



A STAY AT THE LODGE AT TAHISIS
HARBOUR ON VANCOUVER ISLAND'S
WEST COAST WILL BRING YOUR
BIG-FISH FANTASIES TO LIFE

story and photos by Jamie Elvidge



REEL **BIG FISH**



(Previous spread) The view from the Lodge at Tahsis Harbour is as spectacular as the Lodge is inviting. (Here) A fleet of able Trophy Walkarounds helps head fishing guide Roger Miner get clients into massive salmon like this 32-pound chinook.

It's really no wonder there are so many bears living around the Lodge at Tahsis Harbour, a plush yet extremely remote den for big-catch-hungry humans on Vancouver Island's rugged northwest shore. There aren't many people around these parts, just a lot of really big fish. The bears, fat and glossy from a summer-long feast, are putting on a pretty good show of supremacy as they saunter the inlet's rocky shores this morning. But despite having pocketknives for hands, the beasts are at a clear disadvantage.

One hearty tug on the throttle of our 2352 Trophy with its 250-hp MerCruiser puts everything in place. We are headed straight for the salmon. The bears can do nothing but watch.

Roger Miner, head fishing guide at the Lodge at Tahsis Harbour, has been harvesting trophy catches from these waters for more than 20 years, so he has a lot of funny bear stories and seal stories and shark stories and whale stories, but the best ones are about the fish—virtual sea monsters by all counts, huge chinook and coho and halibut half the size of the boat.

I arrived in Tahsis just after dark the night before our outing, and so had no idea what kind of pee-your-pants splendor awaited me at first light. The Lodge sits right on the water near the crux of the Tahsis Inlet, which is cradled by the unspeakably picturesque Rugged Mountain Range. Most guests arrive by seaplane, but I'd chosen to drive over the winding, half-dirt highway to get a grip on just how isolated the area is. "Remote" is too mild an adjective. Tahsis needs an entire phrase to describe its location, something like: so freakin' far-flung you'll need a truckload of breadcrumbs to find your way back. Ideal, in other words, for those of us who want a genuine backcountry fishing experience without giving up niceties like chilled beer and gourmet meals.

A full-service setup, the Lodge, which can accommodate up to 16 guests and receives them in 2- to 4-night stints (longer if you go custom), is loaded with conveniences like wireless Internet and satellite TV. Your stay includes

use of a professional fishing guide, all of whom are deeply knowledgeable about the grounds, plus time aboard one of the lodge's new, fully-outfitted Trophy boats. And then there's Dru, the dock dog, who will entertain you with canine cartwheels and eat your fish bits at no extra charge. Complete cleaning, packaging and shipment of your catches seals the deal. The Lodge's rooms range from comfortable to luxurious, all with mint condition private or shared bathrooms. The expansive kitchen is always open, though the Lodge's full-time chef prepares meals, and you'll find them so hearty and delicious you'll have to waddle your way to the boats each morning.

As you first walk in, you'll notice photos of the Lodge before it was so charming and immaculately kept. In fact, it was just three years ago when four longtime fishing buddies Fred Benini, John Forzani, Peter McCombs and Nigel Hogarth from British Columbia and Alberta happened upon the place and saw its real potential. "It wasn't a plan," says Fred, a Kelowna-based partner. "It was fate. We've been buddies for 40 years," he says. "When we found Tahsis and the lodge idea came up, we just jumped in."

The next move was to buy a collection of boats to accommodate the guests. As a 2052 Walkaround owner himself, Fred already knew what he liked about the Trophy brand, but nonetheless shopped the market in search of the ideal combination of power, efficiency and durability. Inevitably, he returned to Trophy, purchasing the 2352 Walkaround we are using, two

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2052 sterndrive Walkarounds and two 2002 Walkarounds with outboards. "I especially like the working space, the general layout and the performance," says Fred, "and the price is right on them, too, eh?" The partners chose Dockside Marine on Lake Okanogan to deliver the clutch, knowing owner Tom Treadgold's and manager Tom Heisterman's stellar reputations.

Roger, who runs the fishing operation for the owners, wholeheartedly agrees that the Trophy boats are perfect for the job at hand, and their sturdy nature lets him feel especially comfortable taking guests a couple hours offshore in British Columbia's famously rough waters. "To me, the boat's construction is most important. I trust these boats to get our customers out to the fishing grounds and, more importantly, back in time for dinner. Plus, the deck space is perfect for going after the big fish we have out here."

Moments later, Roger gives me an example of just why the 2352's spacious deck is so efficient for reeling, bringing in a feisty 25-pound chinook with easy grace. Within an hour, we've brought up another medium-weight fish, and finally, after a 20-minute tango, an amazing 32-pounder comes onboard with a massive thud. When Roger explains that the day before he'd brought a 40-pounder over the side, and earlier in the season, a 62-pound chinook, I realize this place is just one big-fish fantasy after another. "It's not unusual to hook 20 a day," says Fred. "Of course, fishing is fishing, but out here, it's almost always outstanding."

Finally, it's time for snacks, and we're not talking Twinkies and Slim Jims. Instead, we have fresh salmon wraps and deli sandwiches. As the mid-

morning sun frees itself from the shadows of the steep surrounding mountains to dry our breath and quiet our hands, Roger fills me in on some of the region's history and colorful local lore. These waterways, collectively known as Nootka Sound, are most famously credited as the "Birthplace of British Columbia" because nearby Friendly Cove, off Nootka Island, was the first place Captain James Cook stepped ashore. But, of course, there was already a world in motion at that point. The Mowachaht First Nations people had been thriving on the islands for more than 4,000 years. The natives still call Friendly Cove *Yuquot*, meaning "Where the wind blows all directions."

To top off our experience, Roger takes me on an hour-long offshore island-viewing blast, careening across the churning Pacific, a perfect demonstration of the Trophy's amazing aptitude as a wave slayer. We follow this with a visit to Friendly Cove, where we watch a First Nations artist carving a fresh totem and take a walk to the Island's circa-1890s Roman Catholic church and wander a path along the ocean's edge to find an ancient cemetery. We are inexplicably hushed by the scene, the crashing of waves along the pebbled beach becoming the pulse of something larger than we can understand.

A few things are crystal clear as this magnificent day spent fishing in British Columbia rolls toward its close. There are big fish in the well and prawns and crab to pull from the pots. Back at the Lodge, dinner is cooking and our beer is chilled and waiting. And the bears? They're still hungry and mean, but wouldn't you be, too? After all, they have big-fish fantasies just like we do. The only problem is, they're totally missing the boat.



» INSIDE ANGLE

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