



## Sights and scents of the sea at SookePoint and beyond

WORDS SUSAN LUNDY

eat.

Sooke is home to a number of excellent restaurants that feature West Coast cuisine and fresh seafood. Wild Mountain is a slow food restaurant serving local Canadian cuisine, overlooking Sooke Harbour. Route 14, located in downtown Sooke, offers fine food, music and a rustic atmosphere. Hara Sushi serves traditional and non-traditional dishes, fresh and flavourful food and an authentic Japanese experience. Stickleback West Coast Eatery has a natural cedar bar, a stunning mural of Sombrio Beach and a popular patio.

see.

Experience the ocean in all its forms. Sooke offers a number of ocean adventures from kayaking to whale watching, sailing, boat tours and shoreline excursions. Fishing charters are extremely popular and there's an abundance of opportunities to snag halibut, salmon and cod. Ocean views are also abundant: climb Mount Maguire in East Sooke Park for spectacular views to the Olympic Peninsula, or drive along the coast to Port Renfrew, stopping to watch surfers at the tiny seaside community of Jordan River.

do.

Hike! Sooke has dozens of trails. In East Sooke Regional Park, a petroglyph near the Aylard Farms trailhead and abandoned mines inside the park offer glimpses of local history and numerous easy to moderate walking trails. Mount Empress, accessed from Sooke Potholes via Mary Vine and Todd Creek trails, is a 12.6-kilometre, out-and-back trail considered "difficult." The Roche Cove Regional Park Loop is a 7.7-kilometre loop trail, and hikes at Sandcut, Mystic, Sombrio, French and China beaches await discovery about 30 minutes down the highway towards Port Renfrew.

sleep.

The two-bedroom SookePoint Ocean Cottage Resort suites are 1,014 to 1,340 square feet, sleep up to six, and offer private decks or patios, gourmet kitchens and amenities that range from soaker bathtubs to washer/dryer units. Every suite features a massive, glass-wall system opening to the view. In addition to being rental suites, the cottages are available to buy and live in or rent out. SookePoint is managed by True Key Hotels & Resorts, which also runs Sooke Harbour Resort and Marina in downtown Sooke, plus a number of other properties around BC.



**S**itting in comfortable armchairs with the floor-to-ceiling glass walls wide open, a gentle breeze blows through the suite. In front of us sits the deck—shaped like the bow of a boat—just five metres above the sea, and a wide swath of glistening ocean and distant views of the US Olympic Peninsula spreads before us.

The effect is mesmerizing and the sense of being on a boat is so strong, we almost expect to feel motion.

From the moment we stepped into our two-bedroom suite at SookePoint Ocean Cottages & Surfside Yacht Suites, we were enveloped by a sense of the sea. Everything here is designed to draw your eye to the expanse of blue just outside.

And with all the comforts of home and more—king bed, soaker bathtub, gourmet kitchen—at our fingertips, plus a nearby pebble beach and 3,600 acres of wilderness and hiking trails, there is no reason to leave the area during our two-day stay. SookePoint, perched at the edge of a solid, end-of-the-road rock peninsula in East Sooke, a short drive from Victoria, is the perfect spot to unwind and reconnect with nature.

Today's foray to the coast started in the same way all our trips to Sooke and beyond begin: with a stop at the landmark 17 Mile Pub. This historical watering hole originated in 1894 as the British Ensign Hotel—"a regular stopping point for stagecoaches travelling to Sooke, as well as 'a quiet retreat for those unmarried, who require a little privacy.'" It once housed the area's only telephone. These days, it's a charming pub, full of character and excellent pub fare. (It's also right next door to Adrena LINE Zipline Adventures, a super-fun way to learn about the area while zipping through the trees.)



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Sitting on the patio at the pub, sipping a pint of brew, we feel the urgency of the city ebbing away. The turn-off to SookePoint, Gillespie Road, is just down the highway from the pub, but we recommend stocking up on groceries or picking up takeout in downtown Sooke before embarking on the long and winding road to the point. Once there, you won't want to leave.

Sooke is worth a visit in itself; be sure to check out the Sooke Potholes or any number of hiking trails in the area.

There is ample opportunity for a booze tour as well, with three breweries—Sooke Oceanside Brewery, Bad Dog Brewing Company, Sooke Brewing Company—plus Tugwell Honey Farm & Meadery and the world-renowned Sheringham Distillery. (If they haven't sold out, pick up a bottle of Sheringham's rhubarb gin—oh my!)

Sooke is also on the Pacific Marine Circle Route, a 300-kilometre drive that traverses Victoria, Sooke, Port Renfrew, Cowichan Lake and the Malahat. The circle route is an excellent way to explore the area; we've done it a number of times and can definitely recommend stops at Shirley Delicious Bakery, located about 20 minutes outside of Sooke, and Botanical Beach, a must-do exploration of cool rock formations, tidal pools and forested trails in Port Renfrew. We've spent glorious nights at Point No Point Resort in Shirley and Wild Renfrew Seaside Cottages in Port Renfrew.

But back at SookePoint, we cook ourselves a fresh seafood feast for dinner, sip a bottle of pinot noir from Cowichan-based Blue Grouse Winery and watch the drama of the sea outside our window—including the antics of an eagle that swoops down to pluck out its prey. Eventually, the sun sets over Sooke in a flash of orange and red.

The next morning we set out to explore the neighbouring wilderness playground that is East Sooke Regional Park, embarking on a four-hour hike that took us climbing to the summit of Mount



Maguire, and then walking down an overgrown road that meanders through the forest and past an old copper mine to the ocean. Here, we pick up a somewhat difficult shoreline trail, stop at a beach for a swim and emerge once again, right next to SookePoint resort.

After calling that soaker tub into action and then enjoying another leisurely evening basking in the sights and scents of the sea, we leave the next day, fully relaxed and ready for our next adventure. **11**

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