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A bird's-eye view of Friday Harbor

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A recent overnight getaway to Friday Harbor was bookended by travel with Kenmore Air, adding the thrill of flight to the relaxation of the San Juan Islands. It was a perfect combination.

Earplugs muffled the roar of the engine, but I could still hear the thumping of my heart as the six-passenger de Havilland Beaver left the dock at Kenmore Air and skimmed across Lake Washington. My excitement grew as we gathered speed and took off. In no time I was looking down on familiar territory from a whole new perspective. Soon the University of Washington was beneath us, then Gasworks Park and the city of Seattle. Within 10 minutes we were making a smooth landing on Lake Union.



The terrace at Friday Harbor House overlooks the marina at Friday Harbor, providing a lovely spot to relax, visit with friends, or eat a meal from The Bluff Restaurant. Photo by Elizabeth Griffin.

We changed planes and picked up a few more passengers before heading north to the San Juan Islands. Looking down at I-5, I thought of the many times my husband, Jay, and I had driven the route to Anacortes, hoping to get there in time to take a scheduled ferry to the islands. Flying was definitely more relaxing and took about one-fourth of the time.

Not only was it relaxing, because Kenmore Air was doing all the work for us, it was thrilling. Our airplane flew between 900 and 1,800 feet above ground, so we could see everything. Neighborhoods and landmarks quickly disappeared behind us as the blue-green water and land of the San Juan Islands came into view. From a bird's vantage point, the islands I have grown used to seeing from water level inspired a second look. I noticed designs in the water where dark navy turned to aqua blue, crescent-shaped beaches of sand that bordered rocky stretches, and hillsides holding onto ancient madrona trees.

We landed at the dock in Friday Harbor and were greeted by a representative from Friday Harbor House, our chosen destination. He led us across the dock and up a flight of stairs to the inn, which is conveniently located one block up from the ferry landing. The view from our room encompassed the entire marina, as do many of the guest rooms at Friday Harbor House.

Upon arrival, we relaxed and ate the artisan cheese plate provided by The Bluff Restaurant, which is part of Friday Harbor House. Three delicious cheeses with currant and apricot compote, olive tapenade, candied nuts, house-made crackers and apples satisfied our

appetites.

There are many things to do in Friday Harbor this time of year, from whale watching to kayaking, to shopping and perusing museums. The San Juan Islands boast over 270 days of sunshine a year and we were thrilled to be there on two of those days. Jay and I took a long walk, following a path that wound past the Seattle Yacht Club outpost and hugged the water's edge. When we returned to town, we poked around in antique shops and bookstores, leisurely filling our afternoon with activities we never take the time to do at home.

We ate dinner at The Bluff Restaurant, feasting on the fresh cuisine of Chef Kyle Nicholson. Our meals were both beautiful and sumptuous. Vegetables never tasted as good as the decoratively mounded fresh spring mix of lettuces with paper-thin slices of yellow beets and carrots tossed in delicate vinaigrette. Our appetizer of flash fried squid coated with a hazelnut crust and citrus dust — a specialty of Nicholson's that combines just the right amount of salt and sweet flavor to make it irresistible — was dipped in roasted garlic aioli.

For our main course, Jay had the Wagyu steak with brussel sprouts and perfect fries, which in my book are thin and crisp, with a light bordelaise sauce. My entrée choice was the Columbia River steelhead with rosemary fingerling potatoes and chard, in a citrus brown butter. This was without a doubt the best salmon I have ever eaten. According to our waitress, Chef Nicholson pan sears it in butter with a hint of citrus to seal in the juices with a thin, crisp outer layer, and then bakes it. Jay loved it too, and he doesn't usually like salmon. The potatoes were the perfect texture and really buttery. But the real proof of Nicholson's mastery was the chard. Nobody I know eats chard for the taste of it, least of all me. But this chard was worthy of every bite. It is amazing how something that good for you can taste so decadent.

We had no room for dessert, sadly, despite the tempting offers of warm gingerbread with vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce, crème brulee, and dark chocolate and coffee terrine. We'll just have to come back and leave room for it on our next visit.

The rooms at Friday Harbor House provide a lovely retreat with a double-sized Jacuzzi tub and shower with spa lotions and soaps, a gas fireplace, flat screen television, a coffeemaker and refrigerator, wifi, comfortable chairs and a balcony. Watching the ferry and other boats at night adds to the ambience as the hustle and bustle of regular life is replaced by the relaxation of an island getaway. We slept well and enjoyed a complimentary gourmet continental breakfast the next morning.

The breakfast chef puts fresh brewed coffee out early for those who need it first thing in the morning, like me. I snuck down to get some and met him as he was bringing freshly baked cinnamon rolls out to the buffet. He offered me a tray so I could take breakfast back to my room, but Jay and I decided to eat in the restaurant. The menu included house-made granola, freshly baked scones, muffins, cinnamon rolls, a gourmet frittata, hard-boiled eggs, oatmeal, assorted fresh fruit, and juices — all delicious.

With only 23 guest rooms, Friday Harbor House is able to offer a personalized experience for every guest. I was impressed at the level of service and accommodation. The casual atmosphere and friendly staff made me feel pampered. If that wasn't enough, they offer in-room massage services, or guests can indulge in the tranquil Fireside Spa Treatment

Room.

On our way home, Jay and I agreed that a weekend flight and stay at Friday Harbor House in the San Juan Islands provides one of the most rejuvenating retreats a couple can have. It is definitely one for the bucket list, but don't wait. There's no place better to be in the coming months.

For more information visit www.fridayharborhouse.com and www.kenmoreair.com.

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