

Girl Power; The power of girlfriends.

North Shore News
Sunday, March 16, 2008
Page: B15
Section: Health Wise
Byline: Munisha Tumato
Source: North Shore News

They pump you up when you're feeling down, and pull you back down to reality when the latest man or job has you wedding planning after week two or dreaming premature thoughts of corporate takeover.

It seems that more women are recognizing the importance of female bonding -- if the number of women planning "girl getaways" is any testament to the fact.

Everywhere you look today, whether in a relationship or single, girls are planning spa afternoons, adventure dates, and even champagne and pyjama weekends in fancy hotels . . . with each other. More and more resorts and spas are offering platters of girly goodness -- "girl getaway" packages that offer everything from rounds of Haagen Dazs pints to manicures to women-only surf classes.

North Shore therapist and counsellor Sally Halliday says she pleased that more and more women are deciding to take vacations together.

"We are socialized as women to be more relational. We give birth to babies so we have very close bonds," says Halliday.

"The trend I see is that we are so busy these days and friendships often are the first thing to go," says the longtime counsellor, who has discovered through her work with young widows that those with a rich network of friends often recover faster emotionally, and generally live happier lives.

Even though it seems common sense to any woman who has gone through a rough patch and leaned on her girlfriends to get through it, it wasn't until 2000 that a UCLA study unearthed a biological basis for women's tendency to form strong, supportive female networks.

The study found that not everyone responds to stressful situations through a "fight or flight" response. In fact, until 2000, around 90 per cent of the research on stress has been conducted on and for men -- and what applies to men, namely "fight or flight," does not necessarily apply to women.

The landmark study suggested that when women become stressed, their bodies release a hormone called oxytocin, which actually suppresses the fight or flight response and moves them to tend children and gather with other women instead. Men don't respond the same way because testosterone reduces the effects of oxytocin, while estrogen enhances its effects.

The urge to "tend and befriend" is nothing to be laughed at. Women have been doing it for millennia; it is what has bonded us and helped us survive. But survival aside, sometimes girls just want to have fun, and a weekend getaway with your best friends might be just the way to do it.

COWGIRL CAMP

For all the girls who wanted a pony when they were seven, and now as women, aim to tame one, cowgirl boot camp is the vacation for you. **Elkin Creek Guest Ranch**, nestled in the picturesque Nemaiah Valley, offers this popular camp around the middle of June to riders of any skill level.

When you're done riding and roping, your group can hunker down to sumptuous dinners and martinis, and a quick hot tub or sauna should help with any saddle soreness.

If bootcamp isn't your thing, Elkin offers regular ranch packages as well.

PAMPER POSSE

Leave the babies at home, this is not that kind of pampering. Aquaterre Spa is one of many spas with girl getaway vacation packages that offer to wine, dine and pamper you and your gal pals. Located a short jaunt away, about 30 minutes north of Nanaimo at the edge of Craig's Bay, this picturesque waterfront spa includes a two-night stay, complimentary robes, facials, manicures, pedicures and more. Packages start at \$382 per lady, for the weekend.

PYJAMA PARTY IN WHISTLER

Remember when a slumber party was the peak of your social calendar? Taking its cues from the days of pyjamas, pizza and truth or dare, the Hilton Whistler Resort and Spa offers slumber parties for grown-ups. Substitute board games with a Swedish massage, pyjamas with a pedicure, and pizza with a full gourmet breakfast and you've got an idea of what a slumber party - Whistler style -- looks like.

SURF SISTERS

Traditional myths have always linked women to the ocean, so what better way to spend a girls' weekend than learning how to ride the waves? Surf Sisters in Tofino was founded in 1999 by Canadian women's surfing champion Jenny Stewart, as a way to promote women's surfing. These days they offer lessons for everyone, including a very popular two-day, girls-only weekend surfing clinic that should have you catching waves after two fun and intensive morning group lessons.

Idnumber: 200803160062

Edition: Final

Story Type: News

Length: 753 words