

Hollyhock... an Island Getaway Retreat Center

Article and Photos by Ann Nelson

In January of 2009, I made a promise to myself that I would take a solo trip before the year ended. Hollyhock, an Island Getaway Health Retreat, turned out to be the perfect destination for a solo traveler looking to enhance their sense of purpose and experience adventure.

My initial reasons for choosing Hollyhock were simple. It is located on a small Canadian island in the middle of nowhere. Personal growth, relaxation and incredible organic food are a few of the key ingredients that drew me to Hollyhock.

Before embarking on my adventure, I had a strong notion that Hollyhock, located on Cortes Island, three hours north of Victoria, Canada may not be particularly easy to find. The location in itself created part of my initial intrigue. Nestled at the entrance of Desolation Sound, Cortes Island is one of several islands squeezed in between the glaciers of Vancouver Island and the Coast Mountain range of the mainland.

There are many simple ways to travel to Hollyhock, but I was determined to rent a car and go on my own. I picked up my car in Victoria and headed north, driving over stunning country roads with scenery that took my breath away. The CD's I brought from home were turned up loud.

I was enjoying the drive and felt on top of the world, until I realized that I overshot my exit by 30 miles. I blamed my poor sense of direction, a trait that is embedded in my DNA. As I back-tracked, my major concern was getting to the two ferries on time. I didn't want to spend the night in the parking lot waiting for the morning ferry to arrive. As it turns out, I had worried needlessly. I made

it to the ferry that evening with time to spare.

After driving my car safely onto the ferry, I started to relax. The scenery was simply splendid. Islands popped out of nowhere and the air was fresh. I sat back and engulfed myself in the mystery of this new place.

The adventures I experienced while driving to Hollyhock were well worth it! The retreat center itself sits on a bluff directly above Desolation Sound. Nature trails and meditation sites are woven throughout the 44-acre property.

After spending a few days in quiet relaxation at Hollyhock, I realized the true purpose for going there was much broader than I originally thought. The core purpose for Hollyhock's existence is not to just learn from incredible teachers for personal reasons, but to take what you've learned and apply it in the real world.

Hollyhock is a leading educational retreat center and draws world-renowned lecturers such as Dr. Andrew Weil and Robert & Judith Gass. Program topics range from "The Power of Plants" to "Media that Matters" and "The Buddhist Path to Love & Happiness." More than 70 topics are offered during the May to October schedule.

Choices for lodging range from campsites and dorms to private oceanside rooms. The price includes meals, guided walks, morning meditations and yoga classes. I woke up early each morning and headed up the winding path to a sacred cob house for morning meditation. My days were filled with kayaking, swimming, hiking and incredible "home cooked" meals.

Nora Fletcher is responsible for creating the French Intensive organic garden that produces much of the food for the kitchen. A mix

of edible flowers and fresh vegetables are part of the special ingredients that made each meal a memorable treat. The body treat-

My reaction came as a total surprise. After all, I was not out in the middle of nature; I was in the middle of a city. The design-



Lodging at Hollyhock Retreat Center.

ments I experienced while staying at Hollyhock are the best I've ever had.

Leaving Hollyhock and Cortes Island was not easy, but as I was leaving, I knew I was coming away with a new spiritual awakening. Hollyhock, a non-profit operation, exists to inspire, nourish and support people who are making the world a better place. You can't get any better than that!

Before heading home, I wanted to spend a few days in Seattle. My Seattle home base, the Edgewater Hotel, turned out to be a perfect choice. My initial reason for choosing the Edgewater was one of pure convenience. The hotel was a two-minute walk from where the Victoria Clipper docked in Seattle after sailing from Victoria.

Since the Edgewater was first commissioned for the World's Fair in 1962, it has remained a landmark of distinction and is still the only waterfront hotel in Seattle. The Beatles stayed here during their first world tour in 1964. Old photographs show the Beatles holding fishing poles outside their window. Remember, the hotel is built on top of the pier!

When I was in my room, I felt the wake created by the cruise ships as they departed for distant far-off places. Sail boats sailed directly past my window. The views of the city skyline, Mount Rainier and the Olympic Mountains were unbelievable.

During my travels, I have stayed in many wonderful hotels. For some unknown reason, it is difficult for me to describe this hotel using concrete words. The thought, care and spirit that went into the creation and design of this place evoked my emotions.

ers of this hotel have spent a lot of time out in the wilderness. I could bet on it!

After a restful night's sleep in my room on top of the pier, I grabbed a cup of coffee as soon as it was light and proceeded to the concierge's desk to check out a complimentary bicycle. I wanted to explore the city. Four thousand Seattle commuters ride their bicycles to work every day, taking advantage of the endless miles of bike paths.

From the vantage point of my bike I explored the coast line, shipyards, The Olympic Park, and various neighborhoods. In the afternoon, I hopped on the free Waterfront Street Car Line that stopped in front of the hotel and checked out Pikes Peak Market, Pioneer Square, The Seattle Aquarium, and the Chinatown District.

This was my first trip to Seattle. Immediately after arriving, I realized that I hadn't planned enough time to spend in this city that sparkles with water, light and energy. It's definitely a place I want to come back to, and soon.

Hollyhock Educational Retreat Center: Visit www.hollyhock.ca, or call (800) 933-6339. Prices that do not include a workshop start at approximately \$127.00 a night. Workshop prices are listed in the Hollyhock Catalog, and can be ordered on line, or by calling the toll-free number.

The Edgewater Hotel: Visit www.edgewaterhotel.com, or call (206) 269-4575. Prices change daily and are based upon availability. Low season prices start around \$229.00 a night.

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Hollyhock's organic garden.