

Finding Nimmo

Wilderness resort is the perfect close-to-home getaway

WORDS SUZANNE MORPHET

Stepping onto the large floating dock at Nimmo Bay Wilderness Resort, I barely notice two men relaxing on Adirondack chairs and enjoying a cold beer in the late afternoon sun. Instead, I'm admiring the surroundings.

Dense forest flanks Mount Stephens, which rises sharply above the inlet where our floatplane landed moments earlier. Anchored to the shoreline are a series of tidy buildings on floats, most strikingly a new yellow cedar structure with a flared black roofline, giving the impression that it might just take flight like the Thunderbird of First Nations lore.

My thoughts are interrupted when I hear, "Hey, Suzanne."

Surprised, I turn to look at the two seated men. What are the chances of meeting someone I know deep in the wilderness of the Great Bear Rainforest on BC's central coast?

"Chuck!" I laugh, recognizing one of my neighbours from Victoria. "What are you doing here?"

But I don't really need to ask. With COVID-19 curtailing foreign travel, everyone's holidaying closer to home this year.

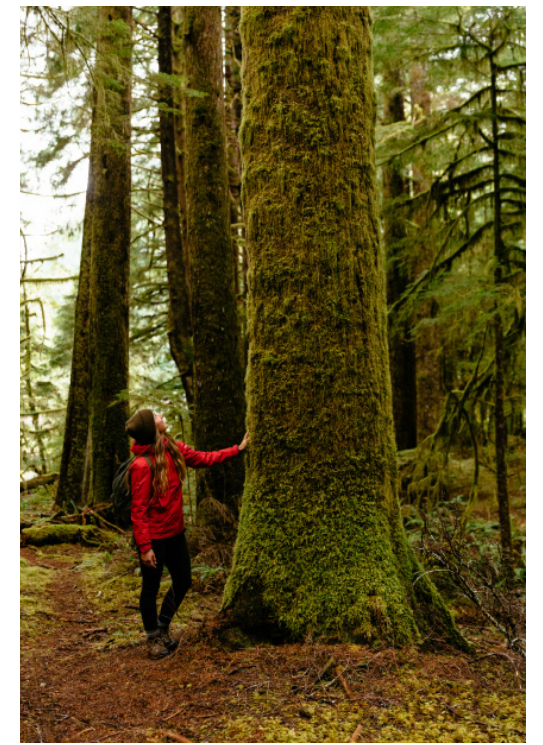
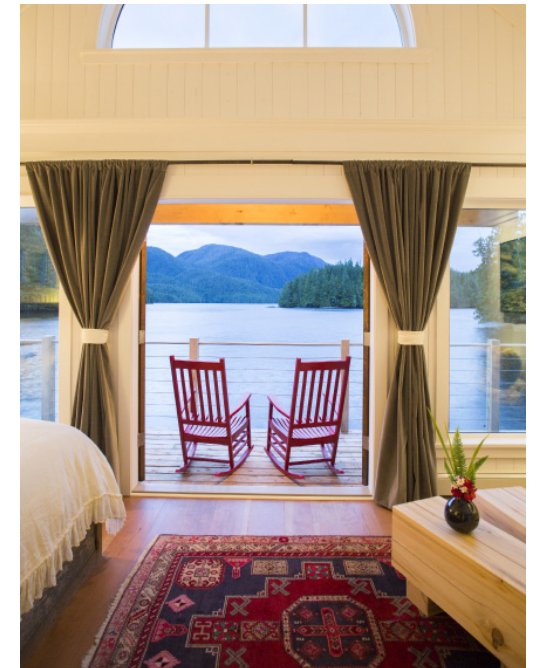
Chuck took advantage of international cancellations and booked a corporate retreat for 13 of his staff. Now, he and his wife are staying a couple days longer. Who can blame them?

As my husband and I are led to our waterfront cabin along a winding boardwalk, I'm reminded of wilderness resorts I've enjoyed in Africa. There, walkways are also elevated, both to protect the ground from damage and protect guests from wild animals.

At these African camps there's always a "wow" moment and just as I'm wondering what's in store here, we round a corner and there it is—a natural waterfall tumbling down a steep ravine.

Two hot tubs are positioned close enough to catch its cool spray, while tucked into the trees higher up is a glass and cedar cabin where I'll enjoy a therapeutic massage on my last morning.

As well as thrilling us every time we



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walk by, the waterfall provides drinking water and up to 80 per cent of the resort's power. In fact, it's the very reason Craig Murray picked this spot more than 40 years ago to build a heli-fishing lodge.

A sign engraved with the words "to fly is human, to hover divine" recalls those early days when a single building on floats accommodated Craig's growing family as well as his paying guests.

Even then, Nimmo Bay attracted well-to-do clients. The Murrys needed people able to pay the big bucks required to finance a seasonal, off-the-grid resort where everything from food to furniture has to be barged or flown in.

Mostly, those were corporate Americans, like the CEO of Boeing and his guests, who arrived every year for 14 years in their own Sikorsky helicopter from Seattle.

When Craig and Deborah's oldest son, Fraser—and his wife Becky—took over in 2011, heli-fishing was still their focus. But that changed almost overnight when they attended a travel trade show in Marrakesh and mentioned to German tour operators that their guests often saw bears and whales.

"They were like, 'Bears? Whales?'" laughs Becky, mimicking a bear's ears. "So we basically knew right then. Day one we were selling heli-fishing, day two we were selling this program that we'd never done before."

For international visitors, wildlife is understandably a huge drawing card, but I want to know what magic Nimmo holds for British Columbians who've already seen a bear or two. Why come here to experience something we can find even closer to home? Sitting around a blazing fire that evening, Chuck assures me that Nimmo Bay "is much more than bears and whales."

We have three full days to find out.

We're already getting the drift over dinner our first night—wild mushroom and garlic soup, seared halibut for me and an enormous ribeye of beef for Kit, and buttermilk and rhubarb sorbets—when Nimmo's amiable concierge stops by our table to discuss tomorrow.

We could do a safari by motorboat, says Will, or kayak the inlets around Nimmo Bay. Heli-fishing is also an option. Or what about an entire day of wellness? Start with a private yoga class, enjoy a full-body eucalyptus and sea salt scrub, meditate in the forest, then end the day with an Ayurvedic head massage.

We want to sample everything and we're happy to let Will figure it out. That's when a weight lifts and suddenly I feel like I'm on vacation. Will's in charge. We just have to show up.

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One evening Will suggests we investigate the private dock down the bay that's equipped with a wood-burning sauna. We'll have it all to ourselves. Arriving by kayak the next day, the sauna is steaming hot and the ocean bracingly cool. The dock is big enough for a dance party and we're all alone without even a mosquito in sight.

How is it possible that providing something as simple as hot air and cold water can feel so luxurious? That's the magic of Nimmo.

Returning to the lodge, we find a couple of large yachts anchored offshore. Just like in the old days, Nimmo Bay is still a must-stop for cruisers looking for hospitality.

Dinner that evening begins with crispy pork belly and Dungeness crab in a tomato reduction, followed by sablefish flavoured with eulachon—an oily fish prized by Indigenous people. The eulachon was a gift from the nearby Dzawada'enuxw First Nation at Kingcome.

Surprisingly perhaps, salmon is not served during our stay and won't be this season.

"There's so much pressure on the salmon from commercial fisheries and sports fisheries," laments Fraser, explaining his preference for using more sustainable fish.

Yes, with a smart eye to the future, and building on a stellar reputation from the past, I can see how Nimmo Bay will continue to please. Whether foreigner or local, we all need a little bit of Nimmo time.

For rates and other information, see nimmobay.com 