

Mayne Island offers quiet escape from city life

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Vancouver Courier

Friday, July 24, 2009

We had just rounded the island known as Little Samuelson, in a quiet channel between the small island and its much larger sibling Samuelson, when we slowed our kayaks down to examine honeycombed designs carved high into sandstone cliffs by the wind. On darker rocks just above the water, purple starfish clung for a hold as they waited for the tide to return.

Moments before, a nearly mature bald eagle had flown low directly over us. Another observed us from a tree limb. The sun was high in the sky, the water below smooth. I shook my head.

Our guide, two other tourists and I were more than half way through an afternoon kayak trip through a small part of Gulf Islands National Park, and I realized I had forgotten, and didn't care, where I was or where I had to be. Job? Gone from my mind. Schedule? Unimportant. My cellphone? Parked on the cottage bedroom's night table as it struggled in vain for a signal from civilization.

I was in a Mayne Island moment.

That morning I had bought a few groceries from the Tru-Value grocery store at Miner's Bay on Mayne, which is the island to the south you see on the ferry as you enter Active Pass on the Tsawwassen to Swartz Bay run. The clerk, who smiled at me like I was family,



CREDIT: photo by Barry Link
The view from Mayne Island Resort's dock to Bennett Bay on a tranquil morning.



CREDIT: photo by Barry Link
Mayne Island Resort is still undergoing renovations, but the "cottages" with their upscale amenities are hardly roughing it.

asked me how I was doing. Great, I replied, it's a day without responsibility.

"Envy drip," she said. "That's what every day on Mayne should be about."

Finding those days are hard for city dwellers. We work indoors. We fight traffic. We argue about bike lane trials.

That's why I escaped to Mayne.

Getting there involved a quick B.C. Ferries trip from Tsawwassen to Village Bay on the island's west coast. From there it was a 10-minute drive to Bennett Bay on the east side of the island to my base at the Mayne Island Resort. The core of the resort is a labourer's hotel that dates back nearly 100 years. New owners bought it several years ago and are in the middle of renovations, with a refurbished restaurant and pub and 12 low cottages fronting the resort's view of Bennett Bay. Two additional four-suite condominium buildings, all with water views, are being added, as are a wine store, health club and conference rooms. My "cottage," in reality an upscale one-bedroom with high ceilings, reclaimed wood floors, stone tiled bathroom, king-sized bed, gas stove and fireplace, widescreen TV with Playstation 3 and high windows looking out to the view, wasn't exactly roughing it. But I wasn't complaining.

I had no reason to. Outside, on the quiet waters of bay as the sun set on that first evening, Canada geese brought their goslings in neat convoys to shore for the night. I sighed.

The next morning it was breakfast at the Sunny Mayne Bakery and Caf?, where \$9 got me the Islander breakfast of eggs, bacon, toast and tea. The cafe was a continuous morning rallying point for locals getting a morning coffee and baked goods. Heavy on suspenders, ballcaps, overalls, ponytails and natural fibres, and skewing older than the weekend crowd on a busier island like Saltspring, everyone knew everyone, and everyone talked.

In the afternoon, after a walk and a late morning nap (which seemed like an island thing to do), I joined up with another couple on the beach at Bennett Bay for a kayak tour with a local outfitter. I hadn't kayaked before and expected to quickly drown, but soon discovered tipping over is highly unlikely. Our guide Ellen, who works part-time as a nurse on the island, instructed us on the use of our paddles and rudders and then shepherded us through a two-hour expedition past the smaller islands accessible from the bay. We saw plenty of seals, large and ungainly on land, fast as torpedoes in the water, sunning themselves on rocky outcroppings. On the larger islands with trees, eagles watched us carefully and flew overhead. Ellen kept up a helpful commentary on kayaking safety, local wildlife, the environment, organic food and why the waters such as the Georgia Strait should be known as the Salish Sea in honour of its First Nations heritage.

That night, happily sore from paddling, I had dinner on the resort's restaurant patio, which probably has the best view in the resort. Aside from two couples

try one of the chef's incredibly rich desserts, immovable. I sat quietly and looked out to the water.

Far out on the eastern horizon, people in Vancouver felt stress. Not here, not on Mayne.

IF YOU GO:

B.C. Ferries runs two ferries a day to Village Bay on Mayne. Seair (www.seairseaplanes.com) flies two float planes a day to Mayne from YVR's south terminal. The planes leave on time.

The Mayne Island Resort offers cottages, which sleep four, and much smaller but cheaper rooms in the hotel, which is still undergoing renovations. See more at www.mayneislandresort.com.

Kayaking can be arranged through Mayne Island Kayaking at www.kayakmayneisland.com.

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