

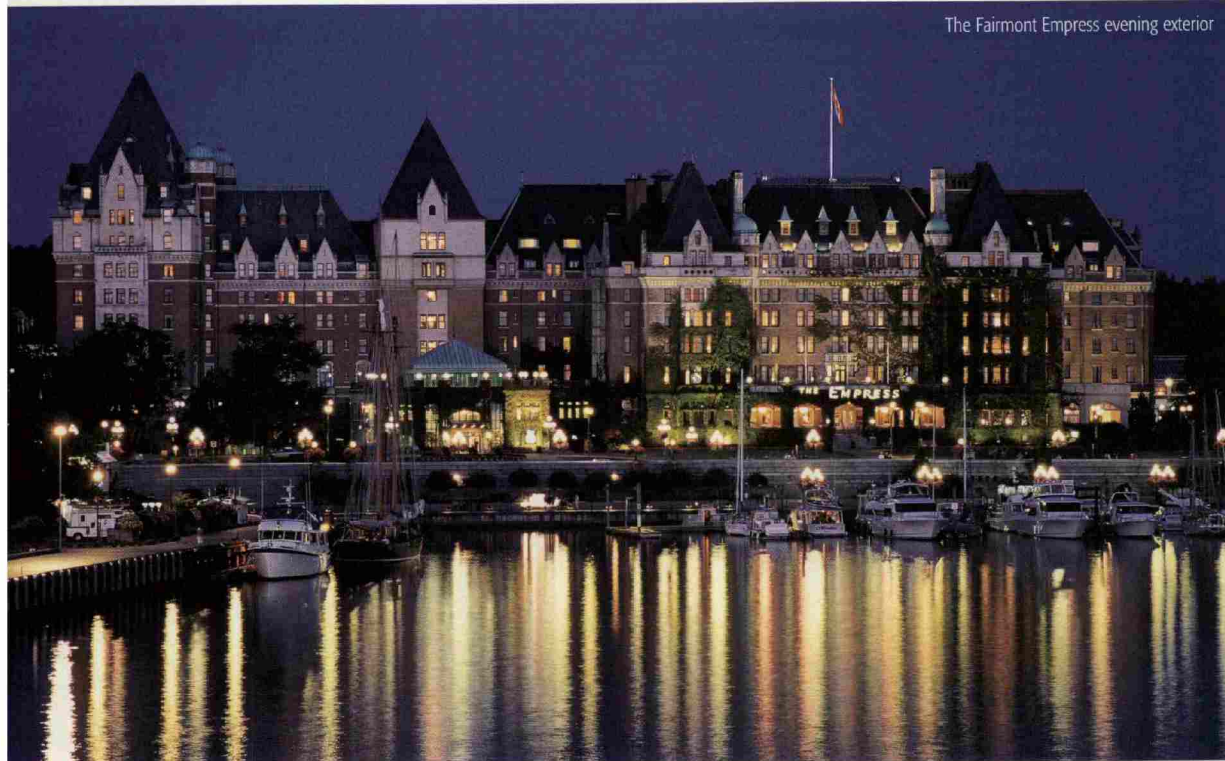
TRAVEL

BY VICKI COLLINS EDWARDS

Vancouver Island Escape

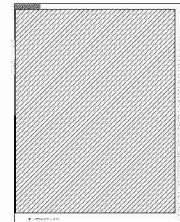
One of the world's top vacation destinations, according to the readers of *Condé Nast Traveler Magazine*, offers one of the most appealing luxury golf resort communities yet to grace Vancouver Island, a getaway wonderland. Bear Mountain Resort, the result of a tree-cutting dispute between famed professional golfer and golf course designer, Jack Nicklaus and his former golf club homeowner's association, is rapidly coming to life amid more than 1,100 acres of prime land on the foothills of Mount Finlayson approximately 30 minutes from the charming seaport of Victoria, British Columbia.

The story goes that when Nicklaus was turned down on his request to cut back a few trees blocking his view on his property, while a neighbor just took matters in his own hands without association approval or reprimand, Nicklaus proclaimed that he would just go build his own golf course! With the able assist of Steve Nicklaus, Bear Mountain Golf and Country Club, complete with a Nicklaus signature jauntily attired bear greeting guests upon their arrival at the two Westin hotel properties on site, Nicklaus has succeeded in creating not one but soon to be two 18-hole championship golf courses just beyond his back door. A new Valley course, to be completed in 2008, will be a par 70 with a 6,890-yard reach from championship tees. The golf club is also the home to Canada's only Nicklaus Academy.



The Fairmont Empress evening exterior

photo courtesy The Fairmont Empress



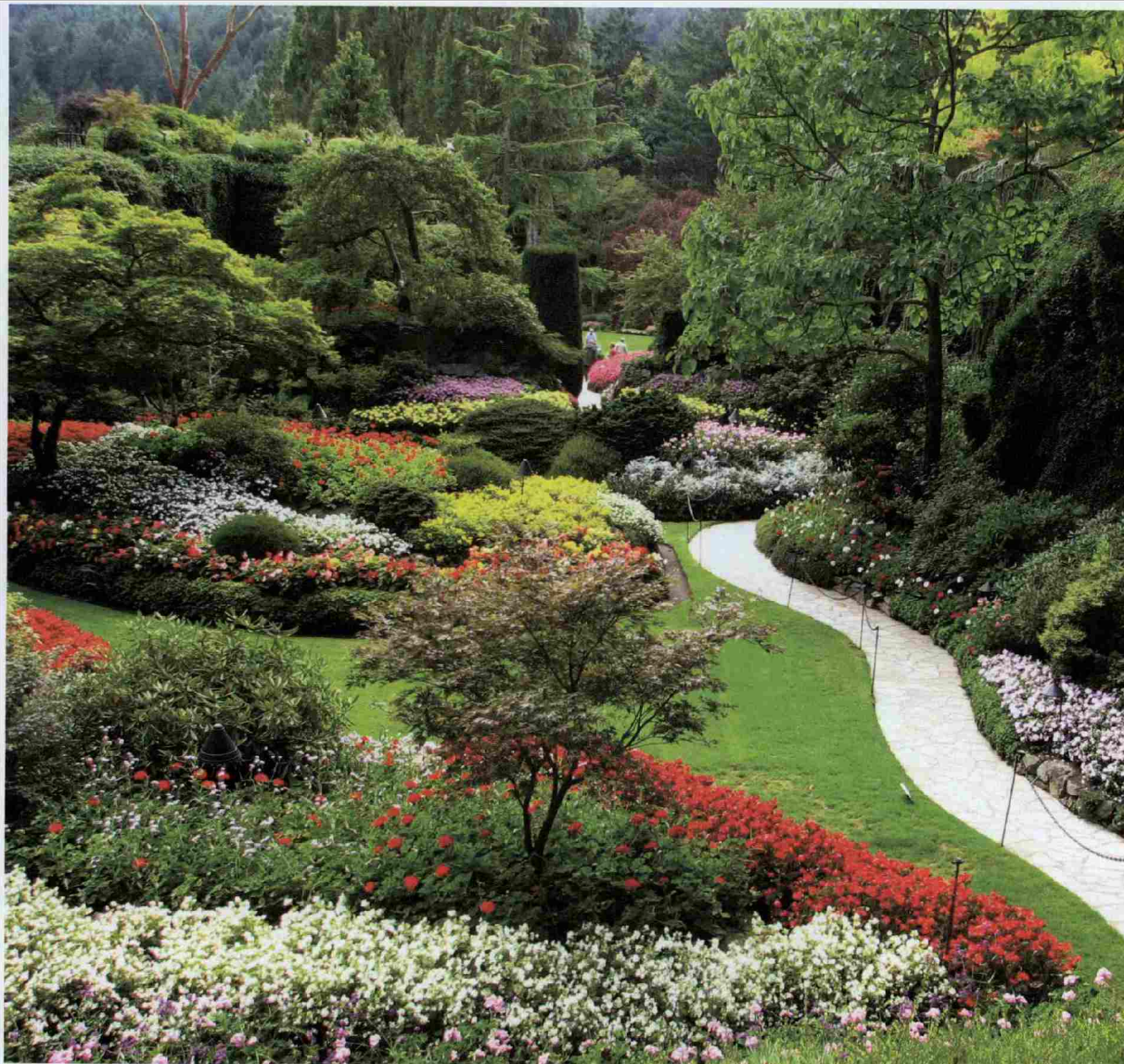


photo by Sumeet Wadhwa, courtesy Tourism Victoria

This masterplanned community of Bear Mountain, developed by former National Hockey League star Len Barrie and several other prominent NHL players, is slated to become a complete village over the next 10 to 12 years. Several single-family and townhome developments are well underway with boutiques and specialty shops in the works. A coffeeshop, art gallery and several bistros including the excellent Kuma Sushi are already open. A full-fledged grocer is now under construction. Summer and early fall are great times to catch a show or listen to top artists performing in the outdoor amphitheatre.

Golfers and non-golfers will enjoy hiking Mount Finlayson, considered a moderately aggressive incline, as well as indulging in the serenity and signature treatments offering indigenous products

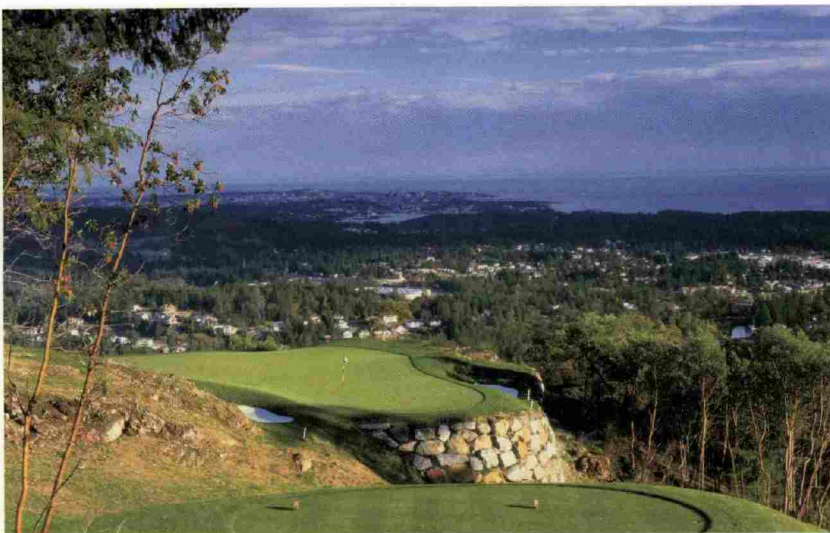


photo courtesy The Fairmont Empress

above: Sunken Garden at Butchart Gardens

left: Hungarian mineral pool at Willow Stream Spa

*Open year-round,
 the garden has been a
 breathtaking tribute to
 the beauty of nature for
 more than 100 years*



19th Hole at Bear Mountain



Hydrotherapy tub at Santé Spa

photos courtesy The Westin Bear Mountain Victoria Golf Resort & Spa

IF YOU GO:

Tourism Victoria
tourismvictoria.com

The Westin Bear Mountain
 Victoria Golf Resort & Spa
 888.533.2327
bearmountain.ca

Fairmont Empress
 800.257.7544
Fairmont.com/empress

Royal BC Museum
 888.447.7977
royalbcmuseum.bc.ca

The Butchart Gardens
 888.824.1987
tavi.butchartgardens.com

in the 12,000-square-foot Santé Spa. If you prefer your exercise indoors, resort guests can enjoy the offerings of the Mountainside Athletic Club nestled between the two Westin hotel properties. An outdoor heated pool and huge whirlpool will soothe strained muscles and prepare you for dinner at Panache, the intimate fine dining restaurant at the Westin. From cocktails and munchies at the distinguished Masters Lounge, to all day service at the Copper Rock Grill or Jack's Place, the food service is friendly and the fare is memorable with an emphasis on a variety of fresh mushrooms renown in this region, daily seafood offerings and hearty fare for big appetites.

A favorite room pick would be a luxury corner suite with full kitchen, dining area, living room with gas fireplace, a balcony overlooking the putting range and the opening holes of the Mountain Course, and of course, a Westin Heavenly bed for sweet dreams.

Motoring back down to Victoria, a must recommendation would be a few nights at the historic Fairmont Empress regally residing just across from Inner Harbor. Celebrating its 100th birthday, this grand dame property is offering a Breakfast in Bed with Traditional Tea package including a one-night accommodation for two complete with a little bubbly. Be sure to book a romantic dinner at The Empress Room for a turn of the century elegant dining experience. A massage or facial at the the hotel's Willow Stream Spa, a leisurely stroll through the incredible Royal BC Museum just across the street and a carriage ride around China Town and the Lojo shopping district will balance out your Bear Mountain Golf Resort experience.

Save a few hours for a walk through the amazing Butchart Gardens before you leave the island. Open year-round, the garden has been a breathtaking tribute to the beauty of nature for more than 100 years. **.SM**