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repose on »RAILS

EMAILS, LAUNDRY, DINNER, THE GYM, A school function and a business meeting. All in a day's work for the Northwest woman, correct?

And if these aren't the particular things you're juggling, I know there's another list at least as horrifying.

Yet with lives like these, we push ourselves to do more. That's why I'm going to encourage you to take a vacation to do absolutely nothing.

It's hard to be passive these days, but not if you're on a train surrounded by some of the most beautiful scenery Canada can offer. The Whistler Mountaineer runs between Vancouver and Whistler and the same company, Rocky Mountaineer, runs trains through western Canada to Quesnel, Jasper, Lake Louise, Banff and Calgary. They have been rated the No. 1 train journeys in the world by The World Travel Awards.

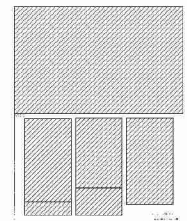
But to get yourself prepared a little, turn off your cell phone and head up to Van-

couver. It's easy to spend a day here doing very little. The Fairmont Hotel Vancouver is centrally located and you can languish in the health club, Griffins restaurant or in the lobby lounge, whose afternoon tea, and light-as-air scones, will remind you what kicking back is all about.

Pedestrianized Yaletown is perfect for nothing but meandering. An older area of the city and former warehouse district, of late it's become a hipster neighborhood. Try a spa treatment at Skoah and the 90-minute Xtreme facial, which includes a foot, hand a scalp massage.

Suitably mellow, for dinner check out Pinky's, a couple of blocks away, for excellent steaks and an unintimidating atmosphere. Pinky's is unusual in that it was designed (by a woman) with women in mind. Small feminine touches, such as smaller seats and big globe lamps, mean you'll feel at home with a block of beef on your plate or just sitting at the bar.

Two or three days in Vancouver should



get you in the mood for your repose on the rails and prepare you for the spectacular scenery that's to come. As you head north, the train mostly hugs the water, meaning your views extend over it to the mountains, where snow sits like cake icing for much of the year. Clouds dance around the mountaintops and you'll likely see some wildlife at ground level. You'll also see a stockpiling of beautiful homes as you leave Vancouver and further north, near Squamish, the Stawamus Chief, the world's second largest granite monolith, at 2,100 feet.

While you're doing nothing on the train, you will actually be getting an education, so don't turn off completely. Your train guides will give you commentary throughout the trips on the history and geography of the regions you pass through, as well as some anecdotes on historical figures.

You'll stop off in Whistler after your first leg on the rails. There are activities galore here and many preparations for the 2010 Olympics, but doing nothing is much easier, and just as rewarding.

The Four Seasons and the Fairmont Chateau Whistler both offer luxury accommodation as well as beautiful restaurants. Try the former's Fifty-Two 80 Bistro for breakfast and the latter's Wildflower Restaurant for a repeat of your afternoon tea. Arrive early enough and you'll snag the table by the fire.

The spa at the Four Seasons serves as perfect sandwich filling between these two repasts. I tried the Sea to Sky massage, the spa's version of lomi lomi, which uses fluid movements and concentrates on several areas of the body at once. Allow time to chill out both before and afterwards so you can enjoy the lounges and maybe even drift into dreamland.

In the summer months, there are also Women's Wednesdays and Mondays, offering introductions to the bike park (which becomes a female-only zone), special deals on bike rentals, a guide and an après-

bike, to help you forget any bruises you've incurred.

If you have a new man in your life, stay at the Fairmont. Its Break The Ice package helps you get to know each other and includes Canadian ice wine martinis on arrival, one night's accommodation, a horse-drawn sleigh ride, a fondue dinner and ziplining (see sidebar).

For dinner, head to Araxi, which has been voted the resort's top restaurant by Vancouver magazine for eight consecutive years. The food is regional, the wine list impressive, and the combination of the two means you'll be happy, healthy and full by evening's end.

But don't get too tied up in Whistler, because your train will leave without you. The 311-mile trip to Quesnel, in Cariboo, the flatter part of British Columbia, takes around 11 hours, and if you want to get away from it all now you will.

The train glides along and all you need do is gaze through the waist-to-ceiling windows or from the open-air vestibule at the rear. From both places, you'll see lakes, whose color ranges from navy to brilliant turquoise, coastal mountains, cloud formations, and maybe even some bears. Taking photos is easy as the train coasts along, slowing down to a mere chug in the more beautiful spots as photographers' fingers click, click, click.

There will be the arduous trips to the dining car for meals that will rival what you eat on stable ground. On the Gold Leaf (first class) cars, there's breakfast, which begins with a mimosa; a three-course lunch; and afternoon snacks of fresh-baked cookies, whose odor will wake you should you dare to nap. Meals are served downstairs in what seems like a high-end restaurant but for its linear design. Who said doing nothing was lazy? This is the perfect way to recuperate from what's become daily life.

IF YOU GO...

The Fairmont:

www.fairmont.com

Skoha Spa:

www.skoah.com

Pinky's:

www.pinkyssteakhouse.com

Rocky Mountaineer:

www.rockymountaineer.com

The Four Seasons:

www.Fourseasons.com

Araxi:

www.araxi.com

Ziptrek Ecotours:

www.ziptrek.com

Whistler Wellness Week:

<http://whistlerwellness.com/wellnessweek.php>

Women's Wed. and Mon.:

www.whistlerbike.com/events/women/index.htm

