

nextstop



Clockwise from left: Views from Mount Maxwell Provincial Park are tough to top; a trailside fairy door; the island boasts 350 apple varieties; camping with a view at Ruckle Provincial Park



SALT SPRING ISLAND, B.C.

A GULF ISLANDS GEM OFFERS HINTS OF THE TROPICS **BY ERIC LUCAS**

IT'S A QUIET MORNING on the placid inlet leading to Ganges, the only town on British Columbia's Salt Spring Island. The group I'm with on a guided tour has kayaked a few miles down the bay, spotting eagles, otters, oystercatchers, dolphins and seals along the way. Now we beach our boats at tiny Russell Island to tour a historic Hawaiian homestead, part of Gulf Islands National Park Reserve, and the setting is so sublime that I waded out from the sand and plunge into the emerald water. ¶ OK, it's a little colder than Hawai'i. "Refreshing," I wryly announce to my fellow paddlers. ¶ Balmy climate, curving beaches of white sand, dolphins and whales in the distance—Salt Spring must have seemed a bit like home to the Hawaiians who settled here in the 19th century. Called Kanakas, they established homesteads in the pastoral landscape, joining African-Americans who had previously left the U.S., and others, to form a community that remains diverse, distinctive and wholly dedicated to a bucolic lifestyle. ¶ Back out in the sun I warm up quickly, and the summer sunshine epitomizes the atmosphere of a place so warmly welcoming that I bet half its visitors vow they'll move here and join the existing 10,000 residents on this 17-mile-long island paradise.

GETTING THERE

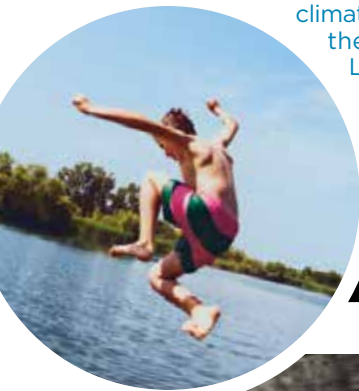
You can't just hop in your car and drive to Salt Spring Island, and that's part of the appeal. BC Ferries serves the island from Tsawwassen, near Vancouver, B.C., and from Swartz Bay and Crofton, both on Vancouver Island. The 90-minute sailing from Tsawwassen offers sensational views of mountains and the occasional whale or dolphin sighting. Advance reservations (bcferries.com)—and binoculars—are strongly recommended.



Fairy Door: Colleen Propp; Boy: CkeenePhoto; Aerial: Emily Norton; Ruckle Provincial Park: Michael Wheatley/AllCanada Photos

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE

Not only do the inlets, bays and coves around the island provide ample opportunities for waterborne activities such as kayaking, Salt Spring boasts inland lakes that warm sufficiently in summer to provide balmy waters for swimming, canoeing, or just wading and splashing about. With a sunny summer climate and waters that warm into the 70s by mid-July, Cusheon Lake and St. Mary Lake each offer a family atmosphere and an aquatic experience that seems subtropical. Lodges and comfy cabins can be found at both lakes.



Chicken Tuk Tuk melds global flavors at Rock Salt.



Mini tarts are among the many reasons to love Barb's Bakery.



Roadside artisan foods.

ON YOUR HONOR

● Salt Spring Island hosts two of the most beloved and best-known farmers markets in the Northwest on Tuesdays and Saturdays in central Ganges, and an equally rewarding island shopping experience is

available along its roads. Residents of island farmsteads set up small kiosks or tables to sell their produce, and it literally ranges from A (apples, 350 varieties) to Z (zucchini and zinnias). One could run through the entire alphabet (including Q: quinces and quiche). Baked goods, home-canned goods and other artisan foods supplement plain old produce. Shopping is simple: To stock up on provisions for your campsite or vacation rental, make your choice, leave payment in the money jar, and proceed to the next roadside stand.

FIND 'EM

DINE

Barb's Bakery & Bistro
1-121 McPhillips Ave., Ganges, 250.537-4491
barbsbakeryandbistro.ca

Café Talia
122 Hereford Ave., Ganges, 250.931.7070
cafetaliaonsaltspring.com

Hastings House Country House Hotel
160 Upper Ganges Road, Ganges, 800.661.9255
hastingshouse.com

House Piccolo
108 Hereford Ave., Ganges, 250.537.1844
housepiccolo.com

Moby's Pub
124 A Upper Ganges Road, Ganges, 250.537.5559
mobyspub.ca

Morningside Organic Bakery Café & Bookstore
107 Morningside Road, Fulford, 250.653.4414
morningsideorganic.com

Rock Salt Restaurant & Café
2921 Fulford-Ganges Road, Fulford, 250.653.4833
rocksaltrestaurant.com

Tree House Cafe
106 Purvis Lane, Ganges, 250.537.5379
treehousecafe.ca

EXPLORE
Gulf Islands National Park Reserve
pc.gc.ca

Ruckle Provincial Park
env.gov.bc.ca

Farmers Markets
Centennial Park, Ganges, Tues., 2-6 p.m.
saltspringtuesdaymarket.com
Sat., 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
saltspringmarket.com

SLEEP
Cusheon Lake Resort
171 Natalie Lane, 250.537.9629
cusheonlake.com

Hedgerow House B&B
238 Park Drive, Ganges, 250.538.1716
hedgerowhouse.ca

St. Mary Lake Resort
1170 North End Road, 250.537.2832
stmarylakeresort.com

MATTERS OF TASTE

Contemporary Northwest cuisine—it's called "West Coast cuisine" in British Columbia—featuring local seafood and produce shines in Ganges, most elegantly at **Hastings House Dining Room** (a AAA Four Diamond restaurant), **House Piccolo** and **Rock Salt Restaurant**. But quality dining also prevails in less-formal settings. **Tree House Cafe**, in Ganges, is a small eatery built around a spreading plum tree; on summer nights, B.C.-based musicians serenade appreciative crowds in the courtyard. Several pubs around the island provide the traditional fish and chips so intrinsic to former British colonies; **Moby's Pub** is the best known. ✨ Mornings bring the quintessential island experience: gathering at local bakeshops for fresh muffins and breads. **Barb's Bakery** is the biggest and most popular; **Morningside Organic Bakery Café & Bookstore** is a vegan alternative. And the date squares at **Café Talia** are deliciously addictive. 🍪