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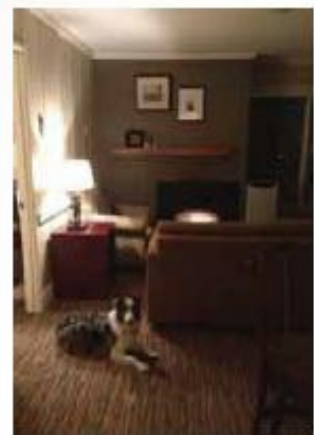
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Washington's Gem

Alberbrook Resort & Spa

By Krysta Furiato



As residents of the Lower Mainland, many of us are regular visitors to Washington State. We shop in Bellingham, we weekend in Seattle, see concerts, and visit friends in Olympia. But how often do we explore the areas a little further off the beaten path?

One such hidden gem is Alderbrook Resort & Spa. Located just west of Olympia, and nestled amongst the wild beauty of the Hood Canal, Alderbrook is one of those places that makes you say "Wow", as soon as you pull into the parking lot.

Leaving Vancouver in the late morning, my partner and I loaded ourselves, our seven-year-old, and our Border Collie into the car, and spent the day meandering south. For us, no trip through Bellingham is complete without a stop for lunch at our favourite healthfood market, and we can't pass through Seattle without stopping for a coffee, so by the time we reached the resort, it was nearly dinnertime.

Checking in, we were immediately overcome with the feeling that this was no mere hotel with chalet décor, this was the real thing. The smell of evergreens and cedar overtook us as we entered the stunning reception area. With monolithic and rustic exposed beams, a giant fireplace and huge windows overlooking the grounds and canal, it was obvious that this space was somewhere that would make guests forget their rush to check in and get the keys to their rooms.

Celebrating its centenary this year, Alderbrook celebrates a history rooted deeply in the celebration and preservation of all that makes this area quintessentially 'northwest'. Originally created as a vacation paradise, the resort has grown and rebuilt over the last century, all the while staying true to the original vision of an unpretentious getaway where families could enjoy food and art while basking in the bounty of the natural surroundings of the Pacific Northwest.

When we arrived, there was a wine and chocolate pairing happening in the lobby, and so after indulging and collecting our map and arrival package, we headed to our cottage.

More than just a detached hotel suite, the cottage brought back memories of spending summers at relatives' cabins in Ontario, where the sun told time over the lake, and children ran free in fun and safe communal spaces. The two bedrooms in the modern but classic cottage were spacious, and the cozy living room opened up onto a covered outdoor living space. We could sit on the couch in front of the fire and gaze out over the beautiful waters of the Hood Canal, right to the majestic Olympic Mountains. The view was unparalleled.

We found packages neatly prepared for both our daughter and our dog, and the room was tastefully stocked with an impressive honour bar and a full kitchen with all the comforts of home.



We spent our first evening enjoying notably unique and delicious meals from room service, and being vegetarians, we were impressed with how gracious and attentive the kitchen staff were to our dietary requests.

The next day we got up at dawn and took our dog for a long walk in the lush hiking trails adjacent to the resort where our daughter played nature guide with the help of the map the resort had provided. The afternoon was spent poolside in the classic conservatory-style swimming and sauna building. Room service is delivered right to the pool, and after a dip, I decided to sneak away to get acquainted with the spa, where the Signature Massage, (heated basalt stones with aromatherapy, relaxation and deep tissue techniques) is an absolute must for making a weekend getaway truly immersive and relaxing.

Not only did we find that we weren't left wanting for self-made fun, from badminton to swimming, aquabiking, the Xbox game room, golf, and hiking, we could also take advantage of many of the organized events and activities at the resort.

Touring the Hood Canal is made fun and easy with scheduled sunrise and sunset cruises aboard the 42ft wood yacht that moors at the resort's dock. Boardgames, lunch, drinks and fishing gear are provided for guests aboard 'Jack'.

As the resort celebrates its centenary in 2013, every month will see exciting events, including historical speakers, guided nature tours, and culinary guests. From guided hikes in August to paddle making in September, and all manner of Thanksgiving and harvest festivities in the fall, one can be assured that there is always something special happening at Alderbrook. ●

Visit Alderbrook resort online for details on the unique history of the resort, full spa menu, and complete events calendar. www.alderbrookresort.com

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