

## Touring the San Juan Islands

Before embarking on a cycling tour of San Juan Island or neighboring islands, there are several things a person should consider: their physical condition, the condition of their bicycle, the quality of their gear and where one plans to stay. The word “island” can be deceiving. If one lacks touring experience, one might want to arrive by vehicle. Once one is at the desired lodging destination, then one would be free to take longer or shorter rides.

We chose to stay at the States Inn & Ranch ([www.statesinn.com](http://www.statesinn.com), 866-602-2737), which is approximately seven miles from the ferry terminal/eateries at Friday Harbor. We wanted solitude. We also were aware that with the exception of breakfast, we were about 30-45 minutes by bicycle from food! We tour in the fall to take advantage of off-season rates/avoid most of the tourists. But touring in the late fall meant that we could anticipate pedaling “home” in the dark after a scrumptious Vietnamese duck dinner. We carry sufficient light-emitting diode tail lights and quality head lights. You want motorists to see you and you want to see deer that might amble onto the roadway.



San Juan Island cycling is rated “moderate” compared to the more strenuous riding on Orcas or easier pedaling on Lopez. While the climbs are short, San Juan does offer Bailer Hill, South West Side Road and Roche Harbor Road where one will gain 300-400 feet of elevation in a short distance. One can elect to ride Beaverton Valley Road, which takes one through rolling hills in the center of the island from Friday Harbor in the southeastern end to Roche Harbor in the north. One-way distance is 11

miles. We made two trips to Roche Harbor – to enjoy the view, visit the 19-acre sculpture park and eat donuts at the Lime Kiln Café.

Courtesy of motorists made scenic touring all the more enjoyable. One motorist, who had the right of way, said, “You’re on a roll. Keep going!” Bicyclists are expected to return the favor. On sections of the roadway where there is limited shoulder on the short climbs, there are bicycle pullout areas to allow vehicles to pass. On Beaverton Road, a sign notifies motorists and cyclists that there is an Alpaca Viewing area/parking just ahead. During the peak touring season – May through September – cycling and motorized traffic significantly increases. One advantage for bikers – ferries always have room for one more bicycle.

We chose routes that took us along the shoreline. *Biking Puget Sound* by Bill Thorness and *San Juan Islands* by Dave Wortman are excellent references. The first route took us from Friday Harbor to the west side of the island past the Pelindaba Lavender Farm to Lime Kiln State Park. The park, also known as Whale Watch Park, offers an excellent view of the Haro Strait. The whale-watching season had passed but we enjoyed hiking to view the San Juan Lighthouse, ships passing by and the rugged shoreline. We also went to the British Camp south of Roche Harbor. A war almost started in 1859 when an American settler killed a British settler's pig! After checking out Roche Harbor and the variety of boats, we returned to Friday Harbor via the eastern side of the island along Roche Harbor Road. Total distance was 32 miles.

Another enjoyable, scenic route takes cyclists from Friday Harbor south to the Cattle Point Lighthouse where one can see snow-covered Mt. Rainier on a clear day. What the 27-mile route lacks in services is made up by frequent water landscapes, more solitude and more history – the American Camp from 1859.