

## The Abiding Appeal of Quilt Retreat

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Retreats come in all shapes and sizes. There are spa retreats and work retreats and wellness retreats...all designed for attendees to 'take a break' from the daily grind of life. Retreats represent an opportunity to recharge, reinvigorate and perhaps, even get back on track. Quilt retreats, although also offering attendees a break from daily life, represent something deeper and richer. They offer an enduring sisterhood.

Retreat, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is both:

- (a) 'an act of withdrawing from what is difficult, dangerous or disagreeable';

and

- (b) 'a place of privacy or safety...a refuge'.

Yes, a quilt retreat can be a safe place; a refuge. But more importantly, it offers attendees an opportunity to withdraw...not from what is dangerous, necessarily, but perhaps from what is difficult or disagreeable. Just for a few precious days, routine chores like housework, preparing meals and generally taking care of others are left behind. A quilt retreat represents the alluring opportunity to trade everyday life and responsibilities for a chance to stitch, stitch and stitch some more.

Nature's inspirational backdrop can provide another layer to a successful quilt retreat. Quilt shop owners will, at times, plan their annual retreat away from the shop, hosting the retreat instead in a vacation destination. Alvina Saliken of Sweet Pea Quilting in Parksville, British Columbia (<http://sweetpeaquilting.ca>.) is one such quilt shop owner. In 2020, Alvina will host a quilt retreat in Tofino, on Vancouver Island, one of the most breathtakingly beautiful places in the World. Here, adjacent to the open ocean, waves crash and break on the shores, no matter the season.

Insert Image: Photo\_1\_Tofino Resort & Marina

Caption: The venue for Sweet Pea Quilting's 2020 quilt retreat

Alvina gives her quilters a choice of structure or freelancing at her retreats. "I always ask the ladies if they would like to do a day class, work together on a similar project or just work on their own." Most of the quilters choose to freelance. She goes on to say, "The attendees often bring way more projects to complete than they have time to work on. But, hey you never know! Quilters are always so optimistic."

At Alvina's retreats, **nothing** gets in the way of stitching. Each quilter has their own sewing table in a designated area. Ironing boards are set up. Some are at their machines by 7 a.m., joyfully stitching in their pajamas. Others start their day with coffee or tea and a walk outside, revelling in all that nature has to offer. She says, "Meals are prepared for everyone. There is no driving. There are no spouses or children to entertain or clean up after. Participants are able to clear their mind of everything not quilting-related and just sew. It may sound weird, but there is something very relaxing about it. You can work at your own pace, you're not trying to keep up with a class and there are no deadlines." That does not sound weird at all!

Vivian Sergeew is a resident of Hinton, Alberta. She is part of a group of women quilters who all met online in the now defunct, Quilter's Club of America (QCA). After ten years, when that online group ceased to exist, some 30+ members migrated to the Quilting Around the World (QATW) (<https://www.quiltingaroundtheworld.com>) site and remained in touch. In 2011, one of the members, a quilt shop owner named Donna Bonn, tossed out the idea of an in-person, let's meet-and-greet, quilt retreat. The ladies loved the idea, pounced on it and now they all endeavour to meet one another once a year for their annual retreat.

In Vivian's case, she will drive more than ten hours from Hinton to the Sun Mountain Lodge (<https://www.sunmountainlodge.com>) in Winthrop, Washington.

Insert Image: Photo\_2\_Google Map shot Hinton to Winthrop

Caption: Vivian Sergeew's drive to quilt retreat from Hinton, Alberta to Winthrop, Washington

She says, "The 2011 retreat was my first trip that long by myself. I left home, not knowing what to expect, never having met these ladies in person. Turns out, they were wonderful...every last one of them. The whole experience made me feel so empowered!"

Donna Bonn, host and organizer of the Sun Mountain Lodge quilt retreat 2020, (a private, by invitation-only retreat) calls the QATW group of ladies, "sisters of the heart. We learn and grow with and from each other...we share both the joy and sorrow of our lives. We thrive on the challenges and exposure to new ideas at our retreats. We share a deep passion for quilting." She laughs when she thinks of the first retreat held in 2011. "First time we met as a group, our family members were aghast." They questioned. "Senior women travelling alone all the way to Washington State? To quilt with strangers? What if it all was a scam? Needless to say, not only was it **not** a scam, but we all had the time of our lives and couldn't wait until the next retreat!"

Insert Image: Photo\_3\_Sun Mountain Lodge

Caption: Autumn at Sun Mountain Lodge

Insert Image: Photo\_4\_View from Sun Mountain Lodge

Caption: A view of the valley from the rooms at Sun Mountain Lodge

At Sun Mountain Lodge, the quilters will stay at the property four or five nights; they will have four full days and two half days to do nothing but quilt. Like with Alvina's retreat in Tofino, B.C., participants arrive toting projects of their own to work on. If desired, there may be a fabric exchange or a mini-class or a demo of new quilting tools on the market.

As we all know, quilters love to shop! Thankfully, that activity doesn't stop at retreat. Since Winthrop, Washington is remote, there are only two, very small LQS in the area. Quilters are careful to 'hit the shops' in small groups of six, so as not to overwhelm staff.

Angela McPherson, is an open, honest, down-to-earth young quilter. She's a civilian employee of the U.S. Military, a married mom of two teenagers. Her husband is also employed by the military, but as an enlisted member. Deployment has led them to reside in far-flung Eielson AFB in Alaska, bustling Minot, North Dakota and Mountain Home AFB near Boise, Idaho.

Angela suffers from anxiety – an often debilitating mental health challenge. Her courage to overcome her fear of meeting new people and being around strangers, prompted her to join a quilt guild in Alaska. By learning how to quilt, she found the courage to conquer her fear of travel, and attended her first-ever quilt retreat. The journey took her from her Alaskan home to Post Falls, Idaho...a staggering total of 2,260 miles. Before she left home, she went to Ben Franklin Crafts in North Pole, Alaska (yes, there is such a place) and purchased batik fat

quarters for each attendee at the retreat. During introductions, Angela stood up and told participants, “If any of you would like a batik fat quarter from my home in Alaska, please come by and say hello.” A massive icebreaker, Angela says, “It worked like a charm! I gave away fabric and made some new friends in the process.”

Insert Image: Photo\_5\_Angela McPherson

Caption: Angela with her Grand Championship, award-winning quilt from the Alaska Fair. (Her husband entered it for her. She was too timid!)

All of us can appreciate the value of unplugging, recharging and revving our engines away from home. All of us can be inspired, not only by the power of nature, but by sharing both our lives and our love of quilting with others. Quilt retreat is the perfect backdrop for the bonding of soul sisters...a true blessing and a positive component to a full life.

**Please note: Quilter's World offers an annual quilt retreat, to different locations each year. 2020's retreat was held in late July in two of Canada's most beautiful provinces: Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Quilters made a special pillow, designed by Quilter's World editor, Carolyn Vagts. Check the website for 2021 quilt retreat details – <https://www.quiltersworld.com/>**

