



Top 10 Things to do on San Juan Island



San Juan Island is the most populated of the 172 islands that make up Washington State's [San Juan Islands](#), and second in size, right behind Orcas Island. You'll need to get to San Juan Island by air, by ferry, or, if you're lucky enough, by private boat.

Most residents and visitors get to San Juan Island on a Washington State Ferry. Anacortes is the main hub on the mainland to get to the islands. Take a close look at the schedules, it changes throughout the seasons, and make sure that your crossing includes a stop in Friday Harbor (they don't all go there). During the beautiful summers in the Pacific Northwest, reservations are strongly recommended; waiting times are often several hours. Check ferry schedule to San Juan Island [here](#).

The island has two small airports, on opposite ends of the island. One is in Friday Harbor and serves the main part of the island, the other in Roche Harbor, primarily serving the resort community's residents and guests.

If you're fortunate enough to have your own boat or to hitch a ride with someone who does, you'll find moorage options located around the island.

Now that you're there, you'll find plenty of things to do on San Juan Island. Here's our list of the top 10 things to do on San Juan Island.

1. Stay at a great resort

Whether you enjoy rustic luxury, want to stay in a yurt or canvas cabin, or are all kitted up for camping, [Lakedale Resort](#) offers options for everyone accommodation preference. The resort is located about five miles from the ferry terminal, in downtown Friday Harbor, and is built around three freshwater spring lakes. You can read Mary Jo's full review of Lakedale Resort [here](#).

2. Discover the local history

Despite living in Washington state all of my life, I had never heard of the [Pig War](#) until I got to San Juan Island. Back in the mid-1800s, both the U.S. and Great Britain asserted control of the island. Both sides had a small military force situated on the island and the territorial dispute was peaceful. One day, however, an American settler shot a British pig who was, according to that American, rooting in and ruining his garden. Thus, the Pig War began in 1859. The war ended some 13-years later with the Americans being declared the winner. Not a single shot was fired. Today, you can visit both the American and British camps, located on opposite ends of the island, when you visit San Juan Island.

3. Whale Watching

We were a little early in the season to see any of the majestic Orcas, but we still sat and watched at [Lime Kiln Park](#). Considered by many to be the best spot in the U.S. to whale watch from land, this Washington State Park also has facilities for hiking, picnicking, and beachcombing in addition to whale watching. The water off Lime Kiln Park offers a combination of scientific properties that result in orcas being seen as close as 20 feet from shore. If you want to enjoy whale watching from the water, you can find tour options in Friday Harbor. Whale watching is one of the top things to do on San Juan Island.

4. Fishing

If you're staying at Lakedale Resort, they can help with everything you need for fishing, from the license to the equipment, to the bait. [Sportsman's Lake](#), about three and a half miles from Friday Harbor, has year-round public fishing (largemouth bass, yellow perch, pumpkinseed sunfish). The lake is located on two and a half acre reserve. Chartered and guiding fishing tours are also available, most out of Friday Harbor. Book in advance.

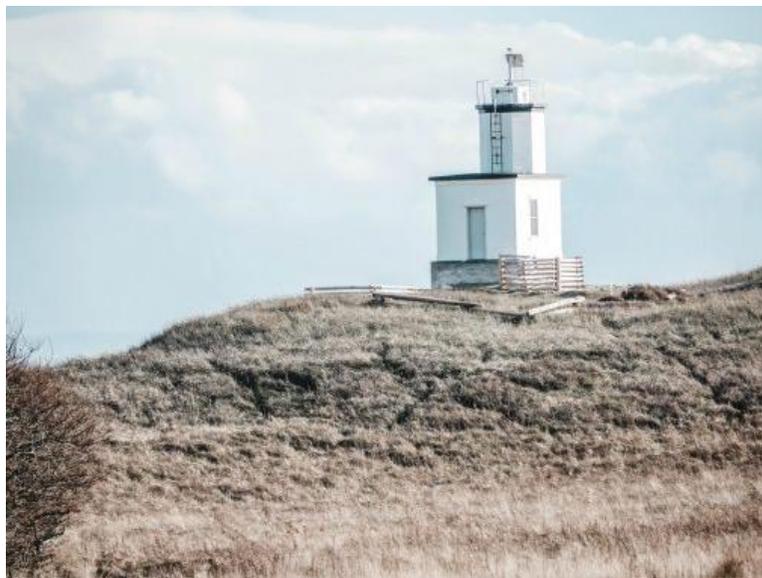
5. Take a Hike

Hiking on San Juan Island runs from quiet forests to rocky bluffs, from driftwood-covered beaches to nature preserves. Even if you're a casual hiker like me, there will be something to fit your skill level. Some of the best hiking recommendations from those in the know include:

- Young Hill – Located at the trailhead across the road from the English Camp, it's a steep grade and reasonably difficult. Bring a picnic lunch and enjoy the views when you get to the top. You'll need the rest.
- Wescott Bay – Hike through the forest along the water from the English Camp to Westcott Bay Shellfish Farm. Reasonably easy.
- Lime Kiln Point State Park – Easy hiking along the shoreline, you also have the advantage of whale watching. You may also see porpoises, seals and sea lions, otters, and other water life.
- South Beach – Located in the American Camp, at two and a half miles, this is the longest public beach in the San Juan Islands. Walk along the sand and pebble beach at your preferred pace, taking in the views and doing a little beachcombing.
- Jakle's Lagoon – Located in the San Juan Island National Historical Park, this forest loop hike will take you to the top of Mt. Finlayson, the highest point on the island. There are a few steep sections, but overall, it's not a difficult hike.

You can find hiking trail information [here](#).

6. Visit a Lighthouse



We discovered the [Cattle Point Lighthouse](#) while driving the scenic byway that took us all over the island. It's part of the San Juan Islands National Monument as is located at the southeastern tip of the highlight. The lighthouse overlooks the Strait of Juan de Fuca where the Haro Straits meet the San Juan Channel. Originally the guidance beacon was merely a lens lantern put on a post (back in 1888), the lighthouse has been updated many times over the years. Up close, the lighthouse is friendly and appealing, from a distance it looks desolate and lonely.

7. Embrace the Quirky

Whether it's attractions like the outdoor [Sculpture Park](#) near Roche Harbor or Mona the Camel (her friend is Lisa, the alpaca), or the friendly shopkeepers and inn owners, San Juan Island has its share of quirky attractions and people. The island relies on tourism for much of its economic base, so jump right in and make yourself at home.

8. Get Local at Community Events

One of the best ways to enjoy a small community is to participate in a few local events. Yes, you'll clearly stand out as a tourist, with a population of around 7,000, it feels like everyone knows everyone else. The Farmers' Market runs May to November, an easy one to stop off at and pick up something for a picnic or some snacks in your room, and you'll also find an assortment of museum showings, art events, kids' activities, and more. Check the calendar of events [here](#).

9. Brunch at Friday Harbor House

Brunch is one of those meals that we never seem to do at home, but enjoy when we're traveling. You get to sleep in, you don't have to decide if you want breakfast or lunch, and it's a perfect excuse to have morning cocktails. At Friday Harbor House, you get a great view of the channel, too. Best of all, brunch is served daily, it's not relegated to only Sundays. Read our review of brunch at Friday Harbor House [here](#).

10. It's About the Journey

When it comes to travel, sometimes it's about the destination, sometimes about the journey. San Juan Island falls into the latter category. Four islands in the group known as the San Juan Islands have ferry service. In addition to San Juan Island, you ferry service is also available to Orcas, Shaw, and Lopez islands. Private transportation is available to a few more. While on the ferry, start to mentally slow down. Adapt to a slower and more enjoyable way of life. Marvel and nature, enjoy the small community feel and set aside your devices to appreciate this corner of the Pacific Northwest. (NOTE: While wi-fi service is widely available on San Juan Island, cell service can be spotty.)