

CAMPBELL RIVER MIRROR

The spa lifestyle is something I could get used to very easily

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A quirky television show on the TV listings caught my attention a few years back and prompted me to check it out.

World's Greatest Spas hooked me fairly easily as the series sent host Brigitte Gall to some of the most luxurious spas on the planet. The quirky Gall would sample the services of spas from British Columbia to Turkey and I thought, man, what a tough job. Some of these spas were exclusive destinations and others were simply luxurious. I may not have Gall's job but I recently got a taste of the spa lifestyle when I sampled the Tigh-Na-Mara resort in Parksville during a winter trip.

From a collection of comfortable log cabins and waterfront condominiums on Parksville's resort row, the Tigh-Na-Mara has expanded to a luxurious destination. With a new manager at the helm, Dant Hirsch, the resort has launched a 20,000 square foot spa entitled "the Grotto." This is actually the second phase of the Grotto. Opened in 2003, the Grotto Spa started out with 13 spa rooms (later expanded to 16) offering treatments from salt scrubs, herbal wraps and various massage techniques. The focal point of the Grotto was a 16,000 square foot pool featuring mineral waters from Hungary and a striking, two-storey water wall.

Pretty nice and one of the few spas in the province. But Hirsch wasn't content to stop there, the Grotto underwent another expansion this year by adding 8,000 square feet of usable space to the The Grotto Spa for a total of about 20,000 square feet, making it the largest spa in B.C. and one of the largest in Canada.

Added to the Grotto were three extravagant Grotto Spa Suites for Two, the Lavendar Relaxation Lounges, an outdoor balcony complete with lavendar garden and the Treetop Tapas Bar and Grill.

Each of the Grotto spa suites will have a large, locally- handcrafted copper soaker tub that will fill by cascading waterfall stemming from a feature rock wall, two over-sized treatment tables and a fireplace with two comfortable chairs and room for two to savor spa cuisine.

The Grotto is the epitome of elegant ambiance and is now the largest spa in BC history and the luxurious facility knows how to pamper its patrons.

"We believe we are responding to the most recent Spa travel trends," says Dant Hirsch, General Manager. "Guests want to extend their experience beyond a 60 minute treatment. Expanding the capacities of our Relaxation Lounges allow for guests to arrive early, detoxify in the Mineral Bath, taste exceptional Spa Cuisine in the new restaurant, and simply unwind."

Last year's \$1.5 million addition added about 8,000 sq. ft. of usable space to The Grotto Spa for a total of about 20,000 sq. ft - the largest spa in British Columbia, and one of the largest in Canada.

Added to the Grotto's stunning 2,500 square foot Mineral Bath - fed by a two-storey waterfall - and 16 treatment rooms, are three extravagant Grotto Spa Suites for Two, the Lavender Relaxation Lounges, an outdoor balcony complete with Lavender garden and the sumptuous delicacies of the Treetop Tapas & Grill.

Each exclusive Grotto Spa Suite will have a large locally hand-crafted copper soaker tub that will fill by a cascading waterfall stemming from a feature rock wall, two oversized treatment tables, and a fireplace with two comfortable chairs and room for two to savor spa cuisine. "Treatments for Two" for couples and friends will allow two people to spending anywhere from 3 to 6 hours in one of these suites, being pampered every step of the way.

"We knew with so many spas opening, to be successful, we had to not only be unique, but be the best," says Hirsch. "We strive to showcase exceptional British Columbian product lines to ensure our guests experience a truly West Coast Spa, one that we are incredibly proud of."

The Grotto Spa is the most recent addition to Tigh-Na-Mara Resort, a 22-acre retreat with luxurious Spa Bungalows, authentic rustic Log Cottages and Oceanview Condominiums overlooking the finest stretch of sandy beach on eastern Vancouver Island.

A recent trip to sample the Grotto and the Tigh-Na-Mara's elegance opened my eyes to the beautiful facility. The mineral pool is a relaxing facility set in a rock, fern and waterfall-themed pool. The soft water of the pool caresses your skin as you float through it. The water is cool, something of a surprise to the uninitiated - namely, me - but is surprisingly relaxing. The mineral qualities of the water are said to invigorate you. My wife sampled the spa treatments and declared them to be a wonderful experience.

The Grotto Spa is part of a vision that Hirsch and his team are developing. In 1981, the Hirsch family and their partners purchased the property consisting of 11 acres and 12 cottages. Over the years, the couple added over one hundred elegant and unique accommodations and developed the resort into an internationally known destination. Management of the resort was turned over to Dant Hirsch who now oversees the 22-acre resort that consists of 192 accommodation units, the acclaimed West Coast Restaurant and Lounge, the Grotto Spa, and the largest Conference Centre north of Victoria on Vancouver Island.