

Cape Breton escapade

By JOHN SOMMERS

In the last 10 years, my wife and I have been vacationing in Cape Breton quite often. We just returned from another two weeks on this wonderful island.

Charlie MacLean, the force behind the new and expanded Dominion Seed House here in Georgetown, started a resort, the Markland, in Dingwall, Cape Breton, three years ago. In these three years the Markland has grown to 12 motel units and eight cabins, all of them overlooking the wide crescent of Aspy Bay, at the northern tip of Cape Breton. The cabins have either one or two bedrooms, and all the accommodations have color television and telephone service.

The cabins have compact kitchens and microwave ovens. All the units are electrically heated. A lodge with a large dining room was opened last year. Two chefs, Donald MacInnis and Todd MacIntyre, prepare truly fabulous dinners and lunches. For instance: Grilled Atlantic salmon with a tangy sorrel butter sauce. Or: Seared Cape Breton lamb loin with garlic, thyme and pommeri mustard, in red wine sauce. Or: Peppered shrimp in a curry butter sauce. The menus for lunch and dinner are different every day. A local lady with the delightful name Cordella, bakes the bread for the Markland, and prepares desserts, like apple strudel and Swiss chocolate roll, and all her creations are scrumptious.

On sunny days, lunch is served on the deck of the lodge, with a great view over the bay towards the mountains. And of course, there is breakfast.

The Markland has a swimming pool for timid souls, but the very large beach that is part of the resort, is far nicer than any swimming pool could possibly be, and the bathing in the cool and invigorating Atlantic is sensational. Tossed by the long waves rolling into the bay, I spent as much as 30 minutes in the water each time, and that as often as three times a day. It takes years off you.

The Markland also has rowing boats, to be used on a large pond behind a sand dune, and it has bicycles for tours around the



Ideas and
The Arts
by
John Sommer

area, which is one of the most scenic in the world. But you don't have to be active at all in Cape Breton. It's the kind of place where you want to sit for hours in the verandah of your cabin, looking out over the Atlantic and watching the gossamer mists from the sea drift over the mountains. Or you might watch the fishing boats in the bay, or the circling seagulls in the air. The sky seems to be higher than in Ontario, and the air is fresher, and at night you sleep like a log.

One day we visited another resort, a religious one, that impressed me very deeply. It's called Gampo Abbey, and it's located at Pleasant Bay, on the west side of Cape Breton. Gampo Abbey is a monastic retreat for the practise and study of Buddhism. It was founded by Abbot Chogyam Trungpa in 1984 on a 200 acre farm overlooking Pleasant Bay. Chogyam Trungpa was one of the greatest of the spiritual leaders of old Tibet, before the communist Chinese invaded the country in the early fifties. Like the Dalai Lama and other Tibetans, high and low, Chogyam Trungpa had to flee from his home country. He came to North America and has since then done missionary work on this continent.

We went to Gampo Abbey because it had "Open House" that day. Usually, only those people that undertake a program of study and meditation, are living at the abbey. We were ushered into a wonderful room that was decorated in the colors blue, orange, and yellow. It was the shrine of the abbey, its most sacred place, and it had been built into a former barn in such a way that the view out of two large windows over a vast expanse of the sea, gave one the impression to hover over this mighty body of water in mid-air. Our courteous and dignified hosts entertained us with a magnificent demonstration of Kyudo archery by one of the greatest Kyudo archers of today, Shibata Sensai, bowmaker and archer of the Emperor of Japan.

In Kyudo, the bow and arrow is not used as a weapon, nor as a gadget of competition, but as a means of self discovery. The arrow has to be released at the "right" moment, the moment of greatest concentration. Shibata Sensai, in a ritualized performance of immense artistry, turned this path of self discovery into a, for the onlooker, highly suspenseful and metaphorical event.

Before that, his wife had given us a demonstration of Ikebana, the tough and disciplined art of Japanese flower arrangement. Her seemingly harmless art, nevertheless carried the balast of

profound messages, messages we tend to ignore at our own peril.

Let me try to put them into words: Order is superior to disorder. Less is more. Time is of no consequence. Truth is beauty. To care means to live fully. - I felt that the afternoon at Gampo Abbey had opened our minds.



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