

Passport to Pleasure: Feeling Good in Friday Harbor, San Juan Island

October 31st, 2012 ·



Last year's trip to Orcas Island whetted my appetite to return to the San Juan Islands. And what better stop than the namesake of the island chain?

Less than ninety miles north of Seattle, you board a ferry in Anacortes, and in an hour's time you're on San Juan

Island. Far from the urban scene, you'll

quickly adapt to island time and island pace. Like Orcas, San Juan Island offers short hikes, beautiful views, and a relaxing, laid-back experience.

One might not ordinarily think of Friday Harbor for a culinary getaway, but it's on a small island (surrounded by other islands) full of farms and artists, which means local seafood, meat, fruits, vegetables, and more prepared with artisan care. Turns out the site of a Pig War is a perfectly good place to pig out.

I hereby offer you three perfectly pleasurable days on San Juan Island. Join me as we venture to Friday Harbor, where we stamp this installment of Passport to Pleasure—a hedonistic quest for great food and good times for two, from nibbles to naughtiness.



Prelude: A Friday Stay at Swinomish, pre-Friday Harbor

If you have a full work day and can't make it all the way to Friday Harbor to start your weekend getaway, make Anacortes your goal. This positions you just minutes from the ferry to catch the earliest departure (avoiding the long lines that come with all the later sailings) the next morning. Lest you think Anacortes is full of dive hotels, look into the [Swinomish Casino & Lodge](#).

Now that you're not rushing and wondering if you'll catch your ferry, you're relaxing (isn't that the whole point of a vacation getaway?) in one of the comfortable rooms of this new property, where you can have a balcony that has water and mountain views, offering you promise of your island destination the next day. Even if you don't gamble, you can explore other entertainment at the resort, or simply settle in for a fine meal in the 13moons Restaurant, where you can enjoy the spot prawn cocktail in season. (More photos in the slideshow above.) Then call it an early night knowing you'll be catching the early ferry.

Day 1: Saturday Strolling and a Stay at Lakedale Resort

It's an early alarm, but an exciting one, as you can feel Friday Harbor in your reach. Still sleepy? No problem. You can park the car on the ferry and easily find seating where you can stretch out like the others and catch more zzz's, especially if there's typical early morning darkness and fog. Then, in one hour, you're docking at Friday Harbor while the little town is still waking up.

Grab coffee and pastry at the popular [Café Demeter](#) to get yourself going. You'll want an energy boost to make your way just south of the town along Cattle Point Road to the American Camp, where you go to the Visitor Center and ask one of

the friendly guides to tell you the fascinating story of the Pig War that marks the history of San Juan Island. Then take a short stroll (watch for eagles!) to Grandma's Cove where you get an immediate taste of the beauty of the island: the water, the hilly terrain, the driftwood on the beach, the general tranquility. It might be the two of you alone at this hour, so stay and soak it all in. If time, you might venture just a little further south to the Cattle Point Interpretive Area and then a stop at South Beach to admire the amazing driftwood and views there. But don't get too distracted, as you've come early on Saturday to see and taste the San Juan Island Farmers Market back in town. It may be modest in size, but it's a fun and friendly affair. You'll wish you had a kitchen where you can cook the locally fresh eggs, seafood, fruits and vegetables, and more, but the consolation prize is that Bakery San Juan is onsite with its pizza ovens to do the work for you—serving up some delicious slices.



After lunch, wander about town if you like, but knowing you'll return, you might want to enjoy some afternoon time at Lakedale Resort at Three Lakes, where you'll stay the night. Here you'll find a variety of accommodations, including the intriguing canvas cabins for a "glamping" experience, and log cabins which would be ideal if you're doing the family or friends thing. More likely, you're in the lodge, where your room has a balcony overlooking Neva Lake. Enjoy the view from your balcony or the deck below; better yet, rent a paddle boat or canoe and get *on* the lake. For dinner, you're perfectly situated for a fine meal at Duck Soup Inn, less than a mile up the road. You'll want to book a reservation well ahead, with the option of eating in the dining room or outside during warm weather, so ask about options. This is informal fine dining with friendly staff and fabulous food that's vibrant in color and flavor. Steak Diane is the signature dish and well-worth considering, but check out the rest of the regular menu for seasonal specials. Enjoy the

evening before retiring back to your room at Lakedale, where you might want to take an evening stroll to see the stars.

Day 2: Touring the Island, Followed by Friday Harbor House

Morning means breakfast at Lakedale Resort, including the whimsy of the automatic pancake machine. As you sit on the deck you might contemplate a slow morning, but you have a fairly full day ahead as you will tour San Juan Island. Start by heading north to Roche Harbor, built around the former Roche Harbor Lime & Cement Company and a Hudson's Bay trading post. Look for a couple of public bocce courts which provide playful entertainment—and a crowd if you're good. At the harbor are some restaurants, shops, and street artisans in season, including the Sweet Shoppe at Roche Harbor where you can buy high quality licorice from all around the world.

Continuing your counter-clockwise tour of the island, a fun stop is [Krystal Acres Farm](#). You can get a close-up look at the adorable alpacas, and then visit the country store if, in essence, you want to *wear* one. The fiber is spun into yarn to make sweaters, slippers, and the like. Stronger and warmer than wool, it feels good and will help you weather wintery days.

Next, take a stroll through English Camp, including a glance at the garden. If you're more interested in a hike up a hill, Mount Young awaits. But be sure to take time at Lime Kiln Point State Park, the place to enjoy the water views with hope of watching whales from just a few feet away.

A short drive from Lime Kiln Point is the [Pelindaba Lavender Farm](#). Wander through the colorful lavender fields, drawing inspiration to purchase products from the farm store. Some of those items are culinary, like teas and chutneys and herbs. For immediate satisfaction, you can try lavender ice cream.

Do your research and your tour can include a distillery, honey farm, ranches, fruit and vegetable farms, and the like, but at some point you'll come full circle back to Friday Harbor, which means it's time to check into [Friday Harbor House](#) for your overnight stay. Here you'll have fabulous views of the harbor, which you'll enjoy

both day and night. Whether on your balcony or on the grounds in an Adirondack chair, you can sip a drink and relax while watching the ferries and seaplanes come and go.



At some point, smells from a kitchen will have you salivating, which means it's time to have dinner at The Bluff Restaurant at Friday Harbor House. Chef Kyle Nicholson deploys creative use of local ingredients, often in intriguing flavor combinations. The flash-fried kelp and calamari, pictured

here (more delicious dishes in the photos below) is a must if on the menu. Indulge in wine pairings with knowledge that your car is safely parked, and that you'll be safely parking yourself back in your room above the restaurant.

Note: Check the Friday Harbor House's "[Specials and Packages](#)" for some interesting deals, including this coming weekend's True Fall Harvest Cooking Class Getaway.

Day 3: A Relaxing Remainder and Goodbye to San Juan Island

Sleep in at Friday Harbor House, but be sure not to miss the excellent breakfast that's included with your stay. The coffee's local and the ingredients are again fresh and seasonal.

Next, you've booked a relaxing Touch for Two couple's massage at the [Lavendera Day Spa](#). Previously located at the lavender farm, the new location is just a stone's throw from the inn. There's something extremely satisfying about pampering yourselves with side-by-side treatments. You can choose the signature Earth Water Spirit Massage, combining reiki, hot stone, and Swedish massage, an experience which is simultaneously relaxing and energizing. At the spa shop, you can also pick up lavender products to take home, including massage oil so you can relive the experience.

Afterward is the time to stroll the village if you've yet to do it. You'll discover bookstores, vintage shops, gift shops, and galleries—including the Sea Shepherd Gallery, as founder Paul Watson calls San Juan Island home.

When you're hungry for lunch, Market Chef awaits with spectacular sandwiches. Then the afternoon is yours to go to places you've yet to see, or to revisit favorite spots like Grandma's Cove. But check the ferry line. You may want to park your car in advance if there's a wait of more than one ferry, but you're free to leave your car walk where you'd like at that point. Eventually, you'll return to your car and board the ferry. As it pushes off the pier, you can look back to Friday Harbor and San Juan Island with a happy stomach and happy memories.

See more than 50 photos from a Friday Harbor getaway in the photos that follow.



A spot prawn cocktail is the perfect start to a meal at Swinomish Casino & Lodge's 13moons Restaurant



A closer look at the spot prawn cocktail, with capers and Walla Walla sweet onions



Prosciutto-wrapped scallops at 13moons (nicely cooked!)



13moons' house salad



Small Caesar salad at 13moons



Alder wood-grilled Chinook salmon with Yukon buttermilk mash, heirloom grape tomatoes, and spot prawn butter



Cioppino with spot prawns, weathervane scallops, halibut, Manila clams, Penn Cove mussels, and saffron-tomato sauce



Strawberry-rhubarb crisp with ice cream for dessert at 13moons (a fine end to a good meal)



Outdoor dining at 13moons



View from the room at the Swinomish Casino & Lodge in Anacortes



Early morning fog on the ferry ride from Anacortes to Friday Harbor



Plenty of room on the ferry for an early morning nap



Ferry approach to Friday Harbor



*Candied oranges make the craquelin au chocolat a treat at
Cafe Demeter*



Cafe Demeter's spinach and feta croissant



Grandma's Cove, accessible via a short walk at the American Camp



An endless stretch of driftwood at South Beach



Bakery San Juan sets up ovens at the Friday Harbor Farmers Market on Saturdays, selling slices like this fungi e cipolla (sauteed crimini mushrooms and onions)



A look at Neva Lake from Lakedale Resort at Three Lakes



Canvas cabin at Lakedale Resort



Grilling is an option at Lakedale Resort



Lakedale Resort's intriguing pancake machine, working diligently at breakfast



Duck Soup Inn, a popular dining destination



Tomato-basil soup at Duck Soup Inn, served with house-made sourdough bread and an addictive anchovy butter



Duck Soup Inn salad (split portion)



Duck Soup Inn's "Thai pork salad with Jones Family Farm ground pork, lemongrass, herbs, chilies, lime & peanuts, served with Blue Moon Farm lettuce leaves for wrapping" (delicious!)



Duck Soup Inn's "Herbes de Provence crusted chicken breast with goat cheese, blueberry habanero chutney & creamy corn polenta (colorful, with some interesting flavor combinations)



Dessert at Duck Soup Inn: black plum coconut sorbet with basil syrup and toasted coconut (completing a fun meal in a fine setting)



Jars of licorice from around the world at the Sweet Shoppe at Roche Harbor



Cute alert: stop to see the alpacas at Krystal Acres Farm



Getting close to an alpaca



Couldn't resist one more!



Lime Kiln Point, also known as “Whale Watch Park”



The sights and smells of the Pelindaba Lavender Farm are captivating



At Pelindaba Lavender Farm, you can taste the lavender as well



Outside Friday Harbor House, high on a bluff



A view from Friday Harbor House



And another view from Friday Harbor House



*Corn and leek bisque with king salmon at The Bluff
Restaurant at Friday Harbor House*



*The Bluff's wilted spinach & Brussels sprouts salad with
pancetta, seasonal foraged wild berries, house-made ricotta,
hazelnut dust, and Jerez sherry vinaigrette*



The Bluff's flash-fried kelp & calamari with smoky tomato sauce and hazelnut & citrus dusts (unique and delicious!)



The Bluff's Dungeness crab cake with Blue Moon Farm raw vegetable salad, foraged sea beans, bull kelp tartar, and citrus dust (this will restore your faith in quality crab cakes)



The Bluff's seared troll-caught salmon with warm red quinoa & snap pea salad, roasted radish, caramel beurre blanc, and sea foam



More from The Bluff: grilled Snake River Farms wagyu bavette steak with local green chile bread pudding, heirloom carrots, grilled onions, gremolata, and blackberry demi (note that these are tasting menu portions)



Spruce tip creme brulee at The Bluff



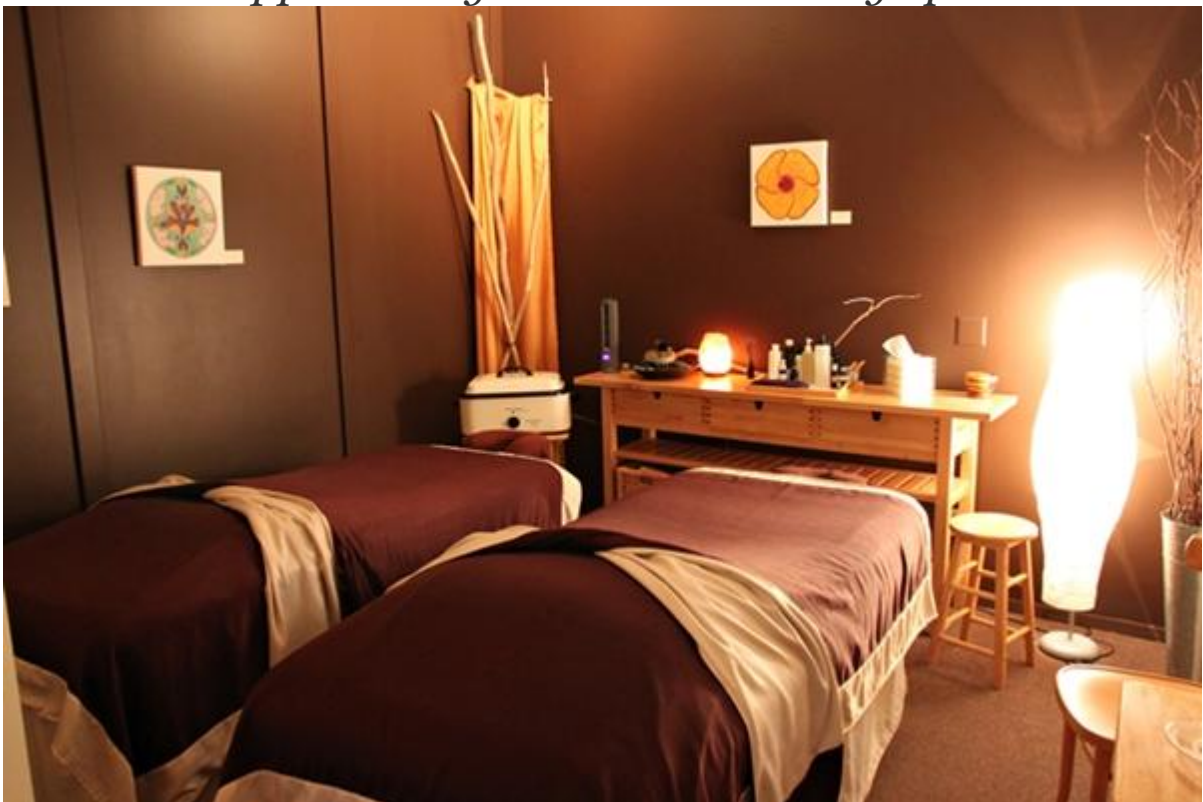
The Bluff's Pink Lady rosemary-apple tart with Lopez Creamery vanilla ice cream (ending a spectacular dinner)



Night view from Friday Harbor House



Approaching the Lavendera Day Spa



A couple's massage awaits at Lavendera Day Spa



Market Chef's roast beef & rocket sandwich with marinated red onions, horseradish sauce, and chunky olive salad



Also at Market Chef: “I’ll Have the Turkey,” with cranberry sauce, Russian dressing, marinated red onions, and organic mixed greens



Entry to the Backdoor Kitchen restaurant, another dining option (which I saved for a future visit)