



BRITISH COLUMBIA

Killer views and even better surf

Ucluelet First Nation's oceanfront Wya Point Resort is a \$6.5-million investment in the future

WENDY STUECK
UCLUELET, B.C.

The bald eagle flew straight at us, its gaze unnervingly direct.

A metre or so from our stunned faces, it wheeled upward and away, swooping over to a bathtub-sized nest perched in a nearby Douglas Fir as if to say: "You may be visiting, but this is my turf."

It was a fitting welcome to Wya Point Resort, which is perched on the west coast of Vancouver Island, between Ucluelet and Pacific Rim National Park Reserve.

The resort, opened in stages over the past three years, is a flagship development for the Ucluelet First Nation, one of five aboriginal groups that are signatories to the Maa-Nulth Treaty, a 2009 agreement through which the groups gained control over roughly 25,000 hectares, including the oceanfront site that is home to the Wya Point Resort.

Featuring one- and two-bedroom lodges as well as a campground, the resort is designed to tap into the region's well-established reputation as a place of exquisite, wild beauty and a surfing culture that has grown from a few pioneering businesses in the 1990s to an internationally recognized destination.

Reached by a winding, gravel road off the main highway through the rain forest, the lodges have been carefully sited amid towering trees that overlook a sandy horseshoe beach. The resort pays homage to Ucluelet Nation culture and geography: The lodge we stayed in, the Killer Whale, is furnished with a wooden sculpture of a whale that looks out to the ocean. And while there are no televisions, microwaves or radios, we do have plush blankets designed for storm watching, propane stoves and deck chairs from which to watch the eagles and pounding surf.

The Kwisitis feast house restaurant, also operated by the Ucluelet First Nation, is on a



With that view, who needs TV? The Ucluelet are wary of getting carried away with development. WYA POINT RESORT



First nation cuisine inspires dishes at Kwisitis Feast House. WYA POINT RESORT

nearby point, while the Wya Point café and surf shop - which offers rentals and sells surfboards with designs created by a Ucluelet artist - is a short drive away.

The lodges and the campground are on former village sites, explains Tyson Touchie, economic development officer for the Ucluelet First Nation.

He grew up here, picking up surfing as it became more popu-

lar and enjoying it for years before he ever donned a wetsuit of the type that is now routine for surfers who tackle the cold waves off Vancouver Island. Now decked out in the latest gear, Touchie is a patient, good-humoured instructor who blends surfing tips with insights about Ucluelet First Nation.

During high season, the resort and surf shop employ about 100 people, a number that is expect-

ed to increase in coming years.

Much of the years-long discussion for the \$6.5-million resort revolved around the desire to balance development with the environmental attributes of the site.

Future plans call for a hotel and spa, possibly in partnership with an established tourism operator. But the Ucluelet are also wary of moving too quickly: They don't want to risk upsetting not only the nesting eagles but people who seek out the resort for a low-key retreat.

"We could have built a casino, but we didn't want all the social problems that come with that," Touchie said after a surfing lesson that was followed with a salmon burger from the Wya Cafe. "We wanted something that fit with our values and our culture."

For more information, visit wyapoint.com.

The writer received a reduced rate from Wya Point Resort. It did not review or approve the article.