



Owners Garrett & Liza Gabriel and Garrett's mother Donna.



Sakinaw Lake Lodge

By Annika S. Hipple

How a family's leap of faith created one of the Sunshine Coast's best getaways

It takes a load of courage to move from the bright lights of a major city to a tiny cabin that's completely off the public utilities grid and can only be reached by boat or seaplane. Now imagine sharing that space with two other people, a cat and two dogs. Sound crazy? On the face of it, perhaps, but not if you're a family with a vision, like the Gabriels of Sakinaw Lake Lodge.

It's been roughly three-and-a-half years since husband-and-wife team Garrett and Liza Gabriel, together with Garrett's mother Donna, left their busy urban lives and purchased the small lodge on British Columbia's Sunshine Coast, about two hours north of Vancouver by ferry and road. Garrett was a physiotherapist at Vancouver General Hospital, Liza worked in real estate, and Donna was a retired psychiatric nurse with a second career in retail and customer service. None of them had ever dreamed about running a hotel—until fate dropped an

intriguing opportunity into their laps.

Donna came across Sakinaw Lake Lodge while visiting a friend further down the coast in Sechelt. When she learned it was for sale an idea began to germinate that soon captured the imagination of Garrett and Liza as well.

Less than six months later, the Gabriels packed up all their belongings, sold their homes in Vancouver, and embarked on a quest to transform Sakinaw Lake Lodge from a somewhat run-down property into the comfortable retreat it is today.

The challenges were numerous. The lodge must supply its own energy, water, and sewage treatment, so Garrett learned to do electrical wiring, plumbing, and woodworking. Donna developed her knowledge of gardening, while Liza took her cooking skills to a whole new level in preparation for hosting guests. Arriving in the middle of winter, the trio suffered through storms, including a blizzard that



nearly stranded the women on the far side of the lake and a windstorm so powerful it blew a refrigerator and stove right off the deck. The family had to learn how to drive a boat, tow a barge loaded with fuel and handle all sorts of day-to-day challenges they'd never imagined. Sharing a cramped cabin, they learned to do without many things they'd taken for granted. Even now, 90 percent of their personal belongings remain in storage.

All that perseverance, creativity, and sacrifice paid off with impressive results. Sakinaw Lake Lodge may be an off-grid experience, but guests need not fear any lack of comfort or

(Top) Sakinaw Lake Lodge deck view. (Bottom) Cozy lake side patio promises a romantic evening of relaxation.





amenities. Arriving at the lodge after the short trip across the lake from the access road—the Gabriels gladly ferry guests back and forth as needed—it takes no more than a moment to realize this is a very special place.

The lodge is charming and intimate, housing a maximum of 10 guests in two waterfront suites and a luxury safari tent. The largest unit, the Cedar Suite, invites relaxation with wood-and-stone construction and earth-toned furnishings. The main room has a king bed and a well-furnished living area, as well as a full kitchen. There's also a separate bedroom with queen bed and private bath. Picture windows and a deck with sliding doors command a view of the lake.

Downstairs, the Pine Suite has a cozy bedroom with a queen bed and French doors opening directly onto the dock, so guests can step outside and dive straight into the water. The suite also includes a private bath and a living room with a foldout couch. Behind the main lodge building, the luxury safari tent has a queen bed, a private freestanding bathroom, and a deck with lake views. All units have access to an outdoor kitchen and seating areas, and all stays except full lodge rentals include breakfast.

The Gabriels delight in getting to know their guests. "It's the fact that we get to share this place that makes it so rewarding and enjoyable," Garrett says. Visitors often stay for a week or more, particularly during the summer when the clear waters of Sakinaw Lake warm to temperatures approaching 80 degrees Fahrenheit. In addition to swimming and canoeing off the lodge decks, Sakinaw Lake Lodge offers boat tours of the entire lake, the largest on the Sunshine Coast.

The lodge makes a great base for exploring the rest of the central Sunshine Coast region, a place rich in opportunities for outdoor recreation, including hiking, kayaking, fishing, mountain biking, snowshoeing, skiing and more. A short distance from

super natural

urban hardwoods®

SEATTLE	SAN FRANCISCO	LOS ANGELES
2101 1st Ave	553 Pacific Ave	741 N. La Cienega
206 443 8099	415 397 9663	424 204 9802

urbanhardwoods.com

the Sakinaw Lake access road is the Iris Griffith Interpretive Center, where visitors can learn about the natural history of the Sunshine Coast. A few miles farther north, Skookumchuk Rapids is popular with whitewater kayakers, and the Egmont Heritage Center has eclectic displays on local history and life. South of Sakinaw Lake, the Pender Harbour area boasts art galleries, restaurants, boating, and a variety of annual festivals.

As for the Gabriels, they've become enthusiastic members of the local community and are putting down roots in more ways than one with the arrival of Garrett and Liza's first child, Sofina, in April. The family hopes to build a larger house soon, but for now, they all continue to share their tiny cabin on the lodge property. Despite the challenges of living and working in such close quarters, the Gabriels share a willingness to communicate and a sincere enjoyment of each others' company. And while experience has

taught them things they could have done differently, not one of the Gabriels has any regrets about their gigantic leap of faith.

"Most people never get to live their dreams," Donna says. "And this was never even our dream."

"It kind of found us more than us finding it," Garrett adds.

Now that the Sakinaw Lake Lodge dream has found them, the Gabriels are giving it all they've got. For guests, sharing even a piece of that dream, however briefly, makes visiting this part of the Sunshine Coast all the more special. ✈️

Getting There: Kenmore Air flies to Pender Harbour, about 15 minutes from the lodge; transfers to and from the lodge are available upon request.