



Northwest Cruising Destinations: Exploring Brentwood Bay, Tod Inlet and Butchart Gardens

by Mark Bunzel

The cruising weather in the Pacific Northwest has been exceptional this summer and there still should be some great weather left as we move from August into September. There were also plenty of great places to go, and in some cases revisit, as they have changed or been renovated and updated. Consider visiting the Saanich Inlet on Vancouver Island with Todd Inlet, Butchart Gardens and the new Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa. It is a scenic and well protected cruising area with many interesting choices to anchor or moor, a new five-star resort, and Butchart Gardens now celebrating its 100th birthday, and looking as colorful and wonderful as ever.

As you travel south down the Saanich Inlet you can imagine how it must have been to be an early settler to this area arriving by boat. Following the west shore the Inlet narrows as you pass Senanus Island. You can imagine what John Sluggett might have thought about the natural beauty of this area when he first settled there in 1876 and founded the town that bore his name, Sluggett. This was later changed in 1925 to the more appealing name of Brentwood Bay. Or consider what the area looked like when Jennie Butchart planted a few sweet peas and a rose bush alongside her new home, built next to her husband's cement plant near the opening of Todd Inlet 100 years ago. Who could have imagined that just a few plantings next to her home would continue and result in one of the world's foremost garden displays open to the public, Butchart Gardens.

Today the wooded shoreline is populated by beautiful luxury homes with their docks and boats. Brentwood Bay is noticeable as you arrive by the densely packed hillside condos. The bay has a number of docks and marinas along with

the ferry landing for the Brentwood-Mill Bay B.C. Ferry, which provides a short cut to the mainland of Vancouver Island. Next to the ferry landing is a familiar marina, the Brentwood Bay Marina, but now above the marina and nestled in the trees in the new Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa. You can anchor in the area just north of the ferry landing or stop by and stay at the Brentwood Bay Marina. Note as you approach the marina the red U22 buoy. Stay to the north of it. The marina has placed two additional yellow buoys directly to the east of U22. Keep the yellow and red buoys to your starboard side as you enter and you will have no problems. Call ahead as the marina has moorage for 65 boats and about 30 slips for guest moorage.

The friendly staff, led by marina manager Greg Duerksen, is more than happy to accommodate you and will introduce you to the many activities available to guests. The marina's activity center has a world class PADI dive center. The area is known for its fantastic diving and is one of the few places in the world where you can see an undersea field of glass sponges which have taken thousands of years to form, located just north of Senanus Island. Or, the marina staff can set you up with a rented kayak to explore the area at water level. The bay is usually calm and you can easily kayak to Butchart Cove or down Todd Inlet into the Gowlland Todd Provincial Park. A special windowed boat offers 2 hour informative eco-tours of the area as well as shuttle service if you would like a ride over to Butchart Gardens, which is also easily reached by dinghy. The marina also features brand new dockside washrooms, showers and laundry facilities as well as a meeting room/classroom and the boardroom which will be popular for boating group rendezvous.

Walking up from the new marina area across a wooden footbridge festooned with baskets of flowers leading to the new Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa... The architecture of the new lodge is quite dramatic with soaring cedar beams that tastefully blend into the wooded hillside. Marina guests are given a key card to allow access directly through the gate to the pool area and lower entry into the Lodge... The Café features a variety of fresh baked goods, wonderful breads,

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sandwiches and tempting desserts... The Wine & Spirits Shop featuring an extensive collection of B.C. wines. Brian Storen, the resort's resident sommelier, has stocked the store with an extensive collection of wines many of which are featured on the award-winning wine list of the Lodge's fine dining room.

According to Brian, "It is not unusual for a dinner guest to enjoy one of our fine wines and then purchase a case to take back to their boat."

Next to the Café is the Marine Pub with outdoor seating overlooking the harbor and the pool... a lively destination for locals and guests to collect, watch the sunset, and socialize well into the evening. The menu in the pub is appealing, quite tasty and reasonably priced. The food is excellent, coming from the same kitchen as the dining room.

...the lobby of Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa is decorated with many beautiful works of art primarily done by local artists and available for sale. While you may enjoy staying on your boat in the marina ask the hotel staff if it is possible to see a room. The 33 OceanSuites all feature balconies with views of the harbor and have been set up to five-star hotel standards. The Lodge is proud to point out that all of the mortise and tenon, alder and walnut furniture is locally crafted. The rooms feature many little touches that make them very comfortable. This is a weekend get-away in the off season, or for guests who may not want to stay onboard.

The lobby area of the Lodge with its beamed ceilings, floor to ceiling stone fireplace and glass walls looking out to the water and marina below, is open to the Arbutus Grille & Wine Bar...The wine bar offers a wonderful selection of wines by the glass or the bottle and also a selection of reasonably priced tasting plates to compliment your wine. The menu in the Arbutus Grille is truly a dining delight with the ultimate indulgence being one of the three, daily, special multi-dinners with a wine pairing for each course. The menu focuses on fresh local items. It is not unusual to see the Chef in his herb garden below the hotel rooms collecting the ingredients for that day's meals. Reservations are recommended well in advance of your visit to the Arbutus Grille. In addition to dinner, the Grille is open for breakfast or lunch, served inside or out on the terrace.

If you do indulge yourself too much at the Arbutus Grille, or want to book a special treat for someone special in your crew, you may want to make a reservation to

visit the Spa- Essence of life in the Lodge. Spa guests can also relax by the pool or hot tub after a massage or vinotherapy.

For those still wanting to stay connected, the Lodge offers free internet Wi-Fi service for all guests. Marina guests can pick up an access number at the front desk and access the internet from their boat, or use the computer in the Lodge to check email or the internet...

If you would like to visit Victoria for a day trip, it is only eight miles away and can be reached by frequent local bus service or taxi.

One of the true jewels of the area is Butchart Gardens. If you haven't been there before, it is always worth a return visit as the gardens are changed from year to year and from season to season. For boater, it is a special experience to arrive by the back gate in Butchart Cove. Butchart cove is a beautiful anchorage with mooring buoys for four boats and room for a few more to anchor in the inlet and stern tie to the shore on either side. Butchart Gardens has their own dock for offloading passengers, or for dinghy mooring only. Please moor on the inside of the dock as the dock is also used for visiting tour boats and sea-plane service. Note that the west side of Butchart Cove can be very shallow at low tide and you should consult the local tide tables.

The back gate to Butchart Gardens is sometimes manned during the busy summer season, but if not, there is an intercom system to request access through the locked gate. Boating guests are then on the honor system to purchase tickets at the main gate.

One of the highlights of the summer is the fireworks resented every Saturday night in Butchart Gardens.... While literally hundreds of boats anchor in Todd Inlet to view the fireworks from their boats, the best vantage point to see the entire show is within Butchart Gardens, on the lawn in front of the fireworks display area. Many of the fireworks displays are on the ground and beautifully choreographed to music. This is a very popular event and it is recommended that you arrive early and place a blanket down on the grass to reserve the best spot... on the lawn in

front of concert stage listening to live music and then as darkness approaches stroll through the gardens to the fireworks viewing area for a show that many describe as the best fireworks display they have ever seen.

The Gowlland Todd Provincial Park in Todd Inlet is worth further exploration. The park protects a significant part of the Gowlland Range, one of the last remaining natural areas in Greater Victoria. Throughout the park old mining and logging roads now provide over 25 miles of hiking trails, some with beautiful vistas of Saanich Inlet.

Additional moorage is available along the shores of Todd Inlet and into the Gowlland Todd Provincial Park. This can be a very pleasant, stern-tie anchorage during the week or out of season. But on fireworks Saturdays it is very crowded with 175-250 boats vying for the best spots.

A protected cruising ground with a five star resort, quaint and charming restaurants, Butchart Gardens with its spectacular flowers and world class fireworks display during the summer, and parks with trails to explore an enjoy. Visit Brentwood Bay this season, or place it on your list of places to go for next year.

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