



Friday Harbor House

Friday Harbor, San Juan Island, United States

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9/₁₀

Telegraph expert
rating

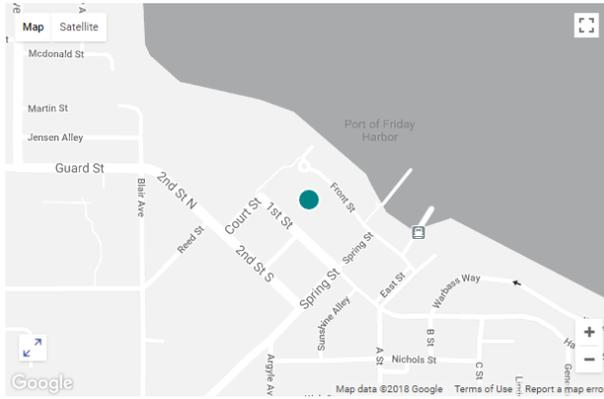
" This 23-room island retreat embodies the heart of Pacific Northwest hospitality, with sleek design, splendid water views, and exquisite food and drink to toast outdoor adventures. Despite all those intense charms, the warmth and intelligence of the staff still win the most accolades. "

By **Amanda Castleman**, TRAVEL WRITER

10/₁₀ Location

A hundred miles northwest of Seattle sprawl the San Juan Islands, an archipelago in Puget Sound that is the nation's second-largest estuary and the start of the Inside Passage stretching to Alaska. Mist softens the lines between the sea, cobblestone beaches, groves of cedar, and distant mountain peaks. Friday Harbor remains the islands' main hub and the hotel crowns the bluff overlooking its picturesque marina and ferry landing. Visitors all arrive via floatplane or boat: during peak travel times reserve a spot on ferries from Anacortes, Washington, or Sidney, British Columbia, in Canada.

Friday Harbor House lies beside the Whale Museum and within a few minutes stroll of excellent eateries, including the Backdoor Kitchen, Mike's Café and Wine Bar, and The Market Chef gourmet deli. Don't miss Lime Kiln Point State Park, one of the world's best places to view whales from shore. Another highlight remains the bays and prairie-covered cliffs of American Camp at the San Juan Island National Historical Park, home to the world's most gentle war. The 13-year standoff evolved into picnics and horse races, and its only casualty was a pig.



9/10

Style & character

A refresh has brought the hotel's level of comfort and elegance back to high standards. Friday Harbor House serves a smorgasbord of Northwest style: hints of clean, contemporary Asian and Scandinavian design with a huge helping of natural textures and the area's raw beauty. Relaxation and romance hold sway here, but fine dining almost steals the spotlight.

The hotels' fantastic bar and restaurant – quickly becoming a destination in their own right – just expanded onto a vast deck with a fire pit and lit heated umbrellas. No better place exists on San Juan Island to linger over a craft cocktail and contemplate the boats angling across the fir-fringed cove. Watch for eagles skimming low over the whale-watching vessels, returning from deeper waters plied by humpbacks and the incredibly rare, endangered pods of resident orcas.



[See more images at Booking.com](#)

9/10

Service & facilities

Every inch of the property has been redone, and yet the staff manages to upstage the glamorous views and setting. Taking care of people seems to be more of a calling than a job requirement at Friday Harbor House. It all starts with check in: guests offload from the ferry and tend to storm the desk in waves. What could be an unpleasant scrum transforms into an impromptu happy hour, as employees encourage people to connect over bubbles, sangria, or honey-bourbon apple cider – depending on the season.

In terms of facilities, the hotel keeps things simple with just the superb bar and restaurant. Guests can get plenty of exercise paddling in Puget Sound, biking the island's rolling hills, or hiking across its rare maritime prairies. It does, however, have a meeting room that often hosts weddings and corporate retreats. The hotel partners with the nearby Lavendera Day Spa for wellness packages that include massages with organic lotions.

- ✓ Bar
- ✓ Restaurant
- ✓ Wi-Fi
- ✓ Laundry
- ✓ Room service

9/10

Rooms

All 23 rooms were designed for romance and have king-sized beds, gas fireplaces, and deep, splendid jet tubs for two (except the corner room overlooking the harbour). About half have balconies, which can be requested, but aren't guaranteed. The clean, modern style mixes island culture with a soupçon of urban sophistication. Expect lots of rich textures and natural finishes, such as coffee tables made from tree cross-sections cradled in concrete, along with a subtle palette of greys and pale gold.

Graceful touches include L'Occitane Mistral toiletries and the pillow menu, complete with buckwheat and bamboo options. Friday Harbor House also honours the area's coffee reputation with Chemex pour-over carafes and beans from San Juan Island Coffee Roasting Company, freshly ground upon arrival. More in the mood to slow down? Try the Salish Sea Dream Kit with chamomile bath salts and a pillow spray scented with the island's signature lavender.

10_{/10} Food & drink

Chef Jason Aldous started as a sous at the legendary Willows Inn on Lummi Island, which fed his passion for ingredients farmed, fished, and foraged daily. The menu reflects his locavore ethos, but also brings in far-flung flavours. Decadent classics such as baked Camembert and braised lamb shank sit beside twists such as a red-curry congee with crispy tofu. He often plays with fermented foods, adding kimchi to a whole roasted branzino fish and pickled golden raisins to a grilled broccoli salad with Vadouvan, pistachio, and spiced yogurt. Many culinary critics consider Aldous a rising star, and rightly so.

House infusions liven up the cocktail list; expect drinks such as lemon-verbena margarita and an Ancient Fashioned, which features lapsang-souchong bourbon and five-spice bitters. A complimentary basic breakfast is offered in the mornings, but order from the menu to savour a bit more of Aldous's creativity. Mains begin at \$13 (£8) for bibimbap or a brick-pressed burrito made with beer-chipotle-braised brisket, then rise to \$15 (£11) for dishes such as breakfast poutine with duck confit.

9_{/10} Value for money

Double rooms from \$290 (£216) in low season; and from \$495 (£370) in high. Basic breakfast included. Free Wi-Fi. While the prices are steep for the islands, the world-class views, design, cuisine, and graceful service make a stay here worth it.

Access for guests with disabilities?

The lobby, bar, and restaurant offer great accessibility on the main floor, as well as bathrooms that can accommodate wheelchairs. Lifts lead up to the rooms: a third-floor harbour-view one has ADA features, including wider doorways, bathroom grab rails, a shower seat, and lowered loo. (Note, the tiny town – and the island in general – contain some steep hills. Travellers with impaired mobility should bring a car or power chair.)

Family-friendly?

Friday Harbor House was designed for couples and doesn't cater for children, though they're welcome. Families can book adjoining rooms, some with pull-out sofas or rollaways for an extra fee of \$20 (£15). Pets are not allowed.

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