

Haida Gwaii 'cool', says celebrity Toronto chef

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By Heather Ramsay--The chef known for starting the locavore or local food movement in Toronto's hip urban restaurant world is coming to Haida Gwaii.

Celebrity chef Jamie Kennedy is hosting a special culinary trip to the West Coast Fishing Club's Outpost lodge in Port Louis on the west coast of Graham Island. With a price tag set at around \$5,500 for a four day jaunt (includes fishing, accommodation, meals, air transfer from Vancouver), this culinary adventure is not likely to be one that many islanders will take part in. But the Observer wanted to find out what would bring a downtown Toronto chef to work at a remote fishing lodge.

"It's a very cool place," said Mr. Kennedy by telephone from Toronto. When he arrived for a similar weekend last year, a helicopter shuttled him to Langara Island where West Coast Fishing Club has its main lodge, then, he said, an "old single engine plane" tooted them down the west coast.

Mr. Kennedy said he has always been supportive of local agriculture, but once he got to The Outpost he was amazed at the abundance of wild food to be gathered. Just by wandering the shore, he and the guests on the tour found clams, mussels, scallops and seaweed, all of which went into a very local chowder. The geoducks, he served sashimi style.

"So sweet," he said. "The bounty is phenomenal."

Besides beachcombing, he hopes to take guests for a walk in the forest to see what type of food he can find in there.

Mr. Kennedy said he wants to connect people with his passion for creating meals from what is around them. To islanders accustomed to gathering local food this may seem obvious, but where Mr. Kennedy lives, people have few options but to push a cart around the grocery store.

Foraging on a beach on Haida Gwaii may be an extreme example, but for Mr. Kennedy shopping locally is the middle ground.

He fills his menu at restaurants like Gilead Cafe and Bistro and the Gardiner Cafe in downtown Toronto with eggs, pork, lake fish, berries and rhubarb in season from local producers. He also creates fine food from wild products like nettles found on his own rural land.

"I just open their eyes to the possibilities," he said of the guests he will host this summer on the west coast.

Although the kitchen at The Outpost is beautifully outfitted, Mr. Kennedy wants to impose some challenges on himself this year. He hopes to get his guests gathering driftwood for a fire on the beach where he'll set up some sort of suspended cauldron to cook a meal in. Or find a way to wrap shellfish in seaweed, bury in it in a pit and bring out a steamed feast after a few hours.

If he finds mushrooms he'll create a dish that allows diners to experience the look and taste of the wild fungus rather than chopping them into a simple mushroom soup.

Mr. Kennedy said that in a place like The Outpost he has to exercise restraint in his preparations so as not to lose the essence of the intense fresh food.

The Fish, Forage and Fun weekend is from July 4-8 at the West Coast Fishing Club. Vancouver chef David Hawksworth, whose new self-titled restaurant is opening in the freshly renovated luxurious Hotel Georgia is also coming. He'll offer a similar experience on Langara Island from July 24-28.