



Poets Cove on
Pender Island is set
in North America's
largest marine park.

Pacific Retreat

Vancouver Island's eco-lodges offer spectacular
seclusion and **luxé** digs at a **great price**

As physicians striving to stay current with the latest knowledge in our chosen field and needing to satisfy continuing medical education requirements, we are always on the lookout for interesting conferences.

Beyond the information being presented, location is a crucial factor in determining whether or not to book a conference or let it pass by. Vancouver Island offers a truly amazing range of natural experiences as well one of the most livable and appealing cities in the world: Victoria.

Sprinkled between Vancouver Island and the mainland, the Gulf Islands provide a peaceful retreat from the stresses of life.

by Dr Brad Bowins

The area's renowned five- and four-star resorts make a perfect add-on of a few nights before or after a conference; several even have facilities for small to mid-size conferences right on site.

Dr Brad Bowins is a psychiatrist working in a private practice and at the University of Toronto Health Service. An avid photographer and scuba diver, he recently visited Vancouver Island on a diving trip to explore the area's artificial reefs, and took a little time to enjoy the view above water.



Brentwood Bay Lodge runs an exclusive water shuttle to the Butchart Gardens.

BIG ISLAND BEAUTY

Ideally situated on Vancouver Island just 20 minutes from Victoria and 10 minutes from Sydney, the five-star **Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa** (849 Verdier Avenue, Brentwood Bay, Vancouver Island; tel: 888-544-2079/250-544-2079; www.brentwoodbaylodge.com) has all the creature comforts and eco adventures you could hope for. The resort features many of the amenities popular in the area — ocean-facing rooms which have a balcony or patio, a fireplace and a spacious bathroom with extra large bathtubs open to the main room. Spring rates start from \$199 a night; summer rates from \$299.

For a different perspective of the sea, kayak to the tip of Saanich Inlet, where you'll also find a refreshing stream. To further replenish the spirit, you can soak in the heated outdoor pool and hot tub at the resort or book an Essence of Life massage, followed by dinner at the acclaimed Arbutus Grill & Wine Bar, where selections from an award-winning wine cellar are matched to each dish. More casual fare and live music are served up at the casual Marine Pub.

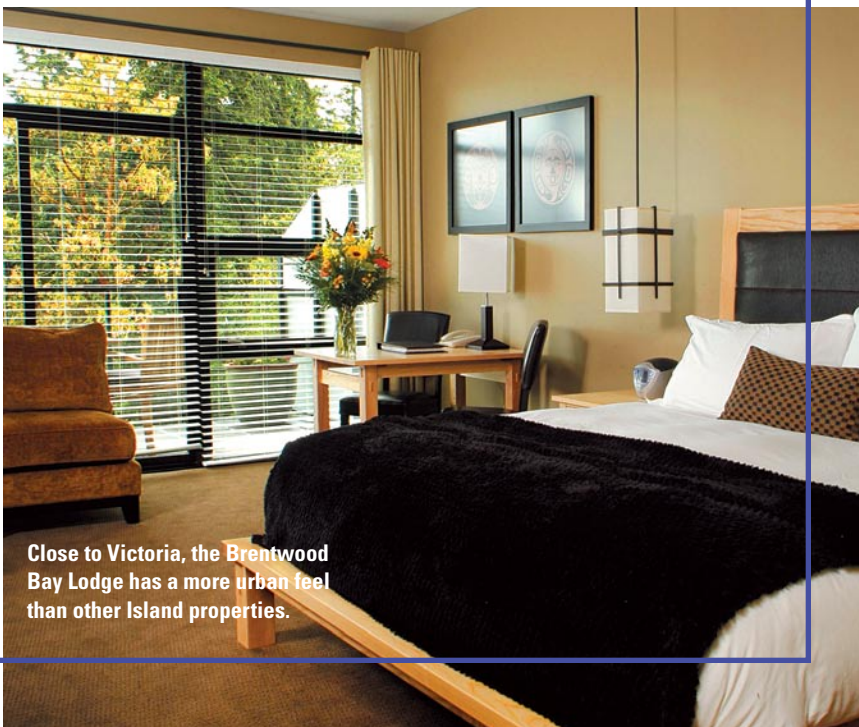
The resort has a well-equipped marine centre with sea kayaks and tour boats. **Rockfish Divers** (tel: 250-889-7282; www.rockfishdivers.com; two dives for \$99) offers outings to see the rare cloud sponges that grow in an amazing diversity of shapes and sizes — many oddly resemble human body parts, such as a spine. Despite the physiological connection, cloud sponge excursions do not currently qualify for continuing medical education credits — the resort, however, can accommodate conferences that do.

WILD PACIFIC BOAST

Tucked into the West Coast paradise of Tofino, the **Long Beach Lodge Resort** (1441 Pacific Rim Highway, Tofino, Vancouver Island; tel: 250-725-2442; www.longbeachlodge.com) is famous for its hiking and ocean kayaking in the summer and storm watching during the winter. This winter pastime was originally popularized by the nearby Wickaninnish Inn. But for just over half the cost of a room at the “Wick”, the Long Beach Lodge Resort offers similar amenities, plus the option of



Long Beach Lodge Resort was designed to resemble a West Coast-style home.



Close to Victoria, the Brentwood Bay Lodge has a more urban feel than other Island properties.

Between 2000 and 3000 California sea lions winter on south Vancouver Island.

For a different perspective of the sea, kayak to the tip of Saanich Inlet where you'll find a refreshing stream

townhouse-style cottages. Until June 22, summer rates start at \$199 a night for a forest room.

Sit in the wood-panelled lounge that serves as a restaurant and bar or relax on your balcony and watch the waves roll in from the Far East as the sun sets. For eco-adventure lovers this region has a lot to offer. The 77-kilometre **West Coast Trail** (tel: 250-726-7721; www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/bc/pacificrim) is one of Canada's best. This grueling hike is a wilderness challenge, but it is still close enough to civilization to ensure you'll make it back in one piece.

A more easygoing option is the 8.5-kilometre **Wild Pacific Trail** (www.wildpacifictrail.com) out of Ucluelet. Open year-round, this trail winds along the coastline through temperate rain-forest. The "wild" part is best appreciated in winter with the awesome beauty of waves crashing on the Broken Islands and rocky shoreline. Ucluelet and Tofino also offer excellent sea kayaking with excursions to Barkley and Clayoquot Sounds, and Meares Island.

ENGULFED ON THE ISLANDS

Sheltered and mist-shrouded, Bedwell Harbour is an ideal setting for a resort. The comfortable accommodations in the main lodge at the **Poets Cove Resort & Spa** (9801 Spalding Road, Pender Island; tel: 888-512-7368/250-629-2100; www.poetscove.com), as well as the luxury cottages built up the hillside, all have perfect ocean

island hopping

Departures from Vancouver Island to the Gulf Islands on **BC Ferries** (tel: 888-223-3779; www.bcferries.bc.ca) leave from Sydney for Pender Island and from Nanaimo for Gabriola Island. Reservations are recommended.

Float planes flying out from various locations on Vancouver Island and the mainland are also available. See "Air Services" under the Transportation tab on the **Tourism Vancouver Island** (tel: 250-754-3500; www.vancouverisland.travel) website.

For more information on travel to the region, contact **Tourism BC** (tel: 800-HELLO-BC; www.hellobc.com).

views. A full spa and a conference centre are located in the main lodge, where rooms start at \$169 a night, including breakfast. From Sunday to Thursday, rates drop to \$139.

For those wishing to experience the great outdoors, the activities centre provides sea kayaks and can arrange scuba diving to sites such as the HMCS Mackenzie, a 310-metre warship delib-

erately sunk for divers. For land-based excursions try the Castle Road Trail winding along a misty hillside. When the mist clears, the summit provides amazing views of the island.

Home to artists and writers, tiny Gabriola Island has over 60 galleries and performance venues. **The Melville Grant Inn** (2310 Windecker Drive, Gabriola Island; tel: 866-247-5444/250-247-9687; www.melvillegrantinn.com) is a four-bedroom, five-star boutique inn perched on a bluff overlooking the sea. Summer rates with gourmet breakfast are \$209 a night, even on weekends.

Offer yourself up to the care of John and Janice, who have created an environment of unmatched comfort and service. They try to satisfy all requests and will gladly take you to an uninhabited beach with a full picnic lunch.

Guided hikes can also be arranged, although trails are so well laid out that you can't get lost. Also recommended is a stop at **Drumbeg Provincial Park** (tel: 250-474-1336; www.env.gov.bc.ca/bc_parks). Its beautiful shoreline is a great site to spend half a day taking in nature and spotting resident bald eagles, great blue herons, and harbour seals. **R**

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(cetirizine HCl)



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