

The Beautiful

# San Juan Islands

Story by Deborah Peniuk

Photos Courtesy of San Juan Islands Visitors Bureau



Eastsound flowers: San Juan Islands Visitors Bureau



Lopez Island's Center Church: George Willis

Only 80 miles "as the crow flies," so the native adage goes, from Seattle, Washington; the San Juan Islands – an archipelago of 176 named islands with hundreds of smaller outcroppings – may as well worlds away. Situated in the northwest corner of the state and sharing its travelers with border neighbor British Columbia, the San Juans are the place to be if you prefer bicycle over car, preferential treatment to local wildlife, and a slower pace of life. The name "San Juan" was given to the islands by the Spanish explorer Francisco de Eliza, who charted the islands in 1791 when he named them Isla y Archipelago de San Juan.

### **Lopez Island**

Get on your way over to Lopez Island, the first ferry stop from Anacortes aboard Washington State Ferries. The sailing time is approximately 45 minutes, so take a moment to enjoy the ride as you wander past some of the smaller islands that make up this archipelago. Keep your eyes peeled for the bald eagles, otters, seals and the occasional orca whale.



Fisherman Bay & Lopez Village: George Willis



View Of Mt. Baker From Orcas Island: Carl Silvermail

Another option is to fly to Lopez on daily scheduled flights from Sea-Tac Airport/Boeing Field or a seaplane from Lake Union located in downtown Seattle. There is water taxi service also available from Anacortes. And Boaters coming to the island can find protected moorage at two marinas in Fisherman Bay – within a half a mile walking distance to Lopez Village.

Lopez Island is the most rural of the three major islands, covering 29.5 square miles. The landscape blends rolling farmlands with the woods and open spaces with shimmering water vistas. It is also known as the "friendly island." Don't forget to wave at the passing motorists – this is one of the local customs for many years! There's a genuine spirit of community and a unique and special feeling for life that permeates throughout the population of 2,500. Lopez is home to a very many artists, craftspeople, musicians, nature lovers, farmers, fisherman, and eccentrics.

### **Orcas Island**

Art, activities and agriculture flourish on Orcas Island, the largest of the San Juans. The horseshoe-shaped island is a magical mix of lush forest, farm valleys, a few placid lakes, and stunning mountains, all wrapped around a beautiful fjord. Made up of several hamlets and villages, the western half of the island features Orcas Village, Westsound, and Deer Harbor – popular destinations for visitors and boaters. Each offers lodging, supplies, and dining. On the mountainous eastern half of the island, Olga is a charming hamlet and home to a restaurant and cooperative art gallery inside a historic strawberry packing plant. The perimeter of Orcas Island is approximately 77.4 miles and has a population of 4,894 residents.

The panoramic views of islands, water, and mountains, from atop 2,409-foot Mount Constitution, is an absolute must-see. Situated in the sprawling 5,000-acre Moran State Park, the mountain is marked with foot



Ferry Entering Friday Harbor: San Juan Islands Visitors Bureau

trails that the Civilian Conservation Corps carved out during the 1930s. It is possible to actually drive to within 100 steps of the top and then walk to the viewing area or up the tower. This State Park offers swimming, paddle boating and fishing in many of the natural lakes, waterfalls along 30 miles of tranquil trails, and camping.

### **San Juan Island**

The most populated of the islands, San Juan is also the busiest, and for many good reasons as there's so much to see and do. Bikes can be rented right by the ferry landing, the nearby supermarket offers visitors lots of local and organic fare. Another cool adventure if you're a committed bike rider or just fairly ambitious is to cycle your way straight to the Pedal Inn, a novel campground just for cyclists only four miles to the west. Once settled there, you literally have the entire south end of the island at your beck and call. Nearby False Bay offers the promise of some of the best tide-pooling in the Pacific Northwest, not to mention the most amazing westward views over the Haro Strait. Just a short distance to the south, you will find the American Camp – the windswept home of U.S. troops from 1859-1871 during the territorial standoff with the British, now under the National Park Service's care. Take in a sunset vista of green islands, white snow-capped peaks, and blue ocean straits from the front porch of the Victorian-era officers' quarters building.

San Juan Island is the most diverse of the three main islands, combining sandy beaches and rocky shores and, prairies and pastures, forests, and lakes. The Whale Museum, educates visitors about the Islands' famous residents – approximately 85 orca whales. The orcas make their home in the San Juans typically from late April through the end of September and sometimes longer. They can be seen from land, most likely from the west side of the island at Lime Kiln Point State Park, also known as "Whale Watch Park" – the only such park in the nation; or from a commercial whale/wildlife boat.



Orca Whales At Lighthouse: San Juan Islands Visitors Bureau

Visitors will want to get out and explore the rest of San Juan Island, stopping at San Juan Vineyards, the historic Roche Harbor Resort - once the largest lime and cement company west of the Mississippi, or Sculpture Park at Westcott Bay Reserve - a 19-acre outdoor museum with over 100 stone, wood, or metal sculptures. Lavender, oysters, Alpacas, and golf make up some of the other attractions on San Juan Island. Discover the island's history at their two national historical parks - American Camp and English Camp - where exhibits detail the history of the Pig War, a 12-year standoff between British and American troops after a pig was shot in the 1800s.

Hiking, biking, sea kayaking, boating, fishing, bird watching, beachcombing, and scuba diving are also very popular activities on San Juan Island. Special events and



English Camp, San Juan Island National Historical Park: San Juan Islands Visitors Bureau



Flying Over Cattle Point And American Camp: San Juan Islands Visitors Bureau

festivals are plentiful and during the quiet season, visitors can enjoy art, nature and writing workshops. The perimeter of San Juan Island is approximately 74 miles and has a population of 5,214 residents, plus 2,150 additional residents that reside in Friday Harbor.

Once you have completed your tour of these three main San Juan Islands and experience everything they have to offer, there are a few hundred other islands in the archipelago to explore. Most of the smaller islands – serviced by water taxi or float plane – are private, but some offer cabins for rent once in awhile.



It doesn't really matter which of the wonderful islands you visit, if your ideal good time consists of breathing clear, fresh, salt-laden air and listening to the sound of the waves lapping at the shore, you'll find a reason to smile in the San Juan Islands even if you never see an orca breach the surface of the seas!

**About Deborah Peniuk**

Deborah is the Owner & Travel Writer of AYALife  
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# San Juan Islands – If You Go

## Accommodations

### Etta's Place San Juan Island



Etta's Place Suites is an 1895 Historic San Juan Island Home in Friday Harbor, Washington. The main unit is self-contained and has a separate entrance. The home interior is furnished with traditional Victorian charm as has the historic exterior with the original 1895 shingles. Etta's Place is conveniently located in downtown Friday Harbor; only 4 blocks from the San Juan Island ferry landing so it is cost effective to leave your car in Anacortes and walk on to save the higher ferry rates during the summer! The town's historic restaurants and shops are all within walking distance. Several modes of transportation are available to get around on this 10 mile wide by 22 mile long island.

**Etta's Place - San Juan Island**  
1895 Historic Home, Downtown Friday Harbor  
455 Argyle Avenue  
Friday Harbor WA 98250  
(360) 298-2999  
[www.ettasplacesji.com](http://www.ettasplacesji.com)



## Accommodations

**Blue Heron B & B**  
Located on West Sound Bay  
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## Realtor

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