

SNOW Scene

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Nature in the raw

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Special to the Sun

People from all over the world come to Canada in the winter for the great skiing and to enjoy a wide variety of outdoor activities they don't get back at home.

But it's not just our white gold they come for; for many it's a fascination with the winter storms that pummel our west coast – an unique winter vacation that Canadians themselves are just now beginning to appreciate.

Leaving my board at home, I packed up all the Gortex I own and headed to Ucluelet, BC to see for myself if the ocean could get my adrenaline up as much as 30 cms of fresh pow.

The ocean harbours an energy which is ominous and impressive; it's in the winter months when this ocean energy is most intense.

Spending some time on Canada's West Coast can not only open your eyes to this incredible power but can also, just maybe, give you a chance to re-discover what relaxation is all about.

My homebase for the weekend was Tauca Lea Resort and Spa in Ucluelet. Most people that know me, know I'm always on the move; it's pretty hard for me to kick back. Welcome to Tauca Lea.

I was out on the deck of my hotel room overlooking the ocean inlet, toes hanging out over the edge of my jetted tub, reading a book with the rain coming down and the winds howling, when I went through my mental itinerary and remembered, "Oh ya, this is what relaxa-

tion is all about."

"Visiting in the winter is an incredibly relaxing time. The resort has been open for six years and as front desk manager said front desk manager Crystal Bolduc of the six-year-old resort.

"Many guests who stay with us may never even leave their rooms."

Ukeke, as its known amongst the locals, is located on the west coast of Vancouver Island and with the next nearest land mass being Japan, operates as a welcome mat for the continuing winter storm systems.

Take a walk

Tucked on the south end of the Pacific Rim National Park, the town is just minutes away from Long Beach, long voted one of the world's top beaches.

"The winter here is for people with enough sense to go out for a walk in the rain," said Dave Snow, owner of the Starfish Cafe, where you'll find some delicious breakfast offerings.

Snow and his wife Margo are new to Ucluelet and for them it's all about being outside experiencing nature.

"Here, anything outside can be adventurous. We've experienced waves that are 11 meters high – you'd look out on the ocean and swear they were mountains, but it's water," said Snow.

"We've watched as waves nine meters high slam into the coastline up by the lighthouse. It is an incredible spectacle; you have to experience it to understand," invites Snow.

Over the course of my weekend I had the opportunity to eat in outstanding

restaurants, check out the storm surge along the impressive Wild Pacific hiking trail and experience the power of the ocean first hand through some wicked winter surf sessions.

I also experienced my own "Three men in a tub" adventure out on the ocean with Subtidal Adventures.

Owner Brian Congdon invited me on one of his Perfect Storm harbour cruises.

Bobbing around in his Zodiac like a little cork in a huge tub of water, Congdon talked a bit about his own long standing love affair with the ocean.

"I started running tourists out on the ocean over 27 years ago, and the thing I love about it the most is that everyday is different out here, the ocean is ever changing."

Starting next month Congdon runs whale watching tours viewing grey whales who call this area home for the summer and the migrating Humpbacks who travel through these waters in March and April on route to Alaska.

But here in the winter months it's all about storm chasing.

With another storm warning barking out over the marine radio, we head out to sea and within minutes we are surrounded by huge walls of water; it's an intense and phenomenal way to experience the raw energy the ocean holds.

This power tends to make one a bit hungry, so with an invite for dinner in hand, it was time to head to the Boat Basin Restaurant at the



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Tourists come from all over the world to visit Ucluelet, BC for the winter storm watching – an unique winter vacation that Canadians are just now beginning to appreciate.

Tauca Lea.

Gourmet chef Richard Norwood's menu features a tasty variety of fresh west coast seafood and a stellar array of chicken and beef dishes.

A meal to remember

With a recommendation from Bolduc, I fired things up with an order of the seared scallops, served with a sweet chili sauce and my taste buds sang for joy.

For the main course I swam in for the seafood Paella, a tantalizing mix of fresh salmon, tuna, and mussels served up jambalaya style with rice and chorizo sausage.

Indeed, my time in Ucluelet was relaxing, but it was also a curious split between getting whipped in the face by Mother Nature during the day only to be pampered by luxurious surroundings and great food in the evening.

And I loved every minute

of it.

Don't make your visit too long though if you're a powder hound.

Ucluelet provides a sneak peak for what's on its way east. These are some of the same storm systems that deliver all the great snow here on our slopes.

Surf into www.taucalearesort.com or www.subtidaladventures.com and get the skinny on some serious storm sessions and some great relaxation techniques.