

Stuck in the Mitlenatch with you

Discovering Canada's version of the Galapagos

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Special to the Sun

As our zodiac came close to the island, it was like being in a scene from Jurassic Park.

"This is like something from the Galapagos," raved Vancouver's Heidi Schwandt, who along with two friends from Europe were also discovering some of British Columbia's wild side.

The nature park we were visiting was bursting with activity; seals were sunning themselves on the rocks and thousands of birds, as loud as I have ever heard, were squawking along the sea wall. Massive sea lions were busy working on their social status with their brethren along the shore line.

"Welcome to the Mitlenatch Island Marine Reserve," said Christine Hollman, CEO of Terra Centric Coastal Adventures and our guide for the day.

Also on board was Jared Letts who had just made the move to Powell River from Ontario. "If you wanted to see all the wildlife found on

the Sunshine Coast you just have to come here," said Letts of the reserve which is only a short boat ride from Lund, just north of Powell River.

"This huge of a collection of wildlife all in one place is amazing."

Besides hundreds of seals and sea lions, there are up to 15,000 pairs of sea birds that take up residence on Mitlenatch, which is approximately the size of three Safeways and void of any human existence.

That is, next to visitors and a caretaker who shacks up on the island's eastern shore through the summer to ensure the area is preserved.

Only a small portion of Mitlenatch is hikeable – the rest is off-limits to humans – but that small portion is amazing. We hiked via well laid out paths to Gull Point.

To get to it, we passed through fields of spring flowers featuring every colour of the rainbow, Hollman keeping us intrigued with her incredible knowledge of the plant life the whole way.

An extremely unique environment, Mitlenatch is lo-

cated in what's known as a rain shadow.

This makes for dry conditions and provides a great opportunity for many unique types of flora and fauna to prosper, like prickly pear cactus which grows on its rocky shores.

"It's a huge difference between the amounts of rain this area will receive and that of Vancouver Island, as much as one third" said Hollman.

"The clouds let out a lot of moisture on Vancouver Island as they come across the mountain range, and then gather more precipitation here as they move across the Straight and release it again as they hit the mountains on the mainland."

We arrived back to the beach just in time for lunch that featured a delicious feed of organic potato salad, smoked salmon from Powell River and a selection of cheeses from Salt Spring Island.

For dessert, you won't do better than Hollman's homemade cookies – so good and the recipe so secret



GRAHAM OSBOURNE/Terra Centric Coastal Adventures

Clients of Terra Centric Coastal Adventures spend some time exploring one of the many beaches found along BC's Desolation Sound.

that our other guide, Erik Blaney admitted that not even he could get the recipe.

It was over lunch that I had the opportunity to find out that Terra Centric is not your average touring company.

Besides ensuring their guests receive the royal treatment in a wild environment, the staff believes passionately in protecting the wildlife as well as sharing and raising awareness of the unique history of the area.

Enroute to Mitlenatch we had encountered some porpoise which unfortunately, as Blaney explained, are some of the world's most polluted sea creatures.

"These harbour porpoise feed off the top two feet of water and that is where a lot

of the pollution sits, so the food they intake is contaminated."

"People don't understand that the islands are constantly changing and people have to respect the very sensitive environment," added Hollman.

That is why Terra Centric is committed to the preservation of its areas of operation, with a portion of each tour price being donated to the Georgia Straight Alliance (georgiastraight.org). The Alliance helps raise awareness and protects the life that lives within this ocean environment.

The history of the Sunshine Coast dates back as far as 12,500 years and along with the many ancient first nations' pictographs located up and down the coast, the

First Nations people have many stories to share with the clients of Terra Centric, and thanks to our guides, we were able to enjoy one or two of those stories during our visit.

The expertise and friendliness of both Hollman and Blaney made for a memorable experience on the high seas, one that everyone in the family would enjoy.

Terra Centric wraps up this area's best history, wildlife and topography into some stellar eco-adventures, including rain forest hikes, kayaking tours, scuba diving as well as the First Nations and Zodiac tours.

For more information, check them out at www.terracentricadventures.com or call 604-483-7900.

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Fill your need for speed

Looking to add some spark to your summer? Rev up to the line and volunteer with the Grand Prix of Edmonton, running from July 20 to 22, as approximately 200,000 motorsport fans descend on Edmonton's downtown airstrip.

The Grand Prix of Edmonton is now accepting applications to become an integral part in one of North America's biggest car racing events. Dennis Keefe, a third year volunteer within site services, explains.

"To be honest, I am not a huge race fan but this weekend is electric and is not to be missed."

Keefe enjoys the excitement his volunteer post provides but he's also a big supporter of the city, saying "with an event that's this high profile, it's an excellent thing to be a part of."

Broadcast to over 200 countries, with a potential audience of 550 million people, Grand Prix Edmonton is an event which brings on nothing but adrenaline. Work amongst a crew of energized individuals in special events, site services, ticketing, and/or hospitality and benefit big time.

"Last year we not only got to transport

the drivers up to the podium, but we were also a big part of the parade of drivers just prior to the start of the race; it was very cool. I definitely got in behind the scenes," said third year volunteer Kevin Ouellette.

"I like that ... to be able to participate in the parts of the event the public can't."

Live amongst the stars and celebrate the Champ Car excitement with the likes of Paul Newman and this year's Grand Marshall, Mario Andretti.

Nazareth, 54-40 and Street Heart will be rocking it out from the beer gardens. Additional benefits include free exclusive swag (two sweet t-shirts, hat and sling pack-backpack), access to the event, all meals while working and an epic volunteer wrap party post-race Sunday on the track.

Get your application in by Wednesday, July 4 and be entered to win a trip for two to the Phoenix Grand Prix.

For more information please check out the website at www.grandprixedmonton.com and punch off an application form.

Call us today at 488-8882 and/or drop us a line at volunteers@grandprixedmonton.com.