

BY ALLEN COX

cast off your cares

THE PRISTINE SAN JUAN ISLANDS, JUST OFF THE WASHINGTON COAST, OFFER AN ESCAPE FROM THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE OF EVERYDAY LIFE.

From the moment you board the San Juan ferry and start to glide across Rosario Strait, your gnawing desire for escape begins to calm. The deep jade channels, the twisted madrona trees, the salty wind in your face—all whisper a promise. That's the magic of these emerald gems that seem to float in protected waters on Washington's border with British Columbia.

No visit to the San Juan Islands would be complete without exploring the archipelago's two largest islands, Orcas and San Juan. Lush Orcas Island undulates with mountains and valleys, and has a rural village feel. The island's hub is the village of Eastsound, where quaint inns, some acclaimed restaurants, and a handful of shops and galleries occupy a few sleepy streets at the head of a long, postcard-perfect bay. The island's Moran State Park zigzags with miles of hiking trails that pass lakes, rainforests, waterfalls and breathtaking views.

San Juan Island is lower and drier, with more open grassy terrain; it contains the largest village on the islands, Friday Harbor. A great way to discover what San Juan Island has in store is to rent a bike and get around with pedal power. Near the north end you will find English Camp, and on the south end American Camp, both part of the San Juan Island National Historical Park. A little-known chapter in history rests there: a 19th-century dispute between the United States and Britain over ownership of the island, which culminated in a 12-year standoff called the Pig War (the only casualty being an unfortunate pig).

When it's finally time to pack up and board the ferry back to the mainland, you may pause to ponder lingering just another day, a week—or maybe a lifetime.



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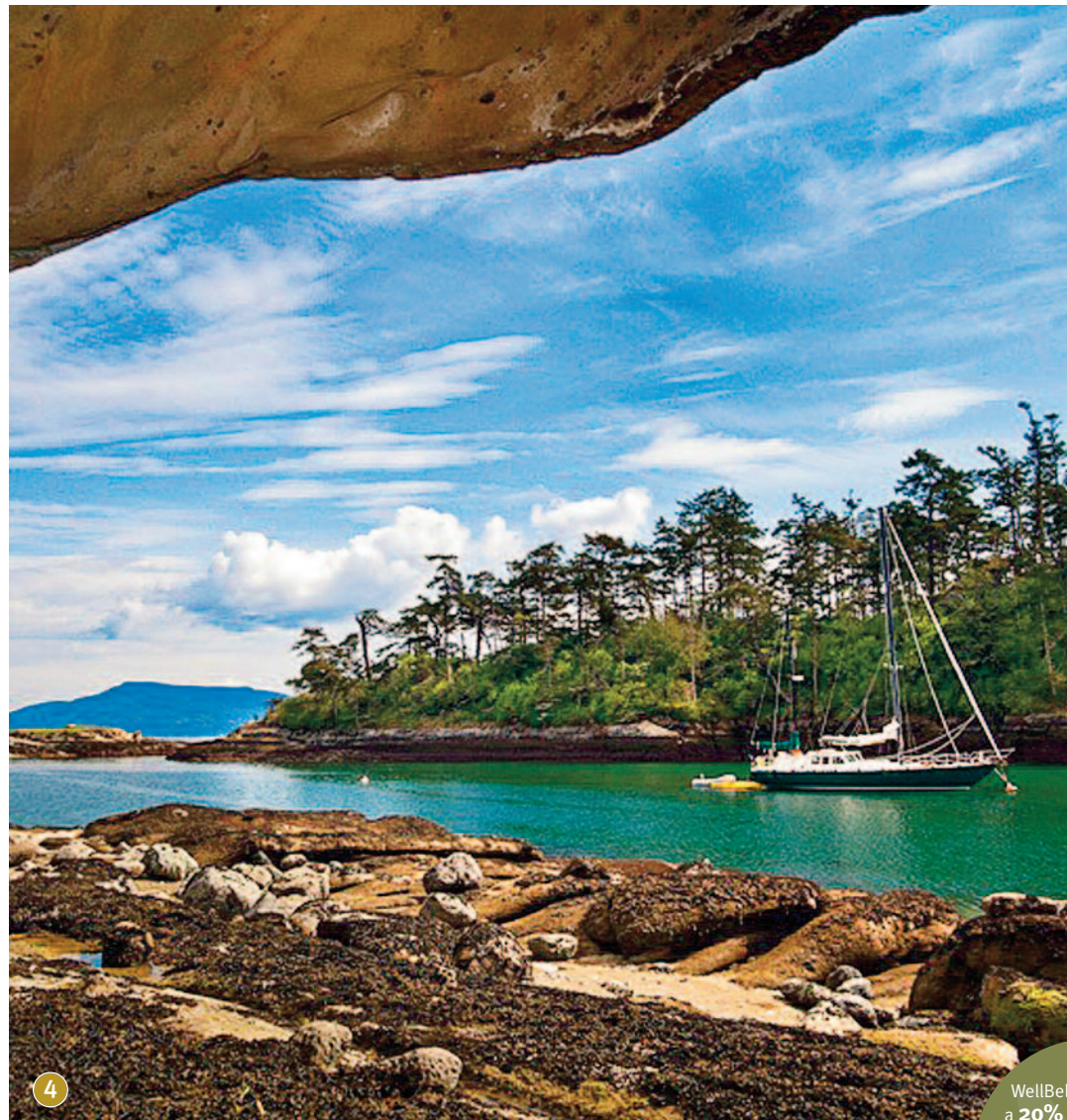
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1) Biking is the perfect way to see San Juan Island. 2) Quaint shops line the streets of Eastsound. 3) English Camp sits near the north end of San Juan Island. 4) You can visit isolated coves aboard the Nawalak, 5) and enjoy fresh local food in its pilothouse. 6) The Nawalak sets sail from Orcas Island.



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PHOTOS: 1. MARK GARDNER; 2, 3. COURTESY OF SAN JUAN ISLANDS VISITORS BUREAU; 4-6. DON PAULSON



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Hey! While in town, check this out ...

The ferry stops at only four of the 170-plus islands in the San Juans, so how do you see the rest? A chartered sailing cruise is the answer.

Emerald Isle Sailing Charters, based on Orcas Island, operates a fully outfitted 54-ft. pilothouse sailboat, the Nawalak (a native word that means *spirit of nature*). This seaworthy ketch has hosted everyone from day-trippers to wildlife researchers and *National Geographic* filmmakers, and carries an experienced crew and a gourmet chef who uses local organic ingredients in season. Up to six passengers can enjoy low-impact sailing adventures to the islands' more isolated coves and passages. Wind and solar energy power the Nawalak, with no diesel generator to spoil the fragile ecosystem. An electric-powered tender provides close but respectful encounters with the islands' wild inhabitants (including resident orcas) and safely shuttles passengers to the islands' remotest shores. "We have a very earth-friendly philosophy," explains David Lutz, owner of Emerald Isle Sailing Charters. "This includes treading lightly wherever we visit, and respecting wildlife, nature and culture on every level."

Passengers enjoy a well-informed, up-close perspective on the wildlife and history of these unspoiled islands, and learn a little about sailing, too. *

WellBella readers get a **20% discount** on trips aboard the Nawalak through June 30, 2010. Call (866) 714-6611, and use promotion code: **WellBella**.



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best time to travel:

Fall and spring offer pleasant weather (average temperatures range from 55° F to 70° F) and fewer crowds than summer.

what to do: Whale watching, kayaking, sailing, bicycling, hiking, spa treatments, galleries, museums

what to pack: Dress in layers for outdoor activities; a jacket for nights, and rain gear year-round (the islands receive half the rainfall of Seattle).

contact info: EmeraldIsleSailing.com, or call (866) 714-6611; prices range from \$135 for a six-hour cruise to \$1,697 for a five-day excursion (see 20% discount code).

how to get there: From Seattle, take I-5 north to Exit 230, then west on Hwy. 20 to Anacortes. Follow the signs to the ferry landing (from Seattle, approx. 80 miles).

for more info: VisitSanJuans.com



For more pictures from the San Juan Islands, see this article at WellBella.com.