

MONTANA LIFE



THE MAIN spa center at Relics Retreat features Canadian log accents, heated floors, multiple Finnish saunas and more. (Casey Kreider photos/Daily Inter Lake)

healing HEAT

Relics European-style spa offers relaxing retreat amid rare fossil collection

By KIANNA GARDNER
Daily Inter Lake

Nestled off the beaten path in the sprawling wilderness that connects Montana's Tobacco Valley with Canada, sits an elaborate health and wellness retreat that boasts soaking pools, Finnish saunas and other European-style spa amenities one would be hard-pressed to find elsewhere in the state.

Known as Relics Retreat, the luxurious spa's existence is a mystery to most as it is thoughtfully tucked between the majestic

Mount Gibraltar and Deep Mountain, a stone's throw from the Kootenai National Forest.

There is no signage indicating the spa's location. And although the retreat spans 30 acres and includes a home, a towering modern guest cabin, stately spa center with illuminated vaulted ceilings and an in-ground sweat lodge, the chances of someone simply stumbling upon it are slim to none.

But according to Willow Holm, that remoteness is all part

See RELICS, C4



WILLOW HOLM and Danny Ray Marsh stand in front of the main spa structure at Relics Retreat. They are the only employees of the retreat.



THE MAA Sauna on the Relics Retreat property is a small sweat lodge with a wood-fired feature that typically is set to 212 degrees.



THE INTERIOR of the Relics Retreat Ruusu Sauna heats to approximately 160 degrees Fahrenheit with about 35% humidity.



AN ANCIENT ammonite fossil is displayed above a jet tub at Relics Retreat. The spa features imported fossils believed to be at least 50 million years old.

RELICS

from C1

of the allure of Relics Retreat, which quietly opened in 2019. While it is only a 20-minute drive from Eureka, its location makes guests feel as though they were dropped in the middle of untouched wilderness — an experience that is amplified by the fact that customers have the entire property to themselves once they book their appointment, whether that entails a few hours in the sauna or a multi-day stay in the guest cabin.

“The intent for coming here should be to heal and to leave with a better understanding of your own health and wellness,” said Holm, who oversees operations at Relics Retreat. “That can be difficult to do if you don’t have an opportunity to completely immerse yourself in all of this. We make sure that people have the property to themselves, so they can move at their own pace.”

And in true Euro-spa fashion, guests can enjoy the entire Relics property sans apparel if they choose. This clothing-optional concept, which Holm says people are usually skeptical of at first, is just one way Relics is attempting to break the mold of how Americans treat a day at the spa and how they view overall health and wellness.

She emphasized the spa amenities and treatments found at Relics, named after the ancient Greecian ammonite fossils that can be spotted around the main spa center, are few and far between in America. Holm made an effort to make holistic European practices a focus at Relics, and the property’s structures were erected with foreign building and design standards in mind.

Although Holm and Property Manager Danny Ray Marsh are in charge of just about every aspect of Relics, the property is owned by Arndt Klinksick, a globe-trotting German who bought the parcel in 2005 after he determined Eureka was one of the most spectacular places he had ever seen. He had the property’s cabins and saunas built throughout the years to what he was familiar with in his home country, and it wasn’t until 2016 when he determined the property and its assets should be made available to the public in some capacity.

He didn’t have a concrete vision, but was introduced to Holm through a mutual friend, and asked the Eureka resident to try her hand at transforming the property into a health and wellness retreat. She embraced the opportunity to create something



RELICS RETREAT is about 5 miles up Grave Creek Road in Eureka. The remoteness is part of the retreat’s allure, according to property managers.

‘I had been struggling with depression and when I started prioritizing sweating and started spending more time here, I felt all of that melt away.’

WILLOW HOLM

Operations manager, Relics

of her own from such a stellar blank slate, and although Holm hadn’t the faintest idea of what that might look like at the start, she knew she wanted to build on the European vision Klinksick had created.

“Arndt’s biggest wish is for more people to see this part of Montana and to really experience it through all of this,” Holm said, motioning to the spa center. “I wanted to honor that and then I knew I wanted to create something you can’t find anywhere else. I didn’t want this to be just another retreat.”

WHILE THERE are options for massage and other therapeutic bodyworks at Relics, there are no cosmetic or beauty treatments, and the theme of detoxification is front and center, just as it tends to be in other corners of the world from Morocco to Thailand and throughout different parts of Europe.

“We want to focus on getting toxins and other things out of our body, not putting more in,” said Holm, who has worked in massage therapy for more than a decade and is certified in Watsu, an aquatic bodywork used for deep relaxation and passive aquatic therapy, which she offers at the therapy

pool at Relics.

Complete detoxification means intoxicants are not allowed in the main spa center or in the sweat lodge — a rule Holm acknowledges may not be for everybody. Although alcohol is technically allowed in the main cabin, she recommends avoiding it all together during one’s stay.

With alcohol out of the picture, she believes guests can better focus on the benefits of the saunas, pools and sweat lodge, which are the highlight at Relics. Although Holm recommends the services be navigated a certain way, building in intensity, with cold water breaks in between, guests can go about as they see fit.

The main spa center is at least 3,000 square feet in size and features Canadian log accents, towering ceilings, an ornate waterfall centerpiece, vast windows that offer views of Grave Creek and a large deck with a jet pool. No expenses were spared in its creation.

The structure also houses two high-end Finnish saunas: the Valo dry sauna, which is roughly 140 degrees Fahrenheit and the Ruuso steam aromatherapy sauna, which is a bit warmer at 160 degrees, but with 35% humidity.

In the Valo, guests can set the therapeutic light to a different color, each of which has its own benefits.

And in the Ruuso, rose quartz crystals lay on the heating table, symbolizing unconditional love. Holm, who emphasizes that one should focus on the mental aspects of their health and wellness as much as they do the physical aspects, said rose quartz contains healing properties and can influence an individual’s ability to exercise forgiveness and compassion.

Finally, located a 50-foot stroll from the main spa center is the Maa Sauna, a small sweat lodge with an A-frame, chimney, a moss roof and an outdoor shower that runs

ice cold. This wood-fired feature is typically set to 212 degrees, though it is slightly cooler near the main door.

“This is where the real sweating happens. People will come out of the lodge feeling like a new person,” said Holm, who added that the lodge has become a part of her own daily health and wellness routine. “What we want is for people to leave renewed and more aware of how to care for their mind and body.”

Both Holm and Marsh can vouch for the healing power of the Relics. They arrived at Relics practically strangers, but are now partners both in business and in life. Holm, a lifelong Montana resident, said Relics found her at a time when she needed it most.

“This place really saved me,” Holm said. “I had been struggling with depression and when I started prioritizing sweating and started spending more time here, I felt all of that melt away. This place really is amazing if you let it do its job.”

MOVING FORWARD, the two have big plans for Relics.

Holm said there eventually will be a second pool inserted in a nearby vacant structure and a new Mongolian canvas tent is due to arrive any day. They are also working to turn a set of horse stalls, all of which appear relatively unused, into a glamping setup, and are planning to expand an existing network of trails on the property so people can go on walks or bike rides.

The property currently can host around 15 to 20 people at a time, though guests typically come in much smaller groups or as individuals. The hope is to increase that capacity to about 30 in the coming months, so Relics can attract and accommodate large groups, which it has already done in the form of specialized retreats for veterans.

Holm, who is part of the local motorcycle community, as are

Marsh and Klinksick, said she sees opportunity in biking events, for example, which occur quite frequently in the area when hundreds of motorcyclists partake in annual rides from Canada through Montana.

But even with growth around the corner, Holm said guests can still expect to have the place entirely to themselves when they arrive, a Relics Retreat promise that is here for the long haul.

“We want to be versatile. If a group needs

a specialized retreat we have that and if a couple wants to come just for a few hours, that’s there, too,” Holm said. “It’s all about offering people this place and about meeting them where they are in their health and wellness journey.”

To learn more about Relics Retreat and to review prices on the spa and lodging, go to <https://www.relicsretreats.com/>

Reporter Kianna Gardner can be reached at 758-4407 or kgardner@dailyinterlake.com

NEW LISTING



440-442 COLLEGE AVENUE, KALISPELL

Terrific investment opportunity! 2 homes on .36 acre lot with possible room for additional garage/shop. Two story home divided into 2 rental units. Main floor is a 1 bed, 1 bath unit with washer/dryer and a one car garage. Upstairs unit is a 1 bed, 1 bath unit. This home was updated in 2004 with new roof, siding, windows and exterior doors. Second home is 2 bed, 1 bath, 1 car garage. Both homes on city water with individual septic systems. **\$399,500. MLS #22102631. Call D.J. Walker at (406) 250-2487**

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Montana Book Awards announced for 2020

The 2020 Montana Book Award winner is “Shakespeare in Montana: Big Sky Country’s Love Affair with the World’s Most Famous Writer” by Gretchen E. Minton, published by the University of New Mexico Press.

This annual award recognizes literary and/or artistic excellence in a book written or illustrated by someone who lives in Montana, is set in Montana, or deals with Montana themes or issues.

Three honor books were also chosen by the 2020 Montana Book Award Committee:

- “The Blaze” by Chad Dundas, published by G.P. Putnam’s Sons
- “Life List” by Marc Beaudin, published by

Riverfeet Press
• “Regarding Willingness” by Tom Harpole, published by Riverfeet Press

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Great News!!! **SOROPTIMIST®**

The Soroptimist Thrift Haus in Whitefish will be re-opening
Thursday, March 11th!

We will have a customer appreciation Bag Sale
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(Masks will be required)

Virtual Informational Meeting

Virtual Informational Meeting for W. Reserve Drive Corridor Planning Study

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is developing a corridor study of W. Reserve Drive between the intersection with US 93 and the intersection with US 2 and extending north one-half mile on Whitefish Stage Road in Kalispell. The purpose of the study is to develop a comprehensive long-range plan for managing the corridor and determine what can be done to improve the corridor based on needs, public and agency input, and financial feasibility.

MDT is holding a virtual meeting to provide information to interested parties about the scope and purpose of the study, collect feedback, and answer questions. The meeting will be held during two times and will start with a short presentation followed by a question and answer session. Please attend whichever time is most convenient for you.

W. Reserve Drive Virtual Meeting

When: Wednesday, March 17, 2021 at 11:00 AM OR 5:30 PM

How To Attend: Visit the website at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/westreserve/> to register for the meeting. Pre-registration is required to attend.

The meeting is open to the public and attendance is encouraged. The Department of Transportation will make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities who wish to participate in the public meeting or need an alternative accessible format of this notice. If you require an accommodation, contact the Department of Transportation no later than March 15, 2021, to advise us of the nature of the accommodation that you need. Please contact Matt Maze, Office of Civil Rights, P.O. Box 201001, Helena, Montana 59620; telephone (406) 444-5416; Montana Relay 711; facsimile (406) 444-7243; or e-mail to mmaze@mt.gov.

Comments may be submitted in writing by mail to Vicki Crnich, Montana Department of Transportation, P.O. Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620.

For more information, or to submit comments online, please visit the study website at: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/westreserve/>