

The New York Times
Great Homes and Destinations

A Respite From Seattle, a Ferry Ride Away

<http://travel.nytimes.com/2009/01/16/greathomesanddestinations/16havens.html>

Published: January 15, 2009

A green and white ferry, running at a soothing rumble, takes only about 35 minutes to cover the nine miles across glassy Puget Sound from the busy terminal on [Seattle's](#) waterfront to Bainbridge Island, Wash., which is much less hip, but much more tranquil.

Boutiques, galleries and restaurants have gathered on Winslow Way, the main street through Winslow, the island's largest village. But there is also a Christian Science Reading Room, a bakery, a drugstore and two barbershops, both with striped poles.

"It reminded us of a quieter, less hurried way of life," said Carter Redish, an architect from San Clemente, Calif., who bought a 2,700-square-foot house on the southwest corner of the island for \$649,000 in 2004.

The charming amenities on the island, once a lumber center and then a playground for Seattle's wealthy, have turned Winslow and all of Bainbridge into a bedroom community. More than half of the island's 20,000 residents catch the ferry each morning to go to work in Seattle.

Even so, about 30 percent of the island's homes, real-estate agents estimate, are used only on weekends and holidays. Because the full-timers have established a thriving arts community, Bainbridge Island is a place to stay year-round, not just when it's warm.

"It's so close to the metro area, but it's so removed, so you feel like you can get away from it all in 30 minutes," said Lance Bear, an orthopedic surgeon from Warrensburg, Mo., who spends about six weeks a year with his wife, Linda Pai, and two children at their waterfront home on Bainbridge Island. Dr. Bear bought the shingled New England-style house in 2004 for \$1.9 million.

Covered by cedars and firs, with splashes of maples and alders, Bainbridge is a big island — slightly bigger than Manhattan, in fact — and there is a lot to see. The bicyclists are the first off the ferry. Soon, they are flying past parents pushing strollers and retirees walking dogs in downtown Winslow, even when it rains.

“When it rains, it doesn’t stop people from doing stuff,” said Jerry Mohr, a commercial real estate broker from Fresno, Calif., who stays at his weekend place on the island about once a month. “When it’s raining, people pull their umbrellas and galoshes out and go for it.”

Not only is there a wide range of activities, there is also a wide range of places to live. Houses run the gamut from \$350,000 cottages to \$1 million custom-built houses in rural settings, to \$6.2 million estates. “It’s not that everything here is \$2 million,” said Dennis Paige, an associate broker for Windermere Real Estate on the island.

Years ago, Mr. Mohr was interested in buying a second home near Carmel, Calif., which is much closer to Fresno than Bainbridge Island. But he found that houses in Carmel were much higher priced, and many had no views of the water.

So he and his wife, Kathy, bought a 4,200-square-foot house on Bainbridge Island in 2003 for \$1.25 million and sold it about three years later for \$1.75 million. They recently bought a five-bedroom, 5,000-square-foot custom house in the village of Port Madison for \$1.9 million.

“We did not buy it for the appreciation level,” Mr. Mohr said, “let me tell you that.”

What they did buy it for was its nearness to the water. They have a 27-foot motorized catamaran and love to take it out as much as they can, even in winter, piloting it through the nooks and crannies of Puget Sound.

The Scene

Dozens of boats are docked in Eagle Harbor, near Winslow, the island’s hub. Winslow has a performing arts center and several good restaurants, including Four Swallows and Cafe

Nola (try the sweet potato hash on the brunch menu for \$12).

The big homes in Eagledale are the first thing a ferry passenger sees, but each village has a different feel. To the north is Port Madison, with summer houses that face the Seattle skyline. Rolling Bay is more rustic, with a feed store and a bakery. Sheep graze behind a house, and a sign points the way to a stand that sells fresh eggs.

The new homes in Seabold and Manzanita face the Olympic Mountains and are graced by the late-afternoon sun. Grand Forest is at the center of the somewhat hilly island. There is a public [golf](#) course nearby, and a wide, undeveloped area to ride a bicycle or a horse. There is a skateboard park near, not surprisingly, the high school.

With Seattle only about half an hour away, many second-home owners on Bainbridge like to take in a concert or a ballgame there. But the island has its own symphony and regular tours of artists' studios run by Bainbridge Arts and Crafts, a 60-year-old nonprofit organization.

Mr. Redish has a simpler pleasure, though: watching the ferry to Bremerton Island move stealthily from Seattle, its lights cutting through the fog. Every now and then, majestic Mount Rainier, to the south of Seattle, will peek through the clouds. "It's really soothing and very pleasant," he said.

Pros

Because it's near Seattle/Tacoma International Airport, which is about a half-hour south of Seattle, it isn't hard to get to Bainbridge Island from other American cities, especially those on the West Coast.

Cons

There is only one road from the mainland: the Agate Pass Bridge in Kitsap County, which enters the island from the northwest. There is no 24-hour ferry service to and from

Seattle. The last ferry leaves Seattle at 1:35 a.m. on weekdays and at 2:10 a.m. on weekends.

The Real Estate Market

Mr. Paige said the values of houses appreciated by an average of 8 or 9 percent annually over a 20-year period — “a steady appreciation,” he said — until the economic downturn hit the Seattle area in late summer of 2007. Sales have been off by about 43 percent in 2008. According to figures compiled by the Northwest Multiple Listing Service, 188 houses were sold on Bainbridge Island in 2008, in contrast with 332 in 2007. Forty-four condominium units were sold last year, compared with 133 in 2007.

The average sale price of a house in 2007 on Bainbridge Island was \$820,569, a record. In 2008, the average sale price was \$749,970. But the 2008 average was still more than twice the 1998 average of \$342,195.

“It came here a little bit later and a little bit lighter, but it’s definitely hit here, and it’s affected all of us,” said Barbara McKenzie, a real estate agent for 20 years who co-owns a Coldwell Banker agency on the island with her husband, Rod. “We’re weathering the storm.”

Maureen Buckley, who owns Buckley & Buckley Real Estate with her husband, Ed, said prices have remained stable because Bainbridge Island is still considered desirable, particularly for second-home owners. A couple from Honolulu recently bought a second house on Bainbridge because of the change of seasons, they said.

But people buy because they like having a cobbler around, and diagonal parking. “People enjoy those things that haven’t changed,” Ms. Buckley said.

LAY OF THE LAND

POPULATION 22,178, according to a 2006 [Census Bureau](#) estimate.

SIZE 27.78 square miles.

WHERE Bainbridge Island is a 35-minute ferry ride from [Seattle](#).