



Humber Valley Resort



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King Salmon Resort
by Oak Bay Marine Group

GONE FISHING BY ALLAN LYNCH

Canada's legendary fishing waters host high-end incentives, retreats and client-appreciation programmes.

There is no end of jokes about fishing. "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. But teach a man to fish and he will sit in a boat and drink beer all day."

What isn't a joke is that Canada has some of the world's most legendary fishing waters, whether it's trolling in a boat along Vancouver Island or standing on a riverbank casting a fly into the Miramichi, Restigouche or Humber Rivers. Canadian businesses have clued in to the cachet of this natural resource and employ these fisheries as the settings for high-end incentives, retreats, and client-appreciation programmes.

While many lodges and outfitters across Canada can cater to smaller

groups (10-40), few can handle triple digits. One resort that can is Painter's Lodge, in Campbell River, B.C., a 35-minute flight from Vancouver. Adding to the incentive perk is the separate check-in desk that the Oak Bay Marine Group – which owns Painter's Lodge and six others – maintains at the Vancouver South Terminal.

Considering the high-profile guests who frequent Canadian fishing lodges and resorts, planners need not worry about depriving guests of all the luxuries of a high-end destination. These resorts have elevated the concept of "rustic" with chefs, massage therapists (if not a complete spa),

trained and accredited guides, wireless Internet, fitness facilities, hot tubs and fully-outfitted adventure centres.

Canada's lodges and fishing resorts have kept their amenities in step with the changing demographics of their guests. Keith Pond, whose family has owned and operated Pond's Resort, in Ludlow, N.B., since 1927, says, "There's a new breed of guest. Years ago, it used to be the 60-year-old guy who had sold his business. Now it's the young corporate executive. Also blended in with that is the purist fisherman, a lot of couples, and more women. There was a time when it was all men, and now it's almost a 50-50 mix."



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Melissa Da Costa, programme manager with Toronto-based Pareto Events, who had a 40-person sales incentive at Painter's Lodge in June, says, "The men and women really enjoyed it. The women were up at five and out fishing, and then they went to the spa at April Point."

Painter's Lodge and its sister resort, April Point Resort & Spa, are connected by a free, regularly scheduled water taxi. Painter's Lodge has 94 bedrooms in a cluster of buildings, so groups can take over the whole resort or have exclusive hire of individual buildings. It has conference facilities, fine dining and a marine

activity centre, which handles all outdoor adventure bookings and outfitting (at a resort like Painter's, guests are provided with everything from licenses, rods, reels, wet gear, boots, boats and guides). April Point has 56 bedrooms, adventure centre, sushi bar, restaurant and full-service, Zen-like spa floating over a pond.

Some properties, like Painter's Lodge and April Point, provide planners with enough venue diversity to enable them to host an off-site function, on-site. Da Costa's client used April Point for a manager's dinner, as well as for a spa day.

WHERE TO GO

Painter's Lodge and **April Point** are two of the seven fishing properties owned by Victoria-based Oak Bay Marine Group. www.obmg.com

Milton Lake Lodge, Sask., is a three-year-old, fly-in wilderness lodge. It can host 16 guests. www.miltonlakelodge.com

Wollaston Lake Lodge, Sask., on the 110-mile-long Wollaston Lake, can accommodate incentive groups up to 50. www.wollastonlakelodge.com

The Fairmont Kenauk, near Montebello, Que., provides accommodation in one- to five-bedroom chalets – one per lake – or at the nearby **Fairmont Le Chateau Montebello**. www.fairmontkenaukresort.com

Pond's Resort, Ludlow, N.B., has riparian rights to 16 salmon pools and nine miles of the Miramichi River. It can accommodate 38 fishers. www.pondsresort.com

The Humber Valley Resort, Corner Brook, NF, an award-winning resort complex on the Humber River, has pumped-up fishing incentives by delivering guests to remote rivers via helicopter. They top out at 40 fishermen. www.humbervalley.com



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Painter's 50 fishing boats can put 100 guests, with guides, on the ocean at any one time. They also have three, four-hour fishing periods each day, which enables scheduling flexibility for business sessions or other programme elements. In addition, they offer nature tours, whale watching, cycling and golf.

Da Costa says the fishing theme was a bit of a risk, because it was a brand new adventure for her client. "I didn't know how it was going to go, but they all had a blast," she says. Since the group was novice fishermen, the experience put everyone on the same page

starting out, which was just as well, since their catch wasn't that impressive. She laughs that her group landed "two not-very-big fish. We also had a fishing derby and I don't think anyone caught a fish that day. It didn't matter, they were good sports about it."

Da Costa says the odd thing about this type of incentive is that you don't really need good weather or to catch any fish. "It rained for the majority of our trip, but it didn't deter anyone from fishing, kayaking and taking the ocean rapids tour."

The two fish that were caught were smoked, canned and delivered to guests'

homes. Most lodges will offer a variety of services for catches: chefs will cook them on-site; they can be packed for travel. Some resorts, like Pond's and Milton Lake Lodge, in Saskatchewan, observe hook and release – a conservation scheme which helps rebuild fish stocks.

Monsanto Canada has been a big supporter of fishing incentives as a form of customer appreciation. According to Winnipeg-based Todd Younghans, Monsanto's Trait business manager, they have booked three successive incentives at the newly opened Milton Lake Lodge. Younghans says these five-day programmes, which pair eight customers and eight Monsanto executives, provide "an opportunity for us to take our top retail customers, guys we don't get much face time with, and give them some exposure to our senior management team, and get feedback from them about what we're doing right and what we're not."

Younghans feels Milton Lake's remoteness contributes to the programme's success. "It's pretty neat to go to an area where you know you're probably one of few humans to touch that piece of ground. That's awe-inspiring. The other aspect of it is, when you're with those customers, we're able

REELING THEM IN

- Laurie McPherson, group/corporate sales for Oak Bay Marine Group, which owns Painter's Lodge, suggests planners remember to ask about the best fishing times. Fish follow Mother Nature's calendar, not yours. McPherson also suggests asking about the length of time people are on boats, since motorboats don't have washrooms.
- Randy MacKinnon, head guide at Painter's Lodge, says guests should advise their guide about medical conditions, like lower back pain. That will affect how the guide operates the boat or where he chooses to take them.
- Barbara Warren, group sales manager at the Humber Valley Resort, on Newfoundland's West Coast, suggests planners consider the skill level for the people fishing. "You do not want to send a beginner out for an eight-hour adventure."
- Finally, consider the different types of fishing available. Some resorts fish from boats, others from the shore. Some allow guests to keep their catch, while others are hook and release. The Fairmont Vancouver Airport Hotel offers a Fish Valet who stores guest catches in a special freezer, ensuring freshness for the flight home.



Milton Lake Lodge



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to have one-on-one time with each one of the guys in the boat, so you'd have one customer with one manager talking about business and getting to know them on a personal level. It's been really good. We've been able to garner a lot more feedback about our business, because when you sit in a boat with somebody all day, the defenses come down pretty quickly and they'll open up more than they generally would about your business, because you've got nobody else to talk to for that day."

Milton Lake is a truly remote fly-in lodge and maintains a one-to-one guest-staff ratio. Youngmans was "really impressed" that this year the lodge was able to cope with one guest's sleep apnea machine.

Planners find the isolation works to build a greater cohesiveness among their captive audience. Catherine Burdett says, "When you go to a place like this, it helps people shed roles and allows people to let their lightness and fun come out. The beauty is, you get to captivate an audience, when you have them in a place that they can't escape; and to have that uninterrupted opportunity to have your audience with you morning, noon and night is great because there are all sorts of wonderful conversations that come up when

people have the opportunity to spend time with others in an unhurried fashion."

Calgary-based Burdett is master facilitator with Toronto's Achievers International. She hosted a team-building workshop for Pacrim Hospitality's 17-person sales staff in May, 2006, at Pond's Resort. Burdett says "as soon as you arrive at Pond's, you enter a different world with a different pace, focus and perspective than what we normally get. We always seem to be in this great hurry to get to wherever we're going and I found when I landed there, even though we're going with a purpose in mind, it was really great to be able to do it in a different environment."

The team-building, she laughs, happened when they hit the river. "It was a remarkable experience for a girl who's never gone fly-fishing before." It started with the "ridiculous-looking equipment," she says. "That was an experience. We all had a good giggle at the hip waders and big funny boots." The laughter rose when the guides tried to teach them the mechanics of casting a line. "It was neat to see people championing each other when they were either getting a nibble or able to cast the line out into the river. It was an absolute thrill."

The remoteness of the fishing lodges also provides a paperwork bonus.



Milton Lake Lodge

Geography means groups do everything on-site and buy from one supplier, so everything can go on one master account and be negotiated much like any other all-inclusive resort.

Fishing incentives, like all incentives, are a premium product. Youngmans says their programmes have been "more expensive than golfing trips, and from a fishing perspective, Milton Lake is in the top 20 per cent for fly-in fishing lodges, but overall, for three years in a row, it's been worth it." ■

— Allan Lynch is a New Minas, N.S. -based freelance writer.