



Can't Take Just One Bite

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ARLENE KROEKER

Another trip to the buffet that is Mayne Island

“What time is it?”

“August.”

Welcome to Mayne Island.

Mayne Island is one of the Southern Gulf Islands, and the halfway point between Vancouver Island and the mainland. Rolling hills and valleys, as well as a temperate climate (more sunshine than the Fraser Valley) make the island an ideal agricultural mecca and home to the oldest agricultural fair in BC (held on the third Saturday every August).

Photos: Arlene Kroeker







First settled in 1859 by gold seekers bound for the Cariboo Gold Rush, Mayne Island, with its picturesque seascapes, secluded beaches, pastoral farms, and coastal forest, is now inhabited year-round by approximately one thousand residents—and thousands of weekend residents.

I am a weekend visitor. I disembark the Saturday morning ferry, along with cyclists and hikers, and I feel my shoulders relax. I inhale the clean air. My first stop is the farmers’ market (open May through October) in Miners Bay, a historic village that was, and still is, the commercial centre of the island. There, I stroll past tables full of garlic, kale, pies, curries, jams and jellies, wool, wooden cutting boards—all local fare.

From the market, I walk to the **Trading Post** for a couple of bottles of wine and a loaf of bread from Victoria’s **Portofino Bakery**. Cars fill the parking lot—the ferry’s arrival creates a rushed hour on Mayne. Across the street, in a lean-to beside the **Root Cellar Inn**, is **Happy Tides Purveyors of Fine Health Foods**, where I pick up **Christina’s Garden** local pea shoots (she also grows sunflower shoots, purple daikon radish shoots, and micro arugula greens—all

full of intense flavour) and some tomatoes and squash brought in by hobby gardeners and small farms.

The first working farms, such as **Glenwood Farm**—or Punch’s Farm, as it is more fondly referred to—were established in the 1870s. Japanese settlers—some of them fishermen; others, farmers—arrived in the early 1900s. **The Green House Bar and Grill** was once a farmhouse owned by Kumozo Hagata, founder of the Active Pass Growers’ Association, a co-operative which grew and packed “Island Brand Tomatoes & Cucumbers.” By the Second World War, one-third of Mayne Island’s population was of Japanese descent, and in 1942, they were all forcibly removed from the island and interned for the duration of the war. Today, the Japanese Garden in Dinner Bay Park commemorates their legacy.

The early farmers planted apple orchards, long before they were planted in the Okanagan. Many properties on the island boast four or five varieties of apple trees, like the huge King apple, which was one of the first planted in BC. With so many apples on the island, a community-owned press has been purchased to make apple juice.

Photos: Arlene Kroeker



I buy 1.5 litres of local, organic juice at **Farm Gate Store**, just a short drive from Miners Bay. Shanti pours samples of apple juice and arranges floral bouquets of amaranth, fennel, and flower of Jerusalem artichoke. She and her brother own **Deacon Vale Farm**, where they grow certified organic vegetables, and raise sheep, chickens, and cattle. For years they sold their produce and relishes from their signature red truck at the farmers' market, but in 2011 they opened the store, to help survive the business of farming.

Other farms on the island include the organic **Starry Night Meadows Farm**, which grows apples, currants, and raspberries. **Meadowmist Farm** is home to Romney/Suffolk-cross sheep, Saanen/Nubian goats, Araucana chickens, peacocks (which at one time ran wild on the island, until farmer Joyce rounded them up), and at times, a few pigs. Visitors are welcome.

From Farm Gate Store, I head down Fernhill Road to the Mt. Parke parking lot. I'm not here to hike; I'm here for **Raylia Farm's** honour stand, located across from the entrance to the park. I pick up a bunch of flowers and a bunch of basil and deposit cash into a tin box. Several farms and hobby gardeners on the island use the honour system to sell their produce, eggs, and flowers. Yes, they count on the integrity of visitors.

I continue my foraging adventure, picking up greens at the **Hard-scrabble Farm** stand, which is run by five young farmers who share resources and practice the economy of reuse/recycle. I carry on, driving slowly along the country road, past the arbutus trees, ferns, firs, deer, rows of mailboxes, and for-sale signs. A friend was once stopped by the lone island cop—for going too slow. Such is the influence of the island.

Next, a stop at the community gardens located behind the community centre. Just a few years old, more than thirty plots now lie within the fenced perimeter. Bungee cords keep the garden gates secure, as the island deer have a way with gates.

After a stroll through the gardens, I head back to Miners Bay to meet the motor vessel *Crab Dancer* at the dock. From the May long weekend to the end of August, the boat arrives at noon on Saturdays. A line forms along the dock for fresh chum and coho, oysters in the shell, mussels, clams, scallops, halibut, ling cod, spot prawns. Smart foragers have ordered ahead and bypass the line. I'm here for crab, and thankfully, by the time I arrive, the pail is at least half-full of crab. I buy two.

Bring a cooler.

I'm staying with friends for the weekend, but there are many B&Bs on the island. There's also **Mayne Island Eco-Camping** (with kayaks and Wi-Fi), and **Mayne Island Resort**, established in 1912, with its **Bennett Bay Bistro**, an Ocean Wise supporter. Try the salmon burger, served with Christina's Garden shoots. Ignore the dirt under the server's fingernails. This is Mayne Island and one cannot live by farming alone. As one young farmer told me, "Never was simplifying life so complicated."

I decide to treat myself to ice cream at the **Sunny Mayne Bakery Café**. Once again I am reminded that I am on island time. The wait may be long, but it is worth it.

Instead of checking the time, watch the newcomers as they try to order coffee drinks that require more than two words. This isn't Starbucks.

The day's rituals also include watching marine traffic in Active Pass, the sunset, and if I'm lucky, a pod of orcas from the deck of the **Springwater Lodge**, once a private home that offered rooms to miners on their way to the Klondike. It is the oldest continuously operating hotel/pub in BC. Surrounded by red umbrellas and enormous baskets of flowers, I order wine and steamed clams and mussels.

I can't take just one bite of Mayne Island.

For more about Mayne Island: mayneislandchamber.ca

Arlene Kroeker first explored the Southern Gulf Islands about twenty years ago. She fell in love with Mayne Island and has eaten there ever since. She teaches The Art of Food Writing at Hollyhock on Cortes Island this summer.