

Gulf Island getaways

BY KENDALL WALTERS

With stunning views, abundant natural beauty and quirky charm to spare – B.C.'s Gulf Islands are a quiet paradise within easy reach of the city. At first glance, these seemingly sleepy island communities have only quiet to offer, but quite the opposite is true: the Gulf Islands have drawn creative types from all over, creating vibrant artist communities.

No trip to the Gulf Islands is complete without a visit to one of the many markets, featuring local artists, artisans and food producers.

Each island boasts its own individual attractions – Saltspring, as the largest, has the most amenities, including a growing culinary scene, Mayne's natural harbours have given the island a unique history unlike its neighbours and Gabriola's conservancy has created an extensive network of trails.

From nature hikes and cycling, to beach days and whale watching, artist studio tours to watersports and vibrant culture to simple solitude, there's a wide range of available pursuits.

Whether visitors stay put or island hop, B.C.'s Gulf Islands have plenty to offer.

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Mayne Island Lighthouse, Active Pass Lighthouse in Mayne Island's Georgina Point Park is a popular stop for visitors.

PHOTO LORIE J BROWN



PHOTO DON BUTT

1 GABRIOLA ISLAND

For those who like to explore on foot, Gabriola Island is an ideal vacation spot. The island boasts one of the most extensive trail systems of any of the Gulf Islands, looked after by the Gabriola Land and Trails Trust. Arbutus Bluff Bed and Breakfast is conveniently located across the street from one of the major trail networks at 707 Park, named for its 700 acres of natural beauty. Situated on 10 acres near the highest point of the island, the B&B offers panoramic views of the Salish Sea. For a true appreciation of the quiet solitude of the location, visitors should take a moonlit soak in the B&B hot tub and enjoy the vast expanse of open starry sky. Arbutus Bluff features both continental and hot entrée breakfast options, which can be ordered to suit dietary restrictions such as gluten-free. The B&B also allows visitors with dogs. Though there are many activities offered on the island, one of the most West Coast is a combination kayak-yoga excursion. Participants kayak to a quiet coastal island where they're treated to a serene outdoor yoga session, then later kayak back.

2 GALIANO ISLAND

With beautiful beaches, Galiano Island is a great place for an ocean-side getaway. As the only full-experience resort on the island, Galiano Island Oceanfront Inn & Spa is the perfect place to take in ocean views and breezes. Easy walking distance from the ferry, Galiano Inn boasts oceanfront dining with stunning views. It plays host to the Kunamokst mural – a large-scale art piece featuring a mother orca and calf. It was created by 190 different artists, each of whom was given a panel to complete – with instructions on colours and general outline – without knowing what the final piece would look like. Galiano Spa focuses on natural indigenous treatments, featuring organic products locally sourced from around the province. For a real treat, try the couple's massage. It takes place in a private cottage next to a waterfall for soothing ambiance. Galiano Inn also has a fleet of Smart Cars – available for rental or as part of accommodation packages – for guests to explore the island.



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3 SALTSRING ISLAND

As the most populous of the Gulf Islands, Saltspring gets the most visitors. With that traffic, the island has established itself as a great culinary destination, including wineries and a burgeoning food truck scene. Fine cuisine is one of the staples of Hastings House Country House Hotel, which brings the charm and warmth of the English cottage experience to the Gulf Islands. Situated on 22 acres in Ganges Harbour, Hastings House features beautiful ocean views as well as lovely gardens. The main building was originally constructed in 1939 by the Hastings Family. The hotel also offers a variety of guest cottage options. Hastings House is all about relaxation so all of the guest rooms have fireplaces and many feature reading rooms. Though curling up with a good book in front of a cosy fire is a favourite activity of guests, visitors shouldn't miss a trip to the island cheesemakers – pick up some locally-crafted cheese and a bottle of wine, ask the hotel for some snacks and choose a quiet spot on the island for a picnic unlike any other.

4 MAYNE ISLAND

With sheltered natural harbours galore, Mayne Island is a popular place for watersports, with kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding among visitor favourites. The most circular of the Gulf Islands, Mayne has a ring road that hugs the shoreline, making it easy to explore the island on a beautiful walk, bike ride or drive. Family-run Blue Vista Resort is the perfect base to launch a variety of activities from. Featuring nine cozy, self-contained cottages, each with its own kitchen and bathroom, Blue Vista works well for families who want flexibility in their accommodations. The closest beach is only 500 metres from the resort, down a set of stairs to a rocky shoreline. At low tide, it's possible to loop right around the island without leaving the beach. A must see for visitors is Active Pass Lighthouse in Georgina Point Park. Built in 1885, the lighthouse has warned incoming ships about sharp reefs and rough waters in Active Pass for over 100 years. Visitors also shouldn't leave out a visit to Miners Bay. The historic village takes its name from Mayne Island's heyday, when the island served as an important supply stop for the 1850s Fraser Canyon Gold Rush.



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5 PENDER ISLAND

Originally one island, Pender was separated by a portage in 1903. Now, Pender Island actually consists of two separate islands – North and South Pender – joined by a bridge. For a getaway that's both rustic and historic, visit Corbett House Country Inn on North Pender. Built 113 years ago by the owner of the island's first store, Corbett House has been lovingly cared for by current owners John and Eve Pollard, who now operate it as a B&B-style retreat for visitors to Pender. Nestled in a beautiful valley close to Hope Bay, Corbett House sits in the centre of an apple orchard. Upon arrival, the hosts greet guests with a glass of champagne, which they serve on the porch on sunny days. Like many of the Gulf Islands, Pender is popular with bikers, who like cycling along the quiet country roads to fully discover the island. It is also home to an award-winning winery – Sea Star Estate Farm and Vineyard – that's well worth the visit.

6 SATURNA ISLAND

For visitors itching to see some marine life, there's no better place than Saturna Island. Saturna boasts great vantage points for land viewing of whales – particularly on the island's East Point. Located on one of the quietest Gulf Islands, Saturna Island Lodge is a great place to unplug and relax. Featuring a licensed restaurant and bar as well as a large common room where guests can play games or watch movies, the Lodge isn't short on entertainment. It also makes a perfect base for island adventures. Given that nearly half of Saturna belongs to the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve, there's no shortage of outdoor recreation. For a stunning view, visitors can climb Mount Warburton Pike. On a clear day, intrepid hikers can see the San Juan Islands. The island is also known for another – slightly more quirky – reason: its feral goat population comes close to outnumbering its human residents. No trip to Saturna is complete without at least one sighting of the island's furry inhabitants!



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