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BREWERY HOPPIN' IN THE SAN JUAN ISLANDS

BY BRANDON FRALIC

UNTIL RECENTLY, FEW FOLKS RANKED BEER among their top reasons for visiting Washington's San Juan Islands. Boasting hundreds of miles of marine shoreline, these idyllic isles offer more than their fair share of attractions—from world-class sea kayaking and whale watching to the simple satisfaction of getting away from it all. Beer was always more of an afterthought in the islands.

But islanders, who have a passion for all things local, needed something island-brewed to drink. Ever-resourceful, they took matters into their own hands, launching three unique breweries in five years. A step into any one of these breweries is a step into the community. Welcome to the living rooms of the San Juans.

Madrona Imperial Red was created for a friend who enjoyed mixing barleywine with IPA. The result: a big, boozy-smooth sipper that has become Island Hoppin's signature beer.

Sample light snacks (like Lopez Island smoked salmon) or bring your own food to the family-friendly taproom. Take a seat next to one of Orcas Island's old salts, whose sea stories are the inspiration behind Old Salts Brown Ale. As the oldest brewery in the San Juans, Island Hoppin' has a few tales to tell of its own.

San Juan Island Brewing

Hop the ferry to Friday Harbor for the only full-service restaurant and brewery in the islands. Featuring a purpose-built modern taproom, San Juan Island Brewing (sanjuanbrew.com) opened during summer 2017 after a whirlwind, year-long construction phase. Everything—from the archipelago-shaped taster trays to the clean branding and beer—is crafted with care.

Brothers Sean and Tim Aylward had long been interested in opening a brewery on the island. Upon teaming up with their stepfather (island grocery store owner Vern Howard), they began researching breweries up and down the West Coast for design inspiration. This research paid off in the form of a beautiful brewpub. Island-sourced wood paneling warms the taproom. Natural light pours in through a wall of windows. A spacious patio allows for live music during summer. There's even a kids' corner for the little ones.

While San Juan Island Brewing stands out with its thoughtful design, the beer is no less notable. Chemistry teacher-turned-brewer Jesse Visciglia sources time-tested European malts to create clean ales and lagers. Pair the juicy Outer Island IPA with wood-stone oven pizza (the Bianca is a top-seller) for a true taste of San Juan Island.

The Oar House at Friday Harbor Brewing Company

The Oar House at Friday Harbor (fridayharboroarhouse.com) is a tiny brewery with a big sense of humor. "Our brewhouse is so small," they say, "the front and back doors are the same door."

After Friday Harbor's original brewery shuttered in 2008, Bob Williams and Mike Close saw an opportunity to pick up the slack. Today, their nanobrewery produces 15-gallon batches "for locals, by locals." Of course, mainlanders are welcome if you time it right. Located inside a boat repair shop, the marine-themed tasting room opens its doors on Friday and Saturday evenings. A dozen taps provide experimental, ever-changing offerings to those who seek harbor at The Oar House. 🍷



For more island inspiration, lodging ideas and eats, go to visitsanjuans.com.

Island Hoppin' Brewing

Housed in a former metal shop above the town of Eastsound, Island Hoppin' Brewing (islandhoppinbrewery.com) is the kind of place you seek out rather than stumble into. Perhaps this explains the laid-back, local hangout feel.

Island Hoppin's location is a point of pride for owners Nate and Becca Gray. Inspired by "the sea, sky and earth of Orcas Island," every pint of Island Hoppin' brew retains a sense of place. And as Nate will tell you, every beer has a story. While he typically produces pints that are "crisp, light, snappy and pleasant to drink," Nate's award-winning Old