

Alaska

BEYOND

HORIZON EDITION MAGAZINE FEBRUARY 2017

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ACTION PLAN

RECREATION & RELAXATION
IN THE NORTHWEST

GREAT ESCAPE»



Whale-watching excursions, with outfitters such as San Juan Cruises, may provide spectacular views of orcas in and around the San Juan Islands.

WONDERFUL WHATCOM COUNTY

Nature and culture in and around Bellingham

By Lauren Kramer

» The spring sunshine warms me as I sit on the deck of the 100-foot *Victoria Star*, my eyes searching the dark-blue waters of a calm Salish Sea. With binoculars at the ready, my fellow passengers and I on this San Juan Cruises whale-watching trip are on the lookout for the glistening outline of a 6-foot dorsal fin on the horizon.

We're not far from Sucia Island, which is located west of Bellingham and north of Orcas Island in the San Juan Archipelago, when our captain identifies five whales from the L pod, their fins rising bladelike

from the ocean in perfect symmetry. We watch, spellbound by the beauty of their black-and-white torsos rising slightly above the water before dipping back down into the depths.

We continue watching for the pod of orcas as the captain turns off the boat's engine and his crew prepares our lunch—wild salmon, barbecued chicken and fresh salads. We're enjoying the delicious meal when the whales begin to venture closer



to the boat. By the time dessert is served, Mega, an orca easily identified by nicks in his dorsal fin, is treating us to a stunning display of spyhopping—or raising his head out of the water—just 90 yards from the vessel.

The whales are so close, we can hear them exhale and see water shoot like geysers from their blowholes. Then the whales are off again, five dorsal fins mov-



ing speedily through the sea in search of their own lunches.

Our daylong whale-watching tour is a quintessential Bellingham-area experience. The city is surrounded by natural beauty and is a gateway to a variety of outdoor activities that include boating on the Salish Sea, kayaking on local rivers and lakes, and exploring Mount Baker and other peaks in the North Cascades.

The city is also home to a strong arts culture, a booming craft-beer industry, an artisanal food movement and the energy

and creativity of the Western Washington University campus.

All of these factors help make Bellingham and Whatcom County a great location for an escape any time of year.

OUTDOORS

Mount Baker

Mount Baker, elevation 10,781 feet, is about 50 miles east of Bellingham and attracts nature lovers year-round. Skiers and snowboarders are drawn to the Mt.

Baker Ski Area, which receives an average of 659 inches of snow annually—one of the highest average snowfalls enjoyed by any resort in the world. Mount Baker also boasts one of the state's longest ski season, usually lasting from late November through April. In the summer, rafters can ride the rapids on area rivers such as the Nooksack, and hikers can enjoy more than 1,500 miles of trails on the mountain and in the surrounding Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (360-734-6771; www.fs.usda.gov/mbs/).

GREAT ESCAPE
 >> BELLINGHAM & WHATCOM COUNTY



JORDEN SIMMONS / GETTY IMAGES



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>> *Hikers enjoy a variety of breathtaking vistas in the North Cascades, far left. Summer swims are a popular pastime at Lake Whatcom, above. Larrabee State Park, left, offers enchanting views of the Salish Sea.*

North Cascades National Park

Home to awe-inspiring vistas, bears, gray wolves and about 200 species of birds, the **North Cascades National Park** is a vast wilderness located to the east of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and the Mt. Baker Wilderness.

Reaching from Lake Chelan to the Canadian border, the park includes peaks that reach elevations of more than 9,000 feet and valleys that drop to about 400 feet above sea level.

This immense region can be visited in

the late spring or summer, and is home to temperate rainforests, dry ponderosa pine forests, glaciers and meadows.

Visitors to the park can hike in from trails near the Mt. Baker Ski Area or they can drive along State Route 20, also known as the North Cascades Highway, which is located about 25 miles south of Bellingham in Burlington. The highway runs through the park, offering access to Gorge Lake, Diablo Lake and Ross Lake. Diablo Lake may be the most famous of the three, due to its unique turquoise ap-

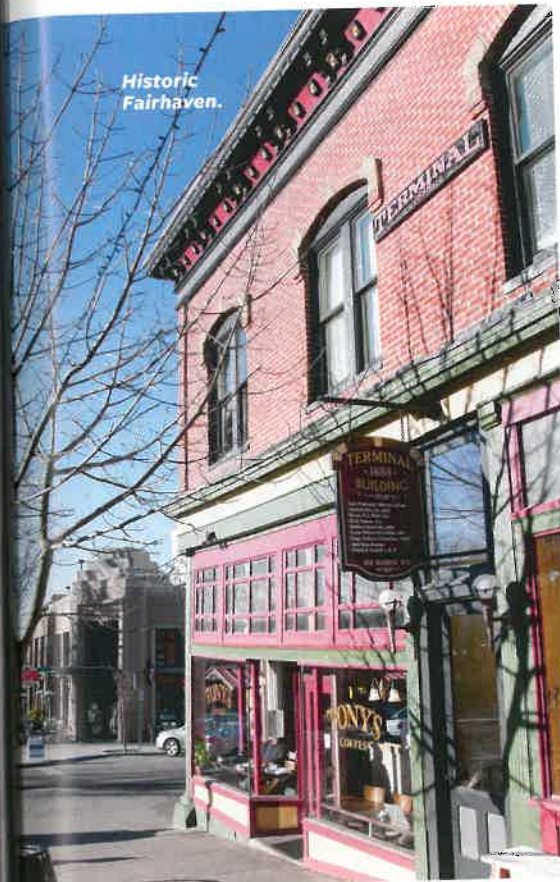
pearance. The lake gets its color from the fine rock in the area's glacial runoff.

Visitors can enjoy hiking, climbing, fishing, camping and walks with rangers. The park is well suited for a variety of fitness levels and interests (360-854-7200; nps.gov/noca).

Local Lakes

Whatcom County lakes, such as lakes Whatcom, Padden and Samish, are popular for swimming, sailing, stand-up paddleboarding and kayaking. The cool,

Historic Fairhaven.



BRANDON FRALIC

clear water of these three lakes makes them perfect for a refreshing dip in the summer or a tranquil paddle in the company of loons and other water birds. Yeager's Sporting Goods (360-733-1080; yeagerssportinggoods.com) rents kayaks and other paddle equipment at the Lake Padden City Park during the summer.

Hikers can walk the trails of **Larrabee State Park**, located on **Samish Bay** about 6 miles south of Bellingham. The 2,683-acre park features two freshwater lakes, tidelands and coves. It also has various mountain-biking trails. Moondance Sea Kayak Adventures leads guided kayak excursions from the park in the summer (360-738-7664; moondancekayak.com).

Great Golfing

With their expert layouts and year-round play, Semiahmoo Golf & Country Club and the Loomis Trail Golf Club at Semiahmoo Resort, Golf, & Spa are among the state's highest-ranked courses.

The country club layout, which was designed by the late golf legend Arnold

Palmer, is a 7,005-yard tree-lined beauty about 3 miles south of the resort. Palmer's design challenges golfers with 67 bunkers and water in play on five of the holes.

The Loomis Trail Golf Club, designed by Graham Cooke, is located about 6 miles southeast of the resort and features an extensive canal and lake system that brings water into play on all 18 holes. Both courses offer great dining (855-917-3767; semiahmoo.com/golf).

CULTURAL FINDS

Camel Safari

Beldar Haven Farm in Bellingham is home to 15 one-hump and two-hump camels. The family-owned operation offers visitors a unique educational opportunity to get close to the camels and learn about their anatomy, history, breeding, upkeep and training. You might even get to bottle-feed a baby camel (800-836-4036; camelsafari.com).

Fairhaven

Founded in the late 1800s, this neighborhood has long been a commercial and cultural center of Bellingham. The buildings even conform to the historical look of the neighborhood. It is a great place to tour boutiques for artisanal items and visit restaurants and pubs (fairhaven.com).

Spark Museum

The Spark Museum of Electrical Invention features a world-class collection of historical radios, phonographs and early electrical equipment, including displays of a 1930s-era living room, a replica of the radio room on board the *Titanic* and the opportunity to listen to a Thomas Edison-era phonograph recording.

On weekends the MegaZapper show at the museum outlines the history of humans harnessing electricity and offers demonstrations of electrical power by producing 12-foot arcs of purple lightning (360-738-3886; sparkmuseum.org).

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CHRYSLIS INN & SPA

WHEN YOU GO

LODGING:

The Chrysalis Inn & Spa (above) is a boutique hotel located on the Bellingham waterfront boardwalk that offers gorgeous bay views, wonderfully appointed suites, the relaxing Spa at The Chrysalis and the excellent Keenan's at the Pier restaurant. It's also within walking distance of the eclectic Fairhaven neighborhood (888-808-0005; thechrysalisinn.com).



AMY PARSONS PHOTOGRAPHY

Hotel Bellwether (above) is a European style retreat in the center of Bellingham's waterfront, with great views of the Cascades, Mount Baker and the San Juan Islands. The Bellwether includes the renowned Lighthouse Grill and access to nearby Zazen Spa and Still Life Massage and Float (360-392-3100; hotelbellwether.com).

Semiahmoo Resort, Golf, & Spa

was recently remodeled and is considered one of Western Washington's finest resorts, with two year-round golf courses, the sumptuous Pierside Kitchen and the full-service Spa at Semiahmoo (360-318-2000; semiahmoo.com). —L.K.

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Upfront Theatre

Visit **The Upfront Theatre**, created by well-known comedian and Bellingham resident Ryan Stiles, best known for his role on the TV program *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, for an all-ages cabaret-style comedy venue that features performances by top comedians, and live improv comedy every Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights (360-733-8855; theupfront.com).

Western Washington University Concerts

To hear top classical talent, attend one of the February concerts at Western Washington University. On February 17, WWU's Department of Music hosts the Sanford-Hill Piano Series, with a concert featuring American pianist Spencer Myer playing compositions by Haydn, Chopin, Ravel and Bolcom.

In addition, WWU's Performing Arts Center Concert Hall has weekly public performances, including the "Liederabend" (which means "evening of song" in German). The free concert on February 22 features students singing various songs and arias (360-650-6146; cfpa.wvu.edu).

FOOD & DRINK

Anthony's at Squalicum Harbor

With its combination of excellent seafood and fantastic views, Anthony's is a popular choice for lunch or dinner. The restaurant is on downtown Bellingham's waterfront, near the Bellingham Marina and the Zuanich Park boardwalk (360-647-5588; anthony.com).



Boundary Bay Brewery & Bistro

One of Bellingham's oldest breweries, Boundary Bay opened in 1995 and has been winning awards ever since. The brewery features an extensive list of

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traditional handcrafted brews, such as the award-winning Cedar Dust IPA. Its beer is complemented by a selection of hearty bistro-style food presented in a restaurant setting known for its friendly atmosphere (360-647-5593; bbaybrewery.com).

Drizzle

This Lynden restaurant and olive oil retail store is focused on locally sourced foods. Chef Andy Nguyen presents extraordinary gourmet dishes, many containing olive oils and balsamic vinegar varieties available for purchase in the store.

Be sure to try the white balsamic vinegar-infused soda with fresh, blended mint. This unique beverage is very refreshing (360-366-8470; drizzletastingroom.com).

Eat Restaurant & Bar

A cozy, French-style American bistro, Eat is run by French chef Eric Truglas, who is also passionate about using local and sustainable ingredients where possible.

The 100-seat restaurant includes a Wall of Fame, featuring photographs of local cheesemakers, farmers, winemakers and fishermen whose products are used in Eat's dishes, such as the Ricotta, Fontina and Goat Cheese Agnolotti with Dungeness Crab (360-306.3917; 4u2eat.com). ■

Lauren Kramer writes about the Pacific Northwest from British Columbia.

Alaska Airlines (800-ALASKAAIR; alaskaair.com) flies daily to the cities of Bellingham and Seattle, WA, and Vancouver, BC, all gateways to Whatcom County recreation. For more information on visiting the area, go to bellingsham.org.