,695) with departures from May to September, the latter an 8-day tour (priced at C\$1,450) offered from late June to mid-September. Both tours include fully qualified guides, accommodations and camping equipment, high quality kayaks and related equipment and all meals. Previous kayaking experience is not necessary; beginners are more than welcome. The trips are dedicated to revealing the beauty and wildlife of this special area.

For more information call 1 800 597 5594 or visit www.activejourneys.com

If Judi Lees has tempted you to visit the **Sunshine Coast**, you may like to consider going from 19 – 22 September and taking part in the *Malibu Arts Retreat* ... four days of arts, wilderness and relaxation. Here you can write, read, sing, dance, paint or just enjoy the sparkling waters, peaks, waterfalls and forests. For those who love art and nature this is the opportunity to relish both. Pick-up is offered in downtown Vancouver, guests cruise for 3 hours on the *Malibu Princess* to the retreat and for the price of C\$580 pp guests enjoy three nights' accommodation, all meals, inlet cruises and a choice of workshops, including photography, dance and yoga as well as painting etc.

For details call Artesia Tours at 1 800 690 7887, fax: 604 886 4293, e-mail: artesiastours@dccnet.com, www.suncoastarts.com

New Brunswick

New Brunswick's historic riverside capital, **Fredericton**, is well worth exploring before you head

off to that province's many pleasures along the coast. And the city offers a great deal: boat cruises, waterfront trails, lighthouses, the Garrison District, one of the best private art galleries in Canada (a large Kreighoff collection, Dali and much British art), the largest outdoor craft sale in Atlantic Canada (mid-August) and many historic B&B's. Especially noteworthy, I hear, is the heritage inn known as The Carriage House, the antique-filled Elmcroft and The Very Best – a Victorian B&B which was the first 5-star B&B in Canada. (Prices for all three under \$100 per room, pn.) For excellent tourism brochures, including a B&B guide call 1 888 888 4768 or visit the website www.city.fredericton.nb.ca

From Fredericton it's not far to **Moncton**. If you're there 13-15 September you'll catch the *Atlantic Seafood Festival*, with guests this year from Lafayette, Louisiana. Of course there will be lots of good food, cooking classes and other events. Visit www.gomoncton.com for lots of details of other events and information on Moncton this summer.



Malibu Arts Retreat

Ontario

News of two tourism initiatives from Travel Ontario: *Arts in the Wild* and *Paddling Ontario*. The arts programme is an alliance of 23 organizations offering art experiences in the great outdoors. Participants can choose from a wide programme that includes painting, sculpting, photography, pottery, woodcarving, furniture making, driftwood basket making and/or gem stone transformation while taking in the scenery. Exhibitions at partnering galleries and cultural sites are also included. Novices and skilled artists are all welcome in the programmes that can be one- or multi-days in length. The *Paddling Ontario* alliance is comprised of 22 outfitters that offer outdoor water adventures. Day, weekend and weeklong trips are offered to suit the taste of all kinds of adventurers, from quiet country lakes to fans of white water rapids. For details of all these adventures call 1 800 ONTARIO.

The major festival theatres of southern Ontario need little introduction as they have a fine reputation beyond Canada's borders. Ontarians can find their numbers easily, but if you're coming from out of province the two brochures published by the Festivals are worth having for as well as theatre listings each contains accommodation suggestions, restaurant reviews and much more. See page 20 for details of the **Shaw Festival**; for **Stratford** call 1 800 567 1600 and request their *Visitors' Guide*.

Planning on coming to **Toronto** to visit some museums and historical sites, or perhaps you live close but there are some cultural attractions you haven't visited? You all need the Toronto Museum Passport, which brings admission to 10 attractions for \$25 (\$20 for seniors) ... a saving of about 50%. The Royal Ontario Museum,

Fort York, Colborne Lodge and the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art are among the cultural centres included in the pass, which is valid for the entire year. Pass available at the museums, from Tourism Toronto at 1 877 848 4111 or online through www.ticketking.com

Resorts Ontario has two illustrated

guides for the asking. Call 1 800 36 ESCAPE for your copy of the comprehensive *Great Escapes* guide and also request the smaller *1000 Reasons for all the Seasons* booklet which contains shoulder season packages and details of the \$100 bonus available on a 3-night stay at any of the resorts listed.

And for a copy of the new *Ontario's Finest Inns* brochure call 1 800 340 INNS, www.ontarios-finestinns.com They too, have an offer: a \$25 gift certificate after three stays, plus a chance in a monthly draw for a 1-night stay at any of the inns listed.

What better way could there be to celebrate Canada than a getaway to the nation's capital to see the Tom Thomson exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada (7 June – 8 September)? Watch *TravelScoop* for details of the special packages some of the **Ottawa** hotels are planning for this event.

Québec

Calling all music lovers to Québec. The *Festival international de Lanaudière in Joliette* (28 June – 30 July), now over 20 years old, is one of the most prestigious classical music events in North America. Concerts are held at the Amphitheatre and in the region's beautiful churches. There's a delightful terrace restaurant attached to the Amphitheatre, or one can picnic on the lawns. For accommodation, choose between a local package created for the Festival (2 nights in charming B&B's from \$299, with concert tickets and lots of extras), or choose the Montréal package and take advantage of the nightly shuttle service to the musical venues (a drive of about 35 minutes). Call 1 800 651 4343 or visit www.lanaudiere.org/ for details. What a great getaway!

If jazz is your thing, you probably already know about the *Festival International de Jazz de Montréal* (27 June to 7 July), described as "the best jazz festival in the world" by the *Chicago Tribune*. Of the 500 shows, 350 are free. Call 1 888 515 0515 or visit www.montrrealjazzfest.com Another good reason for a summer city getaway.

There will be music and fun in Québec City too, between 4 & 14 July, the dates for this year's city-wide party simply known as the *Québec City Summer Festival*. With costumed actors in the streets and lots of free musical offerings, it is a great family event. Information can be yours by calling 1 888 992 5200,

www.infofestival.com And for the excellent tourism literature produced by Tourisme Québec for every region and city in the province call 1 877 BONJOUR.

Yes, the major cities of Québec have a great deal to offer, but if it's a country getaway you are after I highly recommend my favourite region of the province: the Eastern Townships, less than an hour's drive south of Montréal. It's a charming, unspoilt and beautiful region with lots of summer activities, fine food and a wide selection of accommodation. I'll be writing about the region as a winter getaway later in the year, but if you go in the meantime I know you'll be delighted with your choice. For the guide *Welcome to the Eastern Townships!* call 1 800 355 5755 or visit www.eastertownships.cc Details of summer packages will soon be available.

General

If you'd like a packaged vacation in Canada ask your travel agents for the brochures now available from **Horizon Holidays** and **Signature Vacations**. Horizon offer quality fully-guided tours, while Signature offer diverse ways of exploring Canada with trips that include flights, rental cars, motorcoaches, BC Ferries, 'flexipasses', rail travel, even sailboats for charter. There's a bonus if you make travel arrangements totalling \$500 with Signature by 15 June ... you will receive a \$50 Roots gift certificate.

Routes to Learning Canada announces Canada Learning Series 2002

Routes to Learning Canada (formerly Elderhostel Canada), Canada's award-winning learning travel organisation now has available their *Canada Learning Series 2002* catalogue, featuring new adult learning travel programmes (open to all ages) from coast to coast, including Newfoundland and Labrador and other innovative new offerings. A non-profit, registered charity, Routes to Learning Canada has a total of 4 offices in Western, Central and Eastern Canada, coordinating programming at 200+ venues in all 10 provinces and 3 territories.

New programmes in the Canada Learning series this year include a cross-country thematic focus on Canada's land and people, performing arts, spectacular cities, and cuisine and culture. In addition, lifelong learners will find international offerings such as an Australia/New Zealand train

journey, a fine arts programme in Holland, and the ever-popular Cuba Learning Series. Other unique experiences include expedition cruises, in conjunction with Adventure Canada, which focus on cuisine in the Maritimes, accompanied by Chef Michael Smith, as well as High Arctic cruises accompanied by either Doris McCarthy or Margaret Atwood. But perhaps the most popular new programmes will be those that focus on Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly in light of recent movies *The Shipping News*, *Rare Birds* and the television series *Random Passage*.

The *Canada Learning Series 2002* publication is available in public libraries across Canada. Programme descriptions, prices and registration information are also available by calling 1 866 745 1690 or visiting www.routestolearning.ca.

An Economical Way to Visit Niagara-on-the-Lake

by Les Dickason

Retired, but still active, we decided to spend a six-day break in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, without a car (we live in Nanaimo, BC), thereby effecting considerable savings not having to pay for car rental, insurance, or gas.

With the aid of the Internet we made reservations for tickets to six shows at the Shaw Festival, for six nights at the Ben Brae B&B on the edge of the “Old Town” area, and for Niagara Airbus to provide door-to-door service between Pearson Airport and our B&B. A healthy, economical, and fascinating experience resulted as we walked and walked during our sojourn in Niagara-on-the-Lake (or NOTL).

The grid system of streets in Old Town NOTL made it easy for us to take many different routes from the B&B to the “downtown” area where the three theatres used in the Festival are located. We could walk across the Common and be at the Festival Theatre in less than 15 minutes; we could stroll down tree-lined side streets (Regent Street became our favourite) and arrive at the Royal George or Court House Theatres in 20 minutes. A longer walk, using part of the 57 km Niagara River Recreational Trail, linked our B&B with downtown in 30 minutes.

Between Festival shows, and meals eaten downtown, we explored the scores of shops, galleries, and heritage houses - with not a chain-store or fast food outlet in sight. On Saturday and Sunday, walking in this area was slowed by the influx of tourists brought in by the many companies that service the local attrac-

tions. But, we avoided the crowded sidewalks by taking our picnic lunch (lots of gourmet delis from which to choose) to Simcoe Park and enjoying the shade, picnic table, and classical music played by a concert band in the band shell there.

Restaurants are a feature of life in NOTL. With thousands of visitors attending the plays at the Festival, pre-matinee lunches and dinners before and after evening performances are provided by dozens of establishments within easy walking distance of the theatres. From inexpensive pub-fare at the Angel Inn to gourmet meals at Peller Estate Winery Restaurant, there are meals catering to all tastes and budgets.

Our favourites were the Niagara Golf Club (lake-front view across to Fort Niagara), the excellent presentation of local ingredients at the *Epicurean* Restaurant with its counter service for lunch and off-street outdoor patio, and the good value at the Anchorage (loved the PEI mus-

sels and seafood pizza accompanied by Niagara region Sauvignon Blanc).

NOTL has a history, much of centred on the 1812 war, and it was easy to walk to some of the landmarks. Butler’s Barracks are on the Common; Butler’s Burial Grounds are on the edge of Old Town; and the National Historic Site of Fort George is adjacent to the Niagara River near the Festival Theatre. During the summer months, students in period costumes describe life in the Fort in the early 1800s, give musket demonstrations, and entertain with music of the period.



Peller Estate Winery (Dickason)

A View of the Lake

by Glenn Murdoch

So you've travelled around Rome, Florence and Venice and you're sick of the noisy crowds. What do you do? If Italy on the tourist track starts to pall, you can renew your enthusiasm (and recharge your batteries) with a trip to Como. That's what my wife and I did. We hopped a train from Milan and spent a few days by the lake.

Had we taken the main line from Milan to Como's San Giovanni station, we would have been surrounded by the coloured parkas and backpacks of the hordes continuing north to Switzerland, but by taking the branch line to Como Nord we were rewarded by being the only tourists on the train. As it was, our carriage contained five businessmen, an impeccably behaved young boy and two schoolgirls who stole furtive glances at us whenever they thought we weren't looking. The afternoon sunshine painted our carriage the colour of honey as we rattled the last few kilometres into Como.

Como Nord is near the ferry terminals. A 2nd class ticket from Milan's Ferrovie Nord station cost L6,000 (about C\$4.40 ... and please remember Italy has now switched to the euro) and the train takes an hour. Admittedly, when we alighted at Como Nord we could have been at any rundown station in any Italian town. However when we walked to the far end of the platform we were rewarded with Como's showpiece – a view of towering mountains to the left and right, framing the serene waters of Lago Di Como.

The better-known San Giovanni Station overlooks Como from its hill to the west and is certainly the flashier of the two. The trains from Milan's Central station only take 30 minutes and as you exit the station

you see the whole town spread out below you. You can walk down the hill and into the centre of Como in 15 minutes or, for people who have perhaps bought too many souvenirs, taxis are waiting to whisk you to your hotel for about C\$11. Trains continue from this station to Switzerland, but unfortunately the station's old tourist office is closed – permanently.

Como Nord is much smaller than San Giovanni Station, but has the advantage of being closer to town and the remaining tourist information office. The tourist office should generally be your first stop in any new place so, facing the lake, we turned left onto Lungo Lario Trieste and walked 200 metres along the promenade to Piazza Cavour. Here the tourist information office was

open and waiting on the far side of the square, and we collected our free map of the town and got helpful advice from the friendly, multi-lingual staff.

Since we had bags to carry and the afternoon was well advanced, we chose the easiest solution and opted to stay next-door in the Hotel Metropole Suisse at 19 Piazza

Cavour. It's reasonably priced (for Como) with double rooms from C\$145. This is a grand old building with lots of character. Call (area code 011 39) 31 269 444 or visit their web site: www.hotelmetropolesuisse.com.

We dumped our bags, freshened up and in no time at all were out walking the lakeside promenade. Dodging vespers (is there no place free of them?) we crossed the square and settled into a nice café to study our map and make plans. Soon all pretence of planning ceased and we just sat watching people over the rim of our cappuccinos. One thing we noticed was the affluence – among the usual swarms of Fiats there were also



The Hotel Metropole Suisse (Murdoch)

many Mercedes, BMWs and Porsches.

The promenade is certainly the focal point of the town. We saw many Como residents walking there, meeting friends or just admiring the view. When the last rays of sunlight disappear behind the mountains, the streetlights come on and the promenade hosts the *passagero* – an Italian custom where everybody gets dressed up and goes out for an evening stroll. The place to see and be seen is definitely the lakeside promenade.

Dinner on our first night was at the Ristorante Terrazzo Perlasca, which is near the funicular in Piazza de Gasperi 8 (tel: 300 263). They do great seafood and have lovely views over the lake from their second-floor dining room. They're closed on Monday.

For those who want to enjoy a room with a view of the lake, there are several hotels on the promenade to choose from. Obviously a lake-side view is going to come at a premium and, for those with big budgets, the most luxurious hotel in town is the five star Albergo Terminus – right on the water near the Como Nord train

station at 14 Lungo Lario Trieste. Double rooms start at C\$182. If this is a special occasion, you might try and get their best suite – room 500, which will set you back over twice that amount. Phone 31 329 111 for bookings or email larioterminus@galactica.it. If you're on a budget and can forgo a great view, Hotel Marco's is more moderately priced at C\$124. It is close to the lake and funicular station at 62 Lungo Lario Trieste and can be called at 31 303 628.

If you're travelling outside the peak season of June to August, I'm sure you could just wander into town at a reasonable hour and book something through the tourist information office.

The next morning we were up early exploring the town. The mist on the lake was beautiful and our breath came out in little clouds as we walked through the park by the water. Further around the coast to the

west we could see large mansions, each with their own private dock. Some are hotels and one has been turned into a museum. They're very beautiful, but are a long walk from town. In the park itself is the Volta Temple – a museum dedicated to Alessandro Volta (1745-1827) who did pioneer work on the behaviour of electricity. Much of the museum's collection was destroyed by fire, but a fair amount survived and the 18th century architecture is lovely.

Lago Di Como was like a mirror that morning. Most people were still in bed and, as we stood at the back of the temple listening to the seagulls, we felt grateful that there was very little traffic noise to spoil the serenity. We enjoyed the lake and mountain views and took some photographs before we ventured out to explore.

Como has the fortune to be a walled town, which means all development was constrained within the city walls until society advanced enough to make it safe to build outside them. The lack of space and motorcars means that the older streets of Como are narrow lanes of ancient houses towering above them

like canyon walls. A few major roads have been built through necessity, but these can be easily avoided and we did most of our exploring on dark, cobbled streets. These are alleviated by squares, which appear at regular intervals just when you are starting to get chilled in the shadows and yearning for a bit of sunshine. Squares are usually decorated with a fountain or statue – invariably being climbed all over by small children. On certain days you may be rewarded by a lively street market.

Generally speaking, Como has a nice selection of restaurants, but we often try to economise at lunchtime and save our money for dinner. We found a pizza place at Piazza Mazzini 6 called Taverna Messicana. When we strolled past there was a long queue of Italian locals waiting to get in, which is always a good sign. It's a lot bigger than it looks because the taverna was once sev-



Piazza Cavour from the entrance to the Hotel Metropole Suisse (Murdoch)

eral small homes that have been knocked together forming a labyrinth of tiny rooms and cozy corners. You can get basic pizzas for about C\$7, which were a bit disappointing, or specialty pizzas from C\$12 which were good ... highly recommended.

Another find is possibly the only non-smoking panini shop in Italy – quite surprising in a country of chronic smokers. It's called El Merendero and is at Via Crespi 4, a back street not too far from the funicular. They have 45 excellent paninis to choose from and almost as many beers. They do great desserts and are open from 11:30-14:30 and 18:30-1:00 every day except Wednesday. If you need to know, there's even a McDonalds on Via Plinio, near the Duomo. In the evenings it tends to be full of Italian teenagers.

The Duomo is a lovely old Renaissance-Gothic cathedral a couple of blocks from the ferry terminal. It was completed in 1770 and is showing its age in many places. Inside you can spend a quiet time wandering about in the gloom studying all the fine tapestries, paintings and marble sculptures. Pick the right time and you might be able to eavesdrop on choir practice.

Less grand than the Duomo, but still worth a visit, is the Basilica of San Fedele completed in 1120. This is roughly in the centre of the old town in Piazza San Fedele.

For the less ecclesiastically minded there are plenty of opportunities for shopping. We found a good selection of home decorating and upmarket clothing

stores. Como is famous for silk and I bought several ties while my wife bought scarves and silk blouses at very good prices. Buying silk may push the upper limits of your budget, but at least it folds up nice and small in your luggage.

If you fancy some time alone, try a walk along Viale Geno on the funicular side of the lake. This side is like a backwater with some houses on the shore. You can walk all the way down to the point and only meet

a handful of old ladies walking their grandchildren. Sit a while at the old fountain, Lido Villa Geno, and contemplate the beauty of the lake.

After a few days just exploring and enjoying the scenery, you might feel you know Como well enough to



Lago Di Como from our room in the Hotel Metropole Suisse (Murdoch)

move on. There's plenty to see right next door. You can take the funicular up to Brunate and enjoy the views from this beautiful mountaintop town and even walk back down to Como if you're feeling energetic. This walk takes less than an hour. And ferries are standing by to take you on a wonderful tour of Lago Di Como, stopping at postcard villages like Argegno, Lenno, Tremezzo and of course Bellagio, which is generally recognised as one of the most beautiful villages in Italy. When you're feeling rested, the remainder of Italy will be waiting and Switzerland is just up the road. We hope you enjoy as much as we did!

Airline News

WestJet is coming east on 23 May, with regular flights between Toronto/Calgary and Toronto/Edmonton with, of course, connections with this airline to other destinations in Alberta and B.C. One-way fares start at \$205 and \$222 respectively.

Air Canada has launched two new daily non-stop routes from Toronto to Madrid and Amsterdam. The route to Madrid is to be year-round, while to

Amsterdam it will be a summer service only.

Malaysia Airlines is offering an "Access Asia Pass" that allows travel to Kuala Lumpur and up to 23 other cities in Southeast Asia during a 30-day period. The lowest rates, starting at \$747 round-trip, are available for travel from Los Angeles (LAX) between now and May 31, or from August 15 through November 15. **Cathay** is offering a similar deal for 21 days via Hong Kong for as low as \$999.

DISCOVER FRIULI

by Doreen Vanini

One of Friuli's greatest assets is what it *doesn't* have many other tourists! Just 120 km from tourist-filled Venice, the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia (the northeastern corner of Italy, bordering Austria and Slovenia) offers beautiful sandy beaches, mountains for climbing and skiing, vineyards to tour, historical sites and attractive shopping.

The area has been influenced by its many invaders of the past, who contributed to the language, the cuisine and the people's cautious natures. They're cautious, yet welcoming, as Friulian hospitality is a point of pride among the people. You can travel from the golden sand beaches of Lignano on the Adriatic coast to the snow-topped mountains of the Carnic Alps in under two hours. That same length of time takes you from the border city of Gorizia in the east to the next region of Veneto in the west. In between are the verdant plains and gentle slopes that produce some of the finest wines of Italy.

Friuli's many towns and small cities each offer their own history, style and specialty. Tourists might want to situate themselves in Udine, capital of its province, and an attractive city of about 110,000. Its old town today is a smart shopping area with the city's best stores and bookshops and sidewalk cafes. It's tradition to enjoy a cappuccino in the afternoon here, but in Friuli, as in all Italy, stopping in *un caffè* or bar is very much a way of life throughout the day. They may be big or small, but most are handsomely decorated and welcoming, in that "there are a lot of people, but still room for me" feeling. Udine's centre is its castle, a building estimated to be just over 1000 years old. It sits in Piazza Libertà, the square surrounded by many historic buildings, including the Church of Santa Maria, the oldest in the city. This square leads on to the fashionable piazza of San Giacomo, with its outdoor café, daily fruit

and vegetable market and church of San Giacomo.

From Udine as a base, you can take day trips and visit one or two smaller cities or towns per day. Cividale is a great place to begin. Located just 17 km to the east of Udine, it's situated with clear view of the Carnic Alps, with their gentle slopes and snowy tops. Cividale was the region's link to the Roman Republic.

Its former name was Forum Julii, after Julius Caesar, whose statue graces the main square, in front of the beautiful church of Santa Maria Assunta. Also on the square is Cividale's Archaeological Museum, with many items that date back to 586 BC, the time of the invasion of the Lombards from the North. Cividale is a photographer's dream. Its Ponte dal Diavolo, (the devil's bridge) is an oft-photographed point, for the gracious structure of the bridge, the winding Natisone River running beneath it, and the historic church and buildings (now apartments) that line its banks. About 20 km southeast of Udine is the nine-pointed walled city of Palmanova. Built in Venetian style in 1593, it has a large square in its centre, with streets radiating out to the still intact walls. Today the tourists that do discover this charm-



Cividale, on the Natisone River (Vanini)

ing area sit in outdoor cafés in the square and shop in the elegant boutiques that line the streets.

Roman ruins can be found in Aquileia, 37 km south of Udine. Founded by the Romans in 181 BC, it became the main link to the Republic from Cividale. Columns remain of the forum, the circus and basilica; walking around the town one can see evidence of the baths, monastery and city gates. A key site is the Church of San Giusto, for its fabulous floor mosaics.

Keep going south to the Adriatic coast, drive across the causeway, past the tiny island church of St. Barbara and you are in Grado, sister city to Aquileia. Grado is one of the region's beach resorts (the larger Lignano is the other) that share 32 km of coastline. Europeans, mostly Germans, have found Grado and

visitors will hear as much German as Italian being spoken. This is a place to relax, to rent an umbrella and sit on the sandy beach, go for a stroll around the marina in the centre of the city. The jewel of Grado is its old town, a tangle of narrow streets, between 1000-year-old buildings, opening up into crowded squares with excellent restaurants, serving fresh fish. While wandering through, watch for the Basilica of St. Eufemia, begun in the 5th century. AD, with its mosaic floor. Going west from Udine are the cities of Pordenone, Codroipo and the medieval town of Spilimbergo, favourably located on a plain near the Tagliamento River. Its Gothic cathedral was begun in 1284 and it's decorated with frescoes from the 14th century. But it's greatest fame lies in its school for learning the art of mosaics. Examples of its students' works can be seen in a number of Catholic churches in Toronto.

Friuli's capital city is Trieste, located at the eastern tip of the region, on the Adriatic. It has a long and turbulent history of switching countries, between Italy and Yugoslavia, and its strongest influence, even to its architecture, came from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The main government buildings were designed by one of Austria's finest architects of the 1850's. Trieste is a port city, with a history as a major trading and ship-building centre. Today some of the world's largest luxury cruise ships are still built in nearby Monfalcone.

For camping, walking and hiking, there are four major national parks in the area, and there are the mountains, the Carnic Alps, which dominate the north of the region. Skiers flock to Tolmezzo and Tarvisio for excellent day and night skiing. In 2003 Tarvisio is host to the Winter University Games, bringing thousands of young skiers to the area for three days of competition. In this area you can also visit the town of Gemona, which has seen major reconstruction after an earthquake in 1976 all but levelled the town.

Friuli produces some of the world's finest wines and many wineries offer tours and meals, and Agritourism stays. These are farm stays where visitors are guests in homes and get a chance to see and experience the new and many old ways of farming ... and enjoy rustic Friulian cuisine, as well.

The region is studded with fine restaurants offering northern Italian and local Friulian cuisine. It's a hearty cuisine, based on local products, like corn (polenta, which is made from corn, was a staple until after WWII), pork, rice and chicken. The best prosciutto comes from Friuli, from San Daniele and lately from Sauris. Many restaurants today offer the local prod-

ucts, prepared in an imaginative and eye-appealing manner.

For example, in the town of Mortegliano, (population 2,000, 15 km southeast of Udine) is the charming restaurant, da Nando. No menu is presented, but the waiter, usually one of the owners, recites the day's features. While enjoying a glass of prosecco (dry white sparkling wine), you are presented with tastes of four or five antipasti, each attractively prepared, then pastas or rice or gnocchi, followed by the main courses of meat or fish. If you're still capable of dessert, the crème fraiche with berries is a perfect end to the meal.

The *osterias* (small bars/cafés) in any town are fun to visit, where the locals drop by throughout the day for their espresso or a glass of wine and a chat about sports – a favourite topic – or politics. Most towns have a number of these establishments to choose from.

For shoppers in Friuli, the best buys are fine, wool sweaters, which can be purchased from smart designer label-filled department stores; from boutiques, where the sales person knows and describes each item; or even at city markets. Large booths display an excellent variety and you can bargain for the best prices. Ceramics are also popular, hand-painted with a recognizable floral pattern. You can purchase plates, cups, vases, and small pitchers, called *bocai* that are used to serve wine. You'll find malls on the outskirts of some cities, and even a few 'big box' stores, selling everything.

Throughout the region accommodation is good and varied, from 4-star hotels to smaller properties, and I noticed that more and more B&B's are starting to open. I was fortunate in that I could stay with friends, but I noticed an historic B&B close to the centre of Udine where rooms cost from C\$14 to C\$36 b&b pp pn. Casa Vallar is located at Via Amalfi 3, 33100 Udine, Italy, tel: 011 39 432 530 092, e-mail: info@vallar.it, www.vallar.it Getting around the region is easy; if you don't have a car there is a very good local bus service that reaches all corners. Trains are clean and run frequently within the region, to other parts of Italy and outside the country.

Travel help: The closest airport to Trieste and Udine is in Ronchi (outside Trieste). **Alitalia** offers daily flights from Rome. **Helpful sites:** www.initaly.com and www.italiantourism.com For more information, contact the **Italian Government Tourist Office**, at 175 Bloor St. East. Suite 907 Toronto, ON M4W 3R8, tel: 416 925 4882

Sunshine Coast ... continued from page 10

water than this. Cost is \$125 per person and guests get discounts on boat excursions. Tel: 604 883 9120.

This water-bordered region also ranks highly with the lycra-clad set. Day cyclists spill off the ferry and pedal to Sechelt or a few kilometres farther to lunch on the sunny deck of the Wakefield Inn, and return to the city on an evening ferry. Also, the Sunshine Coast's hillsides are riddled with mountain biking trails. For hikers and birders there's a variety of trails here. It's tough to choose from among so many, but for a good work-out and unprecedented views, my choice is **Mount Daniel** in the **Pender Harbour** area. Allow about an hour-and-a-half to reach the top, which is strenuous but well worth the sweat. The panoramic view of islands and ocean seems to go on forever and you'll be eye-level with soaring eagles, ravens and turkey vultures.

The Sunshine Coast is an enchanting step back from the busy world. If you come, watch out for coast fever. It's easy to catch!

Niagara-on-the-Lake ... continued from page 14

The ideal location of our B&B made it possible to take a "gourmet walk". In less than a quarter of an hour we found Kurtz Orchards where, after watching pickers at work in the orchard, we enjoyed cider on the shady veranda before buying the ingredients for our picnic lunch (fresh, washed cherries included of course). After eating the lunch at a picnic table alongside the Niagara River, we returned home - via the newly opened Peller Estates Winery. This impressive establishment is a working winery, but also offers an up-market "starred" restaurant, garden, boutique, and tasting room.

The Shaw Festival is "dark" on Monday, so we walked to the Navy Hall dock, and took advantage of the wood-fired, steam-driven *s.s. Pumper* and its sunset cruise. In two hours, it steams up the Niagara River and back, and then out into Lake Ontario so passengers can enjoy the sunset before returning to NOTL. Commentary provided by the helpful and friendly crew highlights the history of Fort George and Fort Niagara, and of other features of the NOTL shoreline such as the lakeside gazebo seen in the film "Dirty Dancing".

Our B&B, Ben Brae – one of many in this region – felt like home for our visit. Breakfasts were healthy, but varied and substantial. The house boasts a lovely back garden and patio for relaxing, and our amicable

Travel Help:

Ferries depart Horseshoe Bay every two hours starting at 7:20 a.m. until 9:15 p.m. with extra sailings in summer. For information: 1 888 223 3779; www.bcferries.bc.ca Travel 'ambassadors' on the ferries can assist with information.

There is transportation on **Malaspina Coach Lines** from **Vancouver International Airport** to the Sunshine Coast. Tel: 1 877 227 8BUS.

Tourism BC Visitor Info Centres are located in Lower Gibson's on Marine Drive and in Sechelt's Trail Bay Mall. Tel: 1 877 663 2963.

For a comprehensive look at the **Sunshine Coast** visit www.bigpacific.com

For **B&B** listings consult www.bbsunshinecoast.com

Note: Boaters, especially sailors, should familiarize themselves with the tides. To ensure a calm trip through the Inlet, it is essential to travel as the tide is turning.

hosts (Lynda and David) provided information about the area, and comfortable touches to make us feel welcome. The air-conditioned house was a perfect temperature after we had walked from a matinee performance in the warm sun.

For those who prefer not to walk, it is possible to rent cars or bicycles, and to take cycling or mini-bus tours to the many wineries in the region or to nearby scenic highlights such as Niagara Falls and the Welland Canal. But, we chose to remain faithful to our original intent, and we continued to walk NOTL until the Airporter punctually collected us on the final morning and returned us to Pearson Airport.

Travel help:

Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce:

tel: 905 468 5012, www.niagaraonthelake.com,

Ben Brae B&B: 905 468 7224, www.benbrae.com

Niagara Steamship Company: 905 468 8343

www.niagararsteamship.com

Shaw Festival: 1 8000 511 SHAW (for a comprehensive tourist guide combined with theatre listings)

www.shawfest.sympatico.ca

Niagara Airbus: 905 374 8111

www.niagaraairbus.com

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Marvel at the contrasts of Asia on our unique three-country tour covering some fabled highlights of Vietnam, China and Hong Kong. Come with The Travel Society on a very unusual tour: visit Ho Chi Minh City (still called Saigon by many locals) and visit the Reunification Hall, the former presidential palace; the moving War Crimes Museum; Thien Hau Pagoda, home of the Sea Goddess; bustling Chinatown and a fascinating lacquer ware workshop. The following day you'll take a cruise along the Mekong River, stopping at an orchard island to sample delicious tropical fruits and enjoy traditional music in a typical farmhouse. A stay in the Da Lat region, 280 km from Ho Chi Minh City comes next. It's a cool land of pine woods, green hills and valleys, quiet lakes, beautiful waterfalls and exotic gardens. In Da Lat itself you'll visit pagodas, summer palaces and the city's flower, fruit and vegetable market ... one of the most beautiful in Vietnam. A stay in Nha Trang is next on the itinerary, a superb coastal resort famous for strange rock formations and the Oceanographic Institute. We then revisit Ho Chi Minh City, with time to explore aspects of the city you may have missed earlier.

Then it's on to China ... first stop Guilin, a very special destination with scenery like none other on earth. Here you'll enjoy a full day Li River Cruise, passing through breathtaking scenery to the market town of Yangshu. The pleasures of Shanghai come next with highlight tours, that famous acrobatic show and time to shop in this shopper's paradise.

The pleasures and excitement of Hong Kong are well known. We'll show you the highlights of Hong Kong Island on a morning tour, leaving you time to explore on your own later ... it's very easy to get around! Next day promises an in-depth tour of the New Territories known as the Land Between Tour. Situated between the Kowloon Hills and the border with China you'll enjoy scenic views, markets, monasteries, a Hakka village, a fishing site and much more.

AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from:

Vancouver	\$4,548 pp/dbl
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Your tour includes:

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AIR-INCLUSIVE PRICES departing from: Taxes included.

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Fiji add on	\$1,104 pp/dbl
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- All transfers
- Daily breakfast
- 6 dinners
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- All sightseeing tours, boat trips and fees to parks & sites
- Departure taxes

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The Best of Australia, New Zealand & Fiji ... Ancient Cultures, Modern Cities and Timeless Beauty with 2-days in Fiji 29 days departing 21 September 2002

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- Canadian domestic air fares
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- 4 nights in the Outback
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Please call for the full details of this NEW tour.

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departing from:

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Pat Davey, a Travel Society member from BC, has travelled to China with us and written a 14-page account of her trip. For a copy of her unedited story please send us a \$5 cheque and your address.

Don't delay, these tours are very popular and the Yangtze River will be restricted during 2003.

Reserve now for 2003 departures;

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18 April 2003 10 October 2003

Please call now to ensure your reservations for this amazing tour this fall and next year.

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- **China Yangtze Spectacular** – departing March, April, September & October 2003
- **China, Hong Kong & Vietnam** – departing 31 October **2002**, April & October 2003
- **The Highlights of Australia, New Zealand & Fiji** – departing 11 January & 25 October 2003
- **Discover Australia & New Zealand** – departing 10 February & 20 October 2003
- **Exotic Thailand** – departing April & October 2003
- **Costa Rica, Nature's Wonderland** – departing February & March 2003
- **Galapagos & Peru** – departing February & March 2003
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