



DESTINATION

SUMMER

DESTINATION SOOKE

This seaside town, just 45 minutes from Victoria, has plenty to offer travellers

BY JANE MUNDY



In the not-too-distant past, Sooke wasn't much more than a haven for hippies and commercial fishers. There wasn't much to do. Now it's a magnet for lightweight adventurers. And with great food, three brew pubs and lux accommodations, this little town 45 minutes west of Victoria is a perfect getaway where you can unwind and get outdoors.

Circle routes are more interesting than driving the same stretch of road twice. So, adding another half hour from Victoria to bucolic Cobble Hill, we were just in time for lunch at Merridale Ciderworks. (If you're coming from the mainland, either catch the ferry to Nanaimo from West Vancouver (Horseshoe Bay) or avoid ›

Whiffin Spit and its little lighthouse.

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the Malahat and board the ferry from Brentwood Bay to Mill Bay—close to the Swartz Bay ferry terminal.) After a stroll in the orchard with 20 apple varieties—keep going to the end and the faerie mine, which is fascinating not only for kids—Chelsea guided us through the cider tasting experience, including traditional “Scrumpy” with its huge tannins to a Margarita-style Jalisco cider. Merridale has come a long way since selling cider from soda pop coolers. Sample their Aura Gin, a gorgeous magenta colour and so smooth, even at high noon. Speaking of gin, Sheringham Distillery recently moved from Sooke to Langford and you can’t miss it on this route.

To get the lay of the land in the Sooke area, we hopped on e-bikes provided by Palli Palli (delivery and pickup included in rental), ideally suited for the famous 56 kilometre Galloping Goose converted railway trail. You can pedal the trail in three hours and be back without breaking a sweat, with a pit stop at the Sooke Potholes, so pack your bathing suit. Hiking at Sooke Potholes Provincial Park is also not to be missed—even on a gloomy day. Well-maintained trails lead down to pools and potholes naturally carved into the bedrock of the Sooke River with crystal clear water.

Hands down—and hands-free—pedaling with West Coast Outdoor Adventure was one of my best (AKA relaxed and easiest) kayak trips ever. Our guide Allen briefly explained the fast and stable foot-powered Hobbie kayak and we zipped past Sooke Harbour and Whiffin Spit in no time. We paddled through kelp gardens with water so clear we could see purple and pink sea stars and a world of marine life far below. Coming back, we zig-zagged under the old wooden boardwalk and under the watchful eyes of harbour



Zippering through the rainforest canopy.



Paddling along the ocean shoreline near Sooke.



seals lolling on the dock. And a molting elephant seal was snoozing on the pebbly beach at Wiffen Spit, and cordoned off with yellow warning tape, thanks to the parks board. The 1.3-kilometre flat walking trail, which is suitable for wheelchairs and strollers and dogs on leashes, is flanked by park benches and driftwood, and divides the calm waters of Sooke Basin with the frothy Juan de Fuca Strait.

All that walking and paddling required a bevvy. With three micro-breweries and only about 15,000 residents, you’ll likely grab a table, along with a stellar view, at award-winning Sooke Oceanside Brewing. Owner Ryan Orr started brewing from his garage and expanded to a gas station in 2016. “When you don’t have money you get resourceful—it’s called West Coast Funky,” says Orr, laughing. “We sold out of beer one day after we opened and now SOB beer sells in 150 stores throughout Vancouver Island.” Go for the flight, a great way to sample six brews and delivered in a gorgeous flight board design of Vancouver Island.

After a morning soak in the Prestige Oceanfront Resort’s hot tub followed with coffee on our expansive balcony overlooking Whiffin Spit, we were stoked for a zip with Adrena LINE Zipline Adventure Tours—talk about exhilarating! A short drive from our hotel, we were soon soaring through the forest canopy on the new 2,400-foot-long “Big Zip,” eye-level with raptors and the Olympic Mountains in the distance. I’ve experienced several ziplines, including a few near-death zips that involved stopping at the end by smashing into the platform at the speed of light. But these trolleys have magnets that allow for a soft and gentle landing and a back-up brake system is a heavy-duty spring pack—clearly no expense has been spared on safety.

Combine the Big Zip with the two-hour guided forest canopy on eight different ziplines, ranging from 45 to 305 metres in length. “An 86-year-old wore her sticks until the very top. She zipped with her granddaughter and

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last year an ‘active seniors’ group was here—they’ll be back,” says Scott McQueen, Adrena LINE director. “Zip lining appeals to adventurous people and it doesn’t require any aptitude. Our goal is to be wheelchair accessible.” After the first zip we were in competitive mode and with bodies in torpedo shape (flat) we clocked in at 66 kph. Heehaw!

Back at the luxurious Prestige with its beachy-Miami decor, we didn’t have to leave the building for outstanding local cuisine. The bucket of shrimp and calamari were both perfectly cooked and the huge plate of burrata with tomatoes made it back to our balcony. A few locals said they come here for the best smoked

salmon and crab cake bennys, and I agree. On par with the West Coast Grill is Wild Mountain. Chef Oliver’s menu showcases the local community of fishers, foragers, farmers, brewers and bakers, including pizza sliding out of the new wood-fired pizza oven (the crust is made with locally grown and milled wheat). We scarfed down a second order of the crispy polenta and pickle dip and outrageous chocolate pudding back on our balcony, listening to the last cry of seagulls and faint snorts of seals as the sky turned pink and purple and everything was right with the world. 🌲

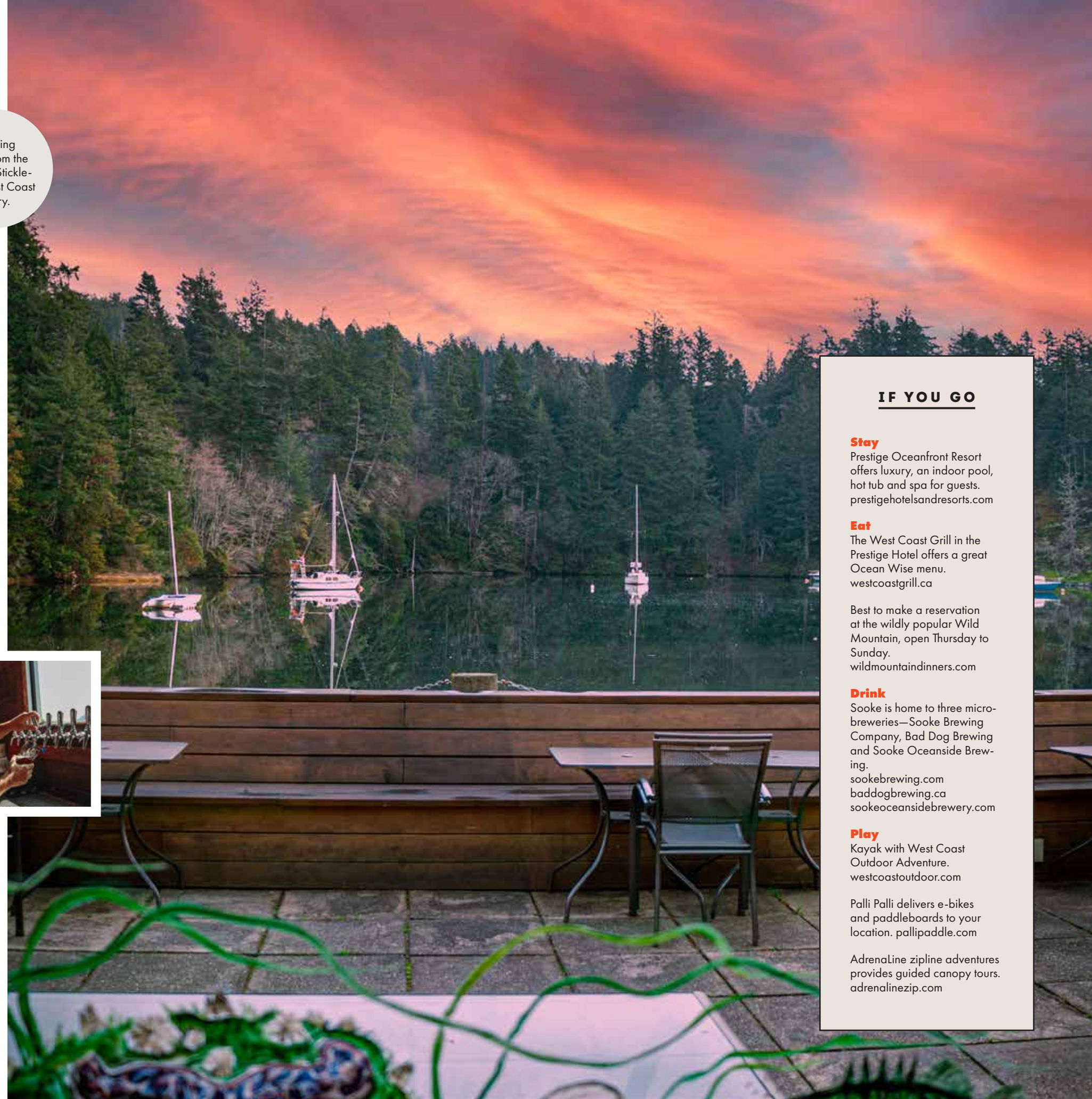
Amazing views from the patio of Stickleback West Coast Eatery.



A fitting rainbow over Prestige Hotel.



Sooke Oceanside Brewery.



IF YOU GO

Stay

Prestige Oceanfront Resort offers luxury, an indoor pool, hot tub and spa for guests. prestigehotelsandresorts.com

Eat

The West Coast Grill in the Prestige Hotel offers a great Ocean Wise menu. westcoastgrill.ca

Best to make a reservation at the wildly popular Wild Mountain, open Thursday to Sunday. wildmountaindinner.com

Drink

Sooke is home to three micro-breweries—Sooke Brewing Company, Bad Dog Brewing and Sooke Oceanside Brewing. sookebrewing.com
baddogbrewing.ca
sookeoceansidebrewery.com

Play

Kayak with West Coast Outdoor Adventure. westcoastoutdoor.com

Palli Palli delivers e-bikes and paddleboards to your location. pallipaddle.com

AdrenaLine zipline adventures provides guided canopy tours. adrenalinezip.com