



Washington's Emerald Isles

Head to the San Juan Islands to kayak among whales or stroll picturesque waterfronts

By Eric Lucas



Emerald isles in a sapphire sea: Washington State's San Juan Islands lend themselves to metaphors. But the islands have infinitely more to offer than easy turns of phrase. Ask Oprah Winfrey, who recently bought an estate on Orcas Island. Kayakers admire the majesty of breaching whales. Organic farmers and ranchers provide artisan ingredients to bustling markets and cozy cafés. From May through September, the sun shines almost every day, and the gentle rains of spring and fall polish the crystalline air for visitors (and residents, of course) who hike and bike and comb the beaches. You can't visit all 172 named islands on a quick trip—and only three even *have* visitor amenities. Your best bet: Start with San Juan Island and Orcas Island.

GRAZE HERE: On Saturdays between April 11 and October 24, don't miss the San Juan Island Farmers Market for pastries, grilled oysters, and more. sjfarmersmarket.com.

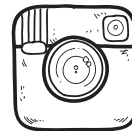
WHALE MUSEUM



FRIDAY HARBOR HOUSE



VIEW FROM FRIDAY HARBOR HOUSE



INSTA-WORTHY

Head to the top of **Mount Constitution**, where on a clear day you can photograph four mountain ranges: the Cascades, British Columbia's Coast Range, the Vancouver Island Range, and the Olympics. The Salish Sea adds the perfect dash of blue.



PARK AND RIDE

From mid-May through September, the **Friday Harbor Jolly Trolley** offers hop-on, hop-off service around San Juan Island to major sights such as Roche Harbor, English Camp, Lime Kiln Point State Park, and Pelindaba Lavender. The buses make seven circuits a day. *All-day rides cost \$10.* (360) 298-8873; fridayharborjollytrolley.com.

Getting There

BY BOAT: The ferry from **Anacortes** to Friday Harbor on San Juan Island takes about an hour and costs about \$64 round-trip for a car and two people. Reservations far in advance are essential for summer months. The 95-mile drive from SeaTac airport to Anacortes takes a few hours. (888) 808-7977; wsdot.wa.gov/ferries.

BY PLANE: **Kenmore Air** offers regularly scheduled flights to San Juan Island from Seattle. The 35-minute commuter plane flight is spectacularly scenic, and costs \$300-\$360 round-trip. If you fly, rent a car in Friday Harbor (about \$60 per day). (866) 435-9524; kenmoreair.com.

Day 1

CHECK IN: Friday Harbor, San Juan Island's main town, makes a great base for exploring the islands. Get a room at **Friday Harbor House**, a snazzy boutique inn with a standout restaurant on the bluff overlooking the bay. The inn's 24 rooms have jetted tubs and gas fireplaces. Rates start at \$209 (360-378-8455; fridayharborhouse.com). More economical lodging is available at **San Juan Island Hostel** (360-370-5602; sanjuanislandhostel.com), or at a B&B.

EAT WITH THE LOCALS: Start with breakfast at **Rocky Bay Café**, which serves hash with corned beef, potatoes, eggs, and all the fixin's. (360) 378-5051.

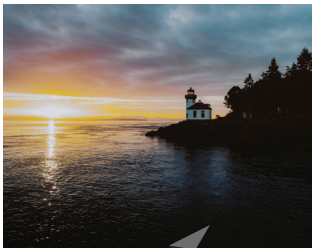
ART, ORCAS, AND LUNCH: A one-minute walk away, you'll find **Arctic Raven Gallery**, which is devoted to modern Northwest Coast indigenous art. (360) 378-3433; arcticravengalleryfridayharbor.com. From there, stroll to the **Whale Museum** to learn about the region's resident orcas. (360) 378-4710; whalemuseum.org. Then step into **Cask and Schooner** for excellent island-style pub food. (360) 378-2922; caskandschooner.com.

ISLAND RAMBLE: Walk to the **San Juan Islands Museum of Art**, which features regional artists and, occasionally, big names. (360) 370-5050; sjima.org. Then browse shops such as **Mystical Mermaid** (New Age crystals and such), **Kings Marine** (nautical paraphernalia), and **Griffin Bay Bookstore** (regional interest and fine fiction).

TIME TO DINE: After a stroll along the docks, end your day back at **Friday Harbor House**, with fine seafood and steak, as well as wine, craft cocktails, and beer.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SAN JUAN ISLANDS VISITORS BUREAU PHOTO BY SLATER MOORE; SAN JUAN ISLANDS VISITORS BUREAU PHOTO (2)

MOUNT CONSTITUTION OBSERVATION TOWER



LIME KILN LIGHTHOUSE



AFTERGLOW VISTA IN ROCHE HARBOR



MORAN STATE PARK

Day 2

PEACE OVER WAR: When the “Pig War” erupted in 1859—an American settler killed a British pig—the two nations established armed garrisons at opposite ends of San Juan Island. But cooler heads prevailed, the two countries submitted the dispute to arbitration, and no shots were fired. **American Camp**, on the island’s south and southeast shore, offers infinite vistas across island prairie sloping down to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, while **English Camp**, 15 miles to the north, is a peaceful, bigleaf maple- and Garry oak-wooded vale close to Roche Harbor. nps.gov/sajh.

SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE SEA: On your drive from American Camp to English Camp, stop at **Lime Kiln Point State Park**, with its historic lighthouse and smashing views of Vancouver Island across Haro Strait. From May to September, the famous resident J Pod orcas often pass by close enough for photos. (360) 378-2044; parks.state.wa.us.

WATERWAY HAVEN: Million-dollar oceangoing yachts often tie up at **Roche Harbor**, a picturesque cove with a self-contained resort. On a 20-acre pastoral hillside, the adjacent **San Juan Islands Sculpture Park** holds more than 150 pieces that range from baffling to beautiful. Dockside, **Lime Kiln Café** offers pub-style food with an island flair; the succulent lamb burger comes from a local farm. rocheharbor.com.

PERFECT PADDLE: After lunch, take a kayak tour with **San Juan Island Outfitters** and explore inlets and channels that are home to seals, sea lions, seabirds, otters, eagles, and, yes, sometimes whales. A three-hour tour is \$99 per person. (360) 378-1962; sanjuanislandoutfitters.com.

COZY EATS: On your way back to Friday Harbor, stop for dinner at **Duck Soup**, a fire-lit, woodsy cabin. Open Wednesday-Saturday. Closed in January. (360) 378-4878; ducksoupsanjuans.com.

Day 3

ISLAND HOP: Board the morning ferry with your car for the half-hour ride to **Orcas Island**. The biggest and most geographically diverse island has a distinctly New Age vibe. *Cost of round-trip journey varies by season but is about \$24 per car.* wsdot.wa.gov/ferries.

START HERE: From the ferry terminal, drive about 20 minutes to Orcas’ main town, **Eastsound**. Stop into **Brown Bear Baking** for croissants, quiches, and breads. (360) 855-7456. Then peruse the ceramics and other works at **Island Thyme Shop and Gallery**. (360) 376-4260.

PAMPER THYSELF: The **Healing Arts Center** offers acupuncture, Chinese medicine, cranio-sacral therapy, reflexology, energy work, counseling, and more than a dozen kinds of massage and bodywork. (360) 376-4002; orcashealingarts.org.

PARKS AND REC: Head 4.5 miles to **Moran State Park** and drive to the top of 2,409-foot **Mount Constitution**. Climb the watchtower stairs for 360-degree views that stretch from Mount Rainier to Canada. *Park admission is \$10 a day per vehicle.* moranstatepark.com. Then head to **Rosario Resort and Spa** and explore the historic 1909 mansion. (800) 562-8820; rosarioresort.com.

EAT AND RUN: Dine early at **Rosario Resort’s The Mansion Restaurant** so you can get to the ferry dock in time to return to Friday Harbor. Open Wednesday-Sunday. (360) 376-2222, ext. 400; rosarioresort.com.

San Juan Island resident **Eric Lucas** writes about western North America and Europe.

➡ Be sure to designate a driver if you plan to drink alcohol. ⬅

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: LEE317; SAN JUAN ISLANDS VISITORS BUREAU PHOTO BY MIC MONASCH; CAVAN IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; SAN JUAN ISLANDS VISITORS BUREAU PHOTO BY DANA HALPERT.