

# Romantic getaways in the Gulf Islands

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FOR CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

In 1985, promising good things for one another, we vowed to mark each wedding anniversary with a memorable escape to one of B.C.'s Gulf Islands, a different one each year. But other, more exotic travel destinations caught our attention and we have yet to complete the "Gulf Islands Cycle." Deciding to pick it up again, we ask friends to tell us about their special places. Their stories prompted us to concoct an interesting list from which to choose, deliberately seeking those out-of-the-way and little-known spots perfect for a romantic getaway.

One couple has spent their wedding anniversary every year since 1981 at Vancouver Island's Point-no-Point Resort near Sooke.

They tell us that the ocean can often be heard, even with doors and windows closed. Log fire. Hot tub. Walks in the woods and to the beach. The resort boasts a fine restaurant, but each cottage has its own kitchen if you want to simply stay inside and snuggle.

Here, the feeling of escaping the busy-ness of everyday life is complete - no telephone, no television or wi-fi. In fact, the resort does not even have an email address or offer a toll-free number in order to preserve that "back to nature" feeling.

Point-No-Point Resort: 250-646-2020  
www.pointnopointresort.com

Up a winding wooded lane, behind a deer-detering gate overlooking a small cove on Navy Channel, Mayne Island's Oceanwood

Country Inn has matured from humble cottage beginnings into a charmingly sophisticated home.

Innkeeper Jonathan Chilvers greets us while jazz wafts through the rooms. Established in 1990, this is the first year the inn is open as a B&B through the winter. Looking around, we decide it's a perfect romantic getaway.

Oceanwood Country Inn: 250-539-5074  
www.oceanwood.com

Tucked away on a quiet cul-de-sac in one of Victoria's most exclusive areas, the Italianate Villa Marco Polo Inn is rated "simply sublime" by the Best Places to Kiss, Pacific Northwest edition.

Proprietor Eliza Livingstone comments, "Here we offer an experience that's out of time and place. Most visitors to our city expect a

Victorian theme, but we transport guests to another world with heirloom furniture, rugs, mirrors and art work from exotic destinations."

Built in 1923 as a parents' gift to a bride, this boutique inn's four spacious suites, each themed after a stop on Marco Polo's travels to faraway Cathay, are steeped in romance. The walls and ceiling in the Silk Road suite, the home's former library, are painted with misty clouds, inspiring dreamers to float off to sleep. A former sunroom looking out to the garden and the Olympic Mountains holds a jetted double soaker tub.

Eliza adds, "We offer full services but we are discreet. Some couples like a private breakfast while others choose conversation over the breakfast table because we attract guests from all over the world - including countries visited by Marco Polo."

Villa Marco Polo Inn: Toll free 1-877-601-1524  
www.villamarcopolo.com

Salt Spring Island offers many bed-and-breakfasts but we're advised to seek a little-known hideaway gem - Seido-en. Friends tell us,

"This Japanese-style forest house is very relaxing and there's a lovely outdoor hot tub. Ruckle Park is nearby and Fulford Harbour not far away. The only inconvenience is clambering up a ladder to the bedroom. But you can sleep downstairs instead."

Seido-en: 250-653-2311  
www.seido-en.com

Also on Salt Spring, the Salt Spring Inn has a reputation for old-style comfort and dining. It has just seven guest rooms, all with queen beds. The three deluxe rooms sport fireplaces, sea views and private bathrooms.

Salt Spring Inn: Toll free 1-877-537-9339  
www.saltspringinn.com

Saturna is the most southerly and easterly of the Gulf Islands. A friend comments "This has to be a perfect romantic getaway, since it's the farthest from the cities, hardest to get to and has the lowest population."

Saturna is also the least developed and most pristine of the Southern Gulf Islands. About half the island's 33 sq. km. is Gulf Islands National Park Reserve.

To balance all that nature are two general stores, a liquor store, artists' galleries and studios, a local pub and quality restaurants. And on the south-facing side of the island lies Saturna Island Family Estate Winery with vineyards, bistro and cellar.



<b>Alaska Highway News (Fort St. John, BC)</b>				Order/Commande 123457
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**Wildlife can be seen from balconies at Pender Island's Coach House on the Cove.**