



# The Yurts of Riverbend Resort

By David Morrison

A conundrum for you:

I've been fortunate enough to experience many interesting accommodations around the world, including plenty dating back centuries. Yet the oldest I've stayed in was only constructed just over four years ago. How can this be?

The answer lies in lateral thinking: the newest accommodation I've stayed in was actually my oldest *in concept!* I'm referring to yurts, you see, which have been in use by nomadic peoples on the steppes of Central Asia since the early 13th century—the days of Genghis Khan.

The yurt's effectiveness, durability and portability have ensured that the idea still translates over eight hundred years since its inception. Modern variations on ancient designs can therefore be found far beyond the sweeping grasslands of Mongolia... like in Parksville, for example!

The yurt I had the pleasure of calling home for a night is one of three featured at Parksville's Riverbend Resort, so named for its pretty setting on a right-angle deviation of the Englishman River. With 68 serviced RV sites, eight rental cabins and a tenting area, there is certainly much more to this excellent family resort than its trio of yurts, but it is understandably they and their

quirkiness that unfailingly steal the majority of publicity thunder.

For the last five-and-a-half years the Riverbend Resort has been owned and run by Heather Powell, assisted by up to six staff according to season. She introduced the yurts early in her tenure and is very proud of them, especially for the invaluable exposure they generate. But the initial decision to erect them was based more on sound business sense than the necessity for a 'gimmick.'

"After our first summer we realized we needed more accommodation, as we were turning people away," she begins. "I looked at the idea of building a log cottage, but by building the yurts I was able to increase my room nights by ninety per month, as opposed to thirty for the cottage - but at the same cost. That was the whole reason we ended up with the yurts, as room-wise they can sleep four or five people."

From my personal perspective, installation of the yurts was a very good call on Powell's part. They are a type of accommodation providing so much more than a comfortable place to bed down; after all, unless it happens to boast out-of-the-box design features, when is one ever prompted to contemplate the structural nuances of a hotel room? In a yurt, it's impossible *not* to notice how they are put together, as

everything is on show. And the ingenious simplicity of its conformation is a beautiful thing indeed. One is simply within a sturdy endoskeleton bearing a protective skin, so there's a natural and therefore comforting organic connection from the off. As I see it, this is key to the overall yurt experience.

Putting one together from scratch is a relatively simple task, Powell says. "They come in kit form (*in this case from Yurtco in Surrey*) with the top, the walls, insulation, screen windows, awnings and the dome," she explains. "They take about a day to construct, but that's not accounting for foundations. Including that, the site preparation, the plumbing and all that sort of thing, it took us about a month, but only a day or so to erect the yurt itself."

This is amazing, as the quality of accommodation is high. My yurt was 24' in diameter, with a laminate flooring and comfort level matching any hotel room I've ever occupied. It's certainly some distance from the camping experience a yurt might be viewed as before actually staying in one. There's a good queen size bed with nightstands and lamps, just a hop from an immaculate, fully fitted washroom. The kitchenette has no oven or hob, but does have a Salton® hot plate, microwave, toaster, coffeemaker and fridge. All crockery

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and cutlery is provided. Like the dividing walls and stunning yurt crown, the kitchen furniture and cabinetry are made from pine. Added comforts come in the forms of a remote controlled propane woodstove, sofa (converting to another double bed) and, you know it, cable television.

The conveniences of modern life aside, a yurt would remain a magical place to stay should it be totally empty. As previously mentioned, the structural aesthetics play a big part as to why. Take the beauty of the crown: 43 equally spaced pine beams spray out like sunbeams, natural light pouring through the central hexagonal skylight. In certain Central Asian cultures the yurt crown is revered as an item of great symbolic significance and often treated as a spiritual heirloom. Considering its dual roles as a roof support—thereby providing shelter—and as the main source of natural light and warmth, emanating from a design imitative of the life-giving sun, it is not difficult to understand why.

Also aesthetically pleasing is the circular lattice framework (in this instance of fir)—the simplest of configurations on which to place the walls, and an obvious reason for the yurt's longevity as an easily transportable dwelling. The walls themselves are of a durable vinyl providing full insulation and protection from the elements. Likewise, the roofing is of an extremely tough material comprising exterior and interior skins sandwiching two layers of insulation. The use of such materials to suit western needs is a long way from the traditional felt coverings still used in the territories in which the yurt originates, but the principals of construction remain pretty much unchanged.

The yurts of Riverbend Resort have proved a real hit since they were introduced, but unexpected were the far-reaching benefits to guests with acute needs.

"We had a family from Victoria stay with a boy who has many allergies," Powell says. "We were one of the first places they were able to vacation as a family, because of the yurts. Unlike a normal building with drywall, carpeting and different kinds of varnishes, the yurt—having a vinyl interior—was somewhere they were able to stay, and



Photo: David Morrison

*Parksville's Riverbend Resort is so named for its pretty setting on a right-angle deviation of the Englishman River.*

comfortably. So we've had them coming back every year to take their family vacation with us. We do some special cleaning for them, of course, and they bring special equipment for him, but they would *never* be able to stay in one of our cottages, for example."

Powell is keen to point out that not for one moment would she hold this family's story up in support of a claim that yurts can have *direct* health benefits, as that is simply not true. It is a happy incidental that the materials with which they are constructed aid in the promotion of a more hypoallergenic environment for sufferers than they might encounter in 'standard' accommodation choices. But she certainly does believe that her yurts possess a special juice of their own, saying: "One of the many things that's unique about a yurt is that there's a really good, positive energy flow within them. It's supposed to be true of all circular buildings, but I definitely feel it in the yurts."

What I felt in Riverbend Resort's Yurt #3 was calm, relaxed, and totally at home from the moment I walked in. There is definitely something to be said for circular accommodations; rooms free of corners where bad "things" traditionally lurk are bound to have a subliminally positive effect on their guests.

The name 'yurt,' incidentally, derives from a Turkic word for the imprint that this type of dwelling leaves on the



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ground when dismantled and carted off to be sited elsewhere. Considering the deep impression that my yurt stay has left on me, I have to say that's rather apt.

*The Riverbend Resort is open year-round and located at 1-924 East Island Highway, Parksville. For further information and reservations visit [riverbendresort.bc.ca](http://riverbendresort.bc.ca) or call (250) 248-3134, or toll free on 1-800-701-3033.*



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