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Photography By Amanda McNaughton.

Hollyhock

Urban reprieve.

STORY: [Tara Henley](#)

As modern life becomes ever-more stressful, the benefits of retreating and unplugging become ever-more clear. Delicious food, deep sleep, quiet contemplation, and rich community are all on offer at Hollyhock, a luxe centre on British Columbia's Cortes Island, located among the stunning Discovery Islands on the north end of the Georgia Strait. And now, after 36 years in existence, the famed hideaway is drawing a new crowd.

Long a haven for Baby Boomer soul-searchers, change-makers, business leaders, and cultural elite, Hollyhock is swiftly becoming a hot destination for millennial and Gen-X tech moguls, foodies, musicians, and literary types. While people once headed to Hollyhock to take courses in subjects like, say, the art of chanting, these days a younger population comes here for inspiration on podcasting, playing the ukulele, and urban homesteading. (This leadership learning hub is not just for courses, though. Interested parties can book in for a rejuvenating holiday—think guided hikes, morning rows, massages—or a group celebration like a wedding. Or the office can head here for a team-building getaway.)

Getting to Hollyhock involves a near-Herculean level of effort. From Vancouver, it takes an entire day to fly to Campbell River, rent a car, take a ferry to Quadra Island, and take a second one to Cortes. But with breathtaking views and friendly fellow travellers, these sailings wind up being their own kind of fun. And once docked in the harbour, journeyers immediately reap the rewards of being so far from city life. The air on Cortes is clean, the night sky impossibly dark, the silence impenetrable.

After checking into Hollyhock, a stroll through the property's extensive gardens puts a weary voyager at ease. The scent of lilies wafts by, and the vibrantly floral plots provide a pleasing visual feast. Fat, orb-like tomatoes burst from vines; rows of lettuce sway gently in the breeze. On benches, people lounge—talking, reading, revelling.

If hungry from the trip over, head to the organic tea and toast bar to enjoy a chilled ginger brew and Hollyhock's signature hearty, house-made grain and seed bread slathered in mixed berry jam. Then it's time to check out the accommodations, in this case a charming wooden cottage, part of the Orchard complex nestled in a patch just minutes from the main lodge. Cool in the summer's intense heat, the cabin boasts a pillow-soft bed that calls for afternoon naps and leisurely hours with good books. At night, the pitch-black encourages dreams to arrive almost instantly.

Mornings at Hollyhock, meanwhile, are for sunrise yoga and visits to the meditation centre. Before breakfast, participants, leaders, and volunteers alike congregate on the lodge patio, sipping coffee and staring out at the sweeping ocean views. And when the meal bell rings out, a palpable feeling of excitement fills the forest air. With two bestselling cookbooks in circulation, Hollyhock is legendary for its culinary program, and one could be forgiven for heading here with the sole purpose of eating. (In fact, local islanders and mariners passing through frequently turn up just to break bread.)

The pescetarian cuisine is both health-conscious and deeply delicious, with its bounty of fresh fruit, vegetables, and edible flowers grown on-site. The breakfast buffet might

feature baked eggs with herbs and lemon blueberry muffins, fruit salad, and porridge with rhubarb compote; lunch may serve up cream of mushroom soup or a vegetable torte, along with a heaping plate of salad with Hollyhock's famed yeast dressing, followed by fresh-from-the-oven dark chocolate cake with a dollop (or two!) of whipped cream. And dinner is, well, an extravaganza: sweet glazed salmon, spicy cornbread biscuits, green beans in garlic, and plum cardamom upside-down cake—with, perhaps, an oyster barbecue on the beach to kick off the night's festivities. The conversations that accompany such meals are often just as inviting as the dishes; a rotating cast of new friends joins the table, sharing perspectives from around the world.

Evenings are spent listening to presenter talks, taking midnight dips in the ocean's bioluminescence, and enjoying long, lingering chats in the hot tub under the stars. The backdrop for it all, of course, is the magic of Cortes, with its sandy beaches, ample wildlife, dense rainforests, and laid-back coastal vibe. In short: the perfect antidote to hectic pace of modern life.

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