

# Salt Spring Island is for Families

As anyone who's taken a car trip with children can attest, refereeing skirmishes, responding to the eternal "Are we there yet?" query, and simple "car claustrophobia" can turn a few hours on the road into a stress-filled ordeal.

Such is my family's plight as we board the ferry to British Columbia's Salt Spring Island. But the ferry ride serves as the perfect antidote for our travel weary bodies and psyches, an ideal transition to "island time," as the natives like to call it. The cadence of the ship's engine, the gentle lapping of the waves and the exquisite views all work to revive our spirits and melt the tension away. The kids, bickering minutes earlier, now stand together at the front of the boat, wind whipping through their hair, mesmerized by the water and the island vistas.

Serenity is but one of myriad reasons for families to visit Salt Spring Island. Here's a look at some of the others:

## Nature

Salt Spring, the largest of the forested jewels that make up Canada's

Southern Gulf Islands, is a stunning destination. Between the bays, harbors and lakes, the abundant wildlife, the madrona trees, and those winding country roads, the island's natural beauty captivates everyone.

One way to get your daily dose of nature on Salt Spring is to select from an abundance of accommodations in beautiful settings. We feel that we've found paradise in Bold Bluff Retreat, a 100-acre nature refuge on the west side of the island. Owner Tamar Griggs picks us up at the Burgoyne Bay dock for a 10-minute boat ride to our water-accessible-only destination. Along the way, we spot an eagle and several seals and take in stunning scenery.

At Bold Bluff, Tamar patiently points out purple starfish, crabs and Lion's Mane jellyfish – looking curiously like sunnyside-up eggs – that cling to the dock's pilings. It's a fairy tale location, a spot where, judging from the entries in the guest book, visitors fantasize about staying and living happily ever after.

Other nature draws include Ruckle Provincial Park on the southern end of the island. It's a perfect picnicking spot and offers miles of easy trails for family hikes. A drive to the island's highest point, Mt. Maxwell, also makes a great family outing. The views of Burgoyne Bay and Samsun Narrows are breathtaking and, with a toddler-friendly fence around the observation area, Mom and Dad can enjoy the scenery, too.

## Fun Activities

For active families, Salt Spring offers unlimited possibilities, from kayaking tours out of Ganges Harbour and horseback riding in Mt. Maxwell forest to biking meandering country roads and exploring many hiking trails.

My family spends a pleasant morning canoeing on St. Mary Lake and then going bowling – yes, bowling. While that might sound mundane, the



kids don't think so because we're bowling Canadian-style, with only five pins and a ball the size of a large shot put. It might be the novelty, but my older son declares this version to be "definitely better than ten pin!" By popular demand, we return the next day.

Shopping turns out to be another pleasant "activity." While I hardly qualify as a recreational shopper, I enjoy strolling around Ganges Village for an afternoon, browsing bookstores and art galleries, indulging my sweet tooth and caffeine habit at bakeries and coffee shops, and loitering in the gazebo on the waterfront.

## Artistic Opportunities

Salt Spring's natural beauty and its laid-back, "island time" approach to life make it a breeding ground for creativity. Consequently, the island has gained an international reputation as a Mecca for artists and art lovers. A decade ago, a few farsighted members of the art community began the studio tour, a self-guided expedition that allows the public to visit 36 artists' workshops and view the artisans in the creative process. Grab a free map at the Tourist Information Centre, 121 Lower Ganges Road, detailing participating artists' locations and hours.

It's a pleasant surprise to find that

my sons enjoy most of the studio stops. If the kids aren't curious about the art, there's often a friendly designated canine greeter to get to know.

If the studio tour inspires your kids, you can visit Fables Cottage (112 Hereford in Ganges; 250-537-0028; [www.fablescottage.com](http://www.fablescottage.com)) where they can hunt for art supplies and books or sign up for very reasonably priced workshops during July and August. Pottery, sketching, mosaics and tie-dyeing are all possibilities, with prices beginning as low as \$4.

All of that artistic exposure can bring out a creative streak in Mom and Dad too, and classes for adults are also available. Joan Carrigan offers basketry workshops (250-538-1877) and Patricia Brown holds week-long art camps for kids and adults (250-653-9406).

## More Bang for Your Yankee Buck

Almost everything, from accommodations to ice cream cones, is a bit more affordable here. Side perks are those "teachable math moments." Throwing the metric system into the equation makes the arithmetic especially challenging: "How much in American dollars did the 20 litres of gas we just bought cost us?"

## An International Experience

While I enjoyed all of these amenities during our Salt Spring stay, I feel that the international experience – the exposure to a different culture, to that lovely Canadian lilt, even un peu de francais – is the number one reason I'd recommend it. Getting to know our closest neighbors is one way to help my kids see beyond our borders and to learn a bit about the rest of the world.

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## If You Go

**Getting there:** Salt Spring Island is accessible by ferry from Swartz Bay or Crofton on Vancouver Island or from Tsawwassen, south of Vancouver, B.C. Reservations are recommended for travel from Tsawwassen, especially during the busy summer season. Contact BC Ferries, 250-386-3431; [www.bcferries.com](http://www.bcferries.com).

**General Information:** Contact Salt Spring Visitor Information, 121 Lower Ganges Road, 250-537-5252 or toll free at 866-216-2936; [www.saltspring-island.bc.ca](http://www.saltspring-island.bc.ca). Other informational Web sites include [www.salt-springguide.com](http://www.salt-springguide.com) and [www.salt-springisland.org](http://www.salt-springisland.org).