



Adventures Await in Washington's Orcas and San Juan Islands

Get on a boat. Go to the San Juan Islands. Have an adventure.

But before you can do any of that, pull up the WSDOT app or website and make a [ferry reservation](#). Because without that, none of these many, delicious, beautiful recommendations will apply to you.

My trip in the last weekend of June began at 5:30 a.m. on a Friday, when my alarm went off. At 7 a.m., I hit the road to Anacortes to catch the 10:20 ferry to Orcas Island. Early is not my favorite, but the sooner you can get to the San Juans, the better.

The ferry crossing is long, an hour, giving plenty of time to walk the boat-wrapping decks and take in the views. Don't eat though, because there's great food waiting for you.

To start, lunch at [Roses](#). Part bakery, part mercantile and (most importantly) part restaurant, it gets crowded around lunchtime. On the menu, you'll find island-raised meats like lamb shoulder shaved thin on a sandwich, local seafood like fresh-caught salmon over lentils and fresh pasta tossed with seasonal ingredients from island farms or foraged from secret spots.

If there's a wait, check out the adjoining store for island-made cheese from [Myers Creamery](#), plus domestic and imported cheese and charcuterie and bread and pastries made in-house. And wine and cider, of course.

With check-in at most hotels around 4 p.m., you'll likely have a lull before checking in. This is the perfect time to head to nearby [Island Hoppin' Brewery](#), where you'll be able to try one of seven beers made on site. Try the Doe Bay ISA or Phosphorescent pale ale, named for the way the water is illuminated in the summer.

Not a drinker? Drive over to [Buck Bay Shellfish](#) for clams, oysters and more, harvested in the bay. No kitchen to cook the beautifully fresh seafood? Head down the road to nearby [Doe Bay Resort](#) where you can soak in hot tubs, walk down to the beach and then head to the pescaterian restaurant, where Buck Bay shellfish is served daily. Cabins, yurts and plenty of camping grounds are available if you can't stand to leave.

I've spent many nights at Doe Bay, between its summer music festival and off-season visits. So, on this past trip, I checked out the biggest hotel on the island, [Rosario Resort](#). A half dozen buildings of hotel rooms, plus a sprawling mansion make up the ages-old resort. As expected from [The Mansion](#), a restaurant with so much history, chefs have come and gone and the quality of food has changed.

With the recent arrival of Chef Raymond Southern, that change was very much for the better. In the lounge, local beer and ciders are on tap and the cocktails are made with local ingredients. Try The Fruit Picker, with gin, Orcas Island pear brandy, [Girl Meets Dirt](#) pear and bay jam (made on Orcas), absinthe and lemon. Lucky diners can snag a seat on the veranda of the Mansion restaurant, and must try Southern's cooking. A native of the area, he grew up just across the border on a farm in Canada and knows how to make the most of locally available ingredients.

A pappardelle pasta made fresh that day was tender with perfect bite, topped with ragu of a lamb raised on Orcas Island. In another dish, the belly and collar of the first Skagit River salmon of the season were crisped and added atop a broth made from salmon stock and ninja radish. And the best dish was local rabbit loin served with yellow summer squash and fried squash blossom.

On another night, head to [Hogstone's Wood Oven](#) in Eastsound where James Beard Award semifinalist Jay Blackinton finds inventive ways to serve ingredients you've seen before in ways you've never tried. The tasting menu is the way to go, though ordering pizza and drinking from the lengthy wine list is a fine way to spend an evening.

A highlight of the tasting menu was what Blackinton referred to as the "death throes salad." A baby head of lettuce was plucked from the ground, root and all. Right before it was served, the chef chopped the root from the body, studding it with edible flowers, smoky egg, and drizzling dressing between the leaves. Chef Blackinton suggests guests to "pick it up by the leaves and eat it from the root end." And we did, and it was visceral, like tearing into meat, if meat were a baby vegetable.

After dinner, which changes daily and seldom sees the same dishes from one season to the next, head back to your hotel or drive to one of the many bays to stare at the stars over the dark water. Toss some rocks in during the summer and you may be greeted with an iridescent showing of phosphorescence.

The next morning, you could have breakfast on the veranda at The Mansion, where you should certainly eat the [Barn Owl Bakery](#) bread basket, featuring the excellent bread made on Lopez Island. It's served with a lovely assortment of jams and butters. The biscuits and gravy, too, are delightful.

Or, head into Eastsound on your way to the ferry. The farmers market is a must, and if the Salvadoran stand is up, the tamales are memorable and magical. [Harmony Chai's](#) falafel is fantastic too.

Catch a morning or early afternoon ferry to San Juan Island, where there are plenty more delicious moments. Once you arrive, a loop around the island is a great way to experience the most delicious things to drink.

Drive from the ferry (with your favorite designated driver) to [San Juan Vineyards](#), where the Madeleine Angevine and Siegerrebe are standouts, and the Mona Vino is named after the camel that lives across the road. A new winemaker is set to arrive any day now, with Chris Primus having just departed after nine years. Take a bottle of the Madeleine Angevine to keep cold for oysters at nearby [Westcott Bay Shellfish](#). There, you can pick your own oysters and shuck them at a picnic table overlooking the bay. A variety of mignonettes are available in the shop.

Next, head to Roche Harbor and on to [San Juan Island Distillery](#) to sample award-winning Spy Hop gin and pick up a bottle of apple brandy made from apples also used for the excellent [Westcott Bay Cider](#). Fifteen types of cider apples are packed into a Very Dry, Dry, Semi-Dry and Pommeau offerings from the cidery.

Make your way back to Friday Harbor and check into the [Friday Harbor House](#). Rooms are equipped with sizeable tubs, big enough for a cozy dip for two, which is a great way to unwind before dinner in the restaurant. New chef Jason Aldous arrived in June after stints at Camano Island Inn and The Willows Inn, with plenty of island-grown love for local ingredients.

Start with the crispy brussels sprouts with bacon onion jam. The fried chicken is a must-try, with a tamarind glaze and smoked coconut cream. A shredded papaya and carrot salad adds a refreshing bite to the dish. San Juan Island lamb makes an appearance regularly, though the cut changes, as the chef purchases the whole animal and varies the preparation. Always, it is tender, and sweet, and locally raised.

If you're not ready for bed, music at the Rumor Mill or Herb's are great spots to end the night. Or, tuck in for the night, watching out the window as the final ferry pulls into dock for the evening. Stars and lights from ships litter the sky.

For brunch on Sunday, go to [San Juan Island Cheese](#) where a three-course meal is made up of cheese-centric dishes and an excellent quiche. The shop also offers a la carte options. Pacific Northwest wines and beers, plus some Italian selections make up the drinks list. On Fridays, a Spritz & Tapas evening features small bites and wine-based cocktails, inspired by the owners' recent trip to Venice.

If there's time before your ferry home, take a whale-watching excursion, snag a kayak for an adventure or rent scooters to explore the island. Backdoor Kitchen, Tops'l Sushi and Coho are prime destinations before you set sail back to your real life, away from the endless beauty and deliciousness of the San Juans.

While my trip only lasted 48 hours, it's not enough time to enjoy all that the islands have to offer.