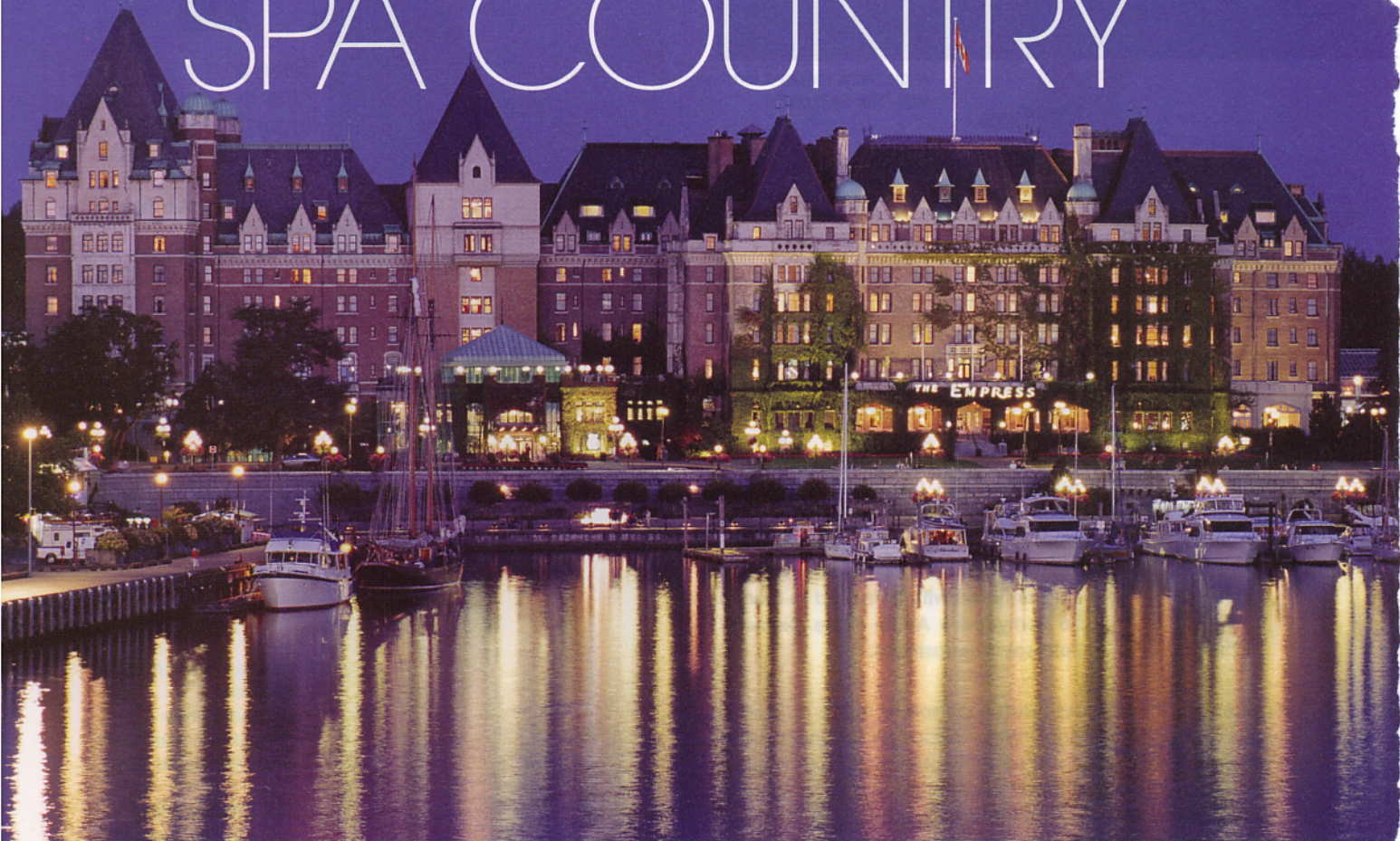


BY LISA ARCELLA

CANADA IS SPA COUNTRY



The Fairmont Empress

A spa vacation is all about relaxation and getting away from the worries of everyday life. There's no better place to do just that than the Willow Stream spa in Victoria, British Columbia, set among some of Canada's most breath-taking scenery.

Canada's great exchange rates mean more for your money, the weather during summer months is close to perfect, and for many of us these days, Canada is just far enough away for adventure, while still being close enough to home.

Victoria was the first European settlement on Vancouver Island and is the oldest city on Canada's west coast. It's a little over 40 miles south of Vancouver and 2 ½ hours away from

Seattle by high-speed ferry—allowing for exploration in both those lovely places. But Victoria has its own charms as a pretty seaside town of gardens, waterfront walks and restored 19th-century architecture.

There also is an interesting and eclectic mix of cultures. Once called the most British city in Canada, Victoria is now a happy mix of Native American, Asian and European traditions.

THE SPA

Willow Stream is the signature spa of the Fairmont Hotel Chain, and in Victoria it can be found within the walls of the stunning chateau-style Fairmont Empress.

A calming waterfall is the first welcome you will receive from this two-level spa with mineral soaking pool. And while it's only two years old, the furnishings are coordinated with the old world elegance of the rest of the hotel.

"I think we have a competitively priced, but still very luxurious spa," director Michelle Young tells *Black Elegance*. "We offer guests an authentic spa experience that smells nice and feels nice, but is great for the body as well. When I speak to guests I think they sometimes get disappointed when they read a brochure that promises something and doesn't deliver what it promises. That doesn't happen here. I think there is a genuine sense of caring here."

The spa is featuring a special body wrap treatment through October featuring Egyptian oils to honor the extensive exhibit being held at the Royal British Columbia Museum, and has recently added popular Lavender Fields manicures and pedicures.

Says one specialist: "We have an Egyptian display at the Royal B.C. Museum here and our treatment is themed to that...we actually created a treatment to coincide. I have Egyptian oils [and we do] a full body wrap."

Willow Stream spa features traditional-style Finnish Sauna and Steam, as well as the incredibly relaxing Hungarian Thermal Mineral Bath.

The incredible 30-minute soak is recommended before taking any facial or body treatments to "prepare the body for total relaxation and nourishment." The spa has several signature treatments, well worth treating yourself to. The Island Senses Body Experience for Health and Energy (2 hours, \$349 Canadian) uses elements found on Vancouver Island. It starts with an invigorating "salts of the sea" body scrub for exfoliation and then an aromatic pine hydrotherapy bath followed by a detoxifying mud wrap. Finally, enjoy a restoring and healthy lavender massage. You won't believe how relaxed you feel after trying this.

The Willow Stream Body Experience For Health (90 minutes, \$229 Canadian) uses medicinal mud, healing waters and light massage for both a detoxifying and relaxing effect. It begins with a body wrap, which combines the famous cleansing and renewing effect of moor mud, with the uplifting aroma of fresh rosemary. It continues



Willow Stream Spa Treatment Room

with immersing in a therapeutic mineral bath using salts from the Hungarian Savar Spring, a spring so high in mineral content that the Hungarian Ministry of Health has designated it "a medicinal water." The experience ends with a soothing massage using a moisturizing mineral cream.

The Find Your Energy Body Experience for Rejuvenation (90 minutes, \$249 Canadian) helps you boost your energy. You begin with a gentle brush exfoliation to stimulate and prepare your skin to be nourished. You then relax in a bath with the restorative scents of chamomile. A rose hip oil massage follows to loosen muscles and relieve tension. Your body is then gently wrapped in an infusion of golden red rose hip. Rose hip has the most intense concentration of Vitamin C, along with other nutrients vital to the health of your skin and body, and it feels great. The spa also features a variety of European Kur treatments meant to reinfuse your body with minerals and energy.

If a facial is on your agenda try the Willow Stream Facial Experience (90 minutes, \$159 Canadian). It starts with an invigorating eucalyptus foot soak and an oxygenating anti-aging facial. And the spa claims that many of the essential oils used in the Fit for a Queen Facial Experience (60 minutes, \$129 Canadian) are the actual products used by many members of the Royal Family! Or try the Traditional European Deep Cleansing Facial (60 minutes, \$99 Canadian). It's great for all skin types. It includes a gentle exfoliation to reveal radiant skin; gentle skin cleansing; a relaxing facial, hand and foot massage; a nourishing and refining masque; and botanical extracts to rejuvenate the skin. Your aesthetician will assist in selecting appropriate products for your skin type. You may want to focus your treatment and have the Eye Lift and Lip Treatment (\$39 Canadian) to help smooth fine lines and wrinkles.

To ease the aches and pains of everyday life, Willow Stream offers all of the traditional massages. Our favorite is the Swedish Massage (60 minutes, \$119 Canadian), a massage technique using long smooth strokes to relax muscles and stimulate the lymphatic and circulatory systems. But there is also the Aromatherapy Massage (60 minutes, \$129 Canadian), Sports Massage (60 minutes, \$129 Canadian) and Shiatsu (60 minutes, \$119 Canadian), the 5,000-year-old Japanese technique, great if you have muscles, headaches, tension and insomnia. This treatment may be performed with comfortable loose clothing.



Willow Stream Spa Hungarian Mineral Pool



Empress Room

One of the more interesting massages offered at Willow Stream is the East Meets West LaStone Therapy (75 minutes, \$189 Canadian). The Ayurvedic treatment involves warming river stones to use as a massage tool, along with fragrant Ayurvedic oils, including a blend of cinnamon, sage, rosemary, basil and rose that will melt away stress.

Once your skin is relaxed, it's time to get a glow on with an exfoliation treatment. The Salt of the Sea Scrub (30 minutes, \$69 Canadian) promises to remove dull surface skin cells, improve circulation and nourish the skin with minerals, trace elements and eucalyptus essential oil. An application of soothing chamomile lotion leaves you with softer, smoother skin. The Gentle Body Polish (30 minutes, \$69 Canadian) is a gentler exfoliation of the body for sensitive skin and includes a unique granulated pumice and chamomile scrub that gently refines and renews the skin. A loofah mitt with chamomile bath gel follows for deep cleansing, while a chamomile spray completes the experience. The Thermal Mineral Bath (30 minutes, \$69 Canadian) contains active minerals and trace elements, which are absorbed through the skin during bathing—this aids in the detoxification of the body. It is especially beneficial for sore muscles and aching joints.

Willow Stream also offers a number of day and weekend packages for men, women and couples. Our favorite is the Romantic Adventure (3 1/2 hours, \$729 Canadian) for couples, where you can spend a romantic day at the spa together in your own private Royal Suite. All your services will be brought to your own treatment room with a private Jacuzzi tub, rainfall shower and relaxing fireside sitting area. If you don't fall in love again after that, we can't help you!

When you are suitably relaxed and blissfully glowing, be sure to take in the hotel's wonderful afternoon tea. Katherine Hepburn, Barbara Streisand and even John Travolta enjoyed a cucumber sandwich or two here.

Willow Stream Spa: (866) 854-7444, toll-free

Open seven days a week, Sunday through Tuesday from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Wednesday through Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Open 365 days a year.

WHERE TO STAY IN VICTORIA

The Fairmont Empress (800)-441-1414. Rates between \$175 and \$250. The best place to stay if you are visiting the spa. Spectacular views of the Inner Harbor.

Beaconsfield Inn (888) 884-4044. Rates between \$175 and \$250. All the suites have stained glass windows and mahogany floors and one room even has a canopied bathtub.

Swans Suite Hotel (800) 668-7926. Rates between \$125 and \$250. A lovely boutique hotel near the waterfront.

Prior House Bed & Breakfast. (877) 924-3300. Rates between \$175-\$250. A restored 1912 manor home with a garden and lots of antiques and fireplaces.

WHAT TO DO

If you can pull yourself away from the spa, Victoria has a lot of entertainment, including:

Art Gallery of Victoria. Featuring west coast artists. (250) 384-4101

Butchart Gardens is 130 acres of horticulture beauty. Summer at the Gardens bring the added attractions of nightly summer musical entertainment and a Saturday night Fireworks display. (250) 652-4422

Butterfly Garden is a lush, indoor tropical garden where flowers always bloom and butterflies flutter about. (250) 652-3822

Craigdarroch Castle. The mansion features the best collection of residential stained and leaded glass on the West Coast, magnificent woodwork and period furnishings. (250) 592-5323

Horticulture Centre of the Pacific. 110 acres of property, gardens and splendor. (250) 479-6162

Royal BC Museum. Rated one of the best in North America. (250) 356-7226

Royal London Wax Museum. Just around Victoria Inner Harbour from the Fairmont Empress. (250) 388-4431

Victoria Eaton Center. Victoria's largest downtown mall.

Market Square. More than 45 specialty stores and restaurants offering original and offbeat shopping and in an old-town setting.

WHERE TO EAT

Empress Room at Fairmont Empress. A French-influenced Pacific Northwest menu in a beautiful setting. \$20 to \$35 for entrees. (250) 389-2727

Zambris. A lively trattoria worthy of a neighborhood in Rome. \$15-25 (250) 360-1171

Café Brio. Delicious Tuscan-style dishes. \$15-\$30 (250) 383-0009

Camilles. Regional game cuisine; try the pork tenderloin in a Jamaican jerk marinade. \$15-\$30. (250) 381-3433

The Marina Restaurant. A prime spot for seafood and Sunday brunch. \$12-\$30. (250) 598-8555

Suze Lounge and Restaurant. Eclectic food with an Asian influence. \$8-\$25



Butchart Gardens

ME AND MY GIRLS

There's nothing like a weekend away with the girls to get you laughing and improve the mood! Admit it, there are those moments when you need to get away from the kids, the man, the house, the dog—just away! Lots of hotels and spas are recognizing your need to renew friendships and kick it with the girls. Ask your travel professional for suggestions. In the meantime, here are a few from *BE*:

Get back in touch with your friends and nature at the same time. **Montebello in Canada**, midway between Montreal and Ottawa, is a huge star-shaped luxury log-cabin-style hotel on 65,000 acres bordering the Ottawa River. You can relax and swim at the indoor Olympic-size pool, or hike, play tennis, ride horses, boat, fish or play golf without ever leaving the property. There is a great restaurant on the premises, and nearby is Omega Park, where you can see wildlife run free. For more information call (866) 540-4462.

The Soho Metropolitan Hotel in Toronto is offering The Girlfriend's Massage Package for groups of four-to-eight women, which features one night in a loft condo, one-hour in-room aromatherapy massage and a four-course catered buffet dinner starting at \$195 per person.

The Omni William Penn Hotel in New York City is offering a Girlfriends Escape Weekend through the end of the year that includes Royal High Tea service, manicure and pedicure or facial or massage. The weekend includes champagne and a complimentary makeover and gift at Saks Fifth Avenue.

Orlando doesn't only mean visiting Mickey and Minnie. **The Holiday Inn Hotel and Suites** in Orlando is offering a two-night room suite for \$180 for two or \$220 for four people and includes a special "ladies-only" shopping vacation with a few of your closest girlfriends at Orlando's Premium Outlets. This prime shopping outlet includes everything from Barneys to Burberry. Transportation to and from the hotel is included.

Vancouver's PMS Package – Pralines, Martinis and Shopping...what could be better? **At the Waterfront**, the gals' getaway includes accommodations for one night, specialty chocolate pralines, a flight of signature martinis in Herons Lounge, and a discount shopping booklet for Waterfront Center Shops and Pacific Center. Rates start from

\$179 per room in May 2004 and from \$210 per room from June through September 2004.

Spa pampering in wine country? If this sounds perfect, book the Girl's Getaway package at **The Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa** in California, which features a \$110 spa credit, spa lunch and a special spa turn-down amenity. The package also includes accommodations for one night in a Fairmont Room with two double beds, access to all of the fitness facilities and an evening wine tasting in the resort's lobby. Guests also can take advantage of all of the spa's daily activities, including pilates, meditation and hiking. Single rates start at \$469 per night through December 31, 2004. For an additional person in room, add \$160 per night.

Casa del Mar Beach Golf & Spa Resort in Cabo, Mexico, is offering a four-night Girlfriends' "Spoil Yourself" Spa Escape in an oceanfront room. For a little more than \$500 per night for two people, they will provide roundtrip airport transportation and a welcome signature margarita upon arrival, and breakfast plus massage, exfoliation, manicures and a snorkeling tour.

Tough week at the office? Grab the gals and head up to Canada for some retail therapy! To indulge the passion for fashion, **Fairmont hotels** in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal or Quebec City have matched up with stylish Holt Renfrew (think Bergdorf's and Barneys) and their savvy team of "At Your Service" personal shopping consultants. Your retail therapy package includes a one-night stay on Fairmont Gold with all the associated indulgences (private check-in and concierge, breakfast, honor bar), complimentary access to Holt's complete personal shopping services, delivery of your purchases to your hotel, and a copy of "Holt's," the store's fashion-forward seasonal guidebook. Until December 31, 2004, the price tag on Retail Therapy starts at \$182 per room. — L.A. **BE**