

Savary Island

A Taste of the Exotic

VIEWED FROM THE AIR, Savary Island could easily be mistaken for an exotic island in the tropics. Almost entirely encircled by white sandy beaches and lapped by the warmest water north of Mexico, it's no wonder this beguiling destination has earned the nickname "Hawaii of the North."

Just eight kilometres long, Savary Island is a squiggle of lushly forested land in the Strait of Georgia near B.C.'s Sunshine Coast. Home to a community of around 100, the population can swell to 2,000 or more upon the arrival of vacationers and day trippers in the summertime. While many come to Savary for the hiking, biking, sunbathing and water sports, it's best known as a spot to just chill out.

A respite from urban madness, Savary has few cars and little traffic, largely because there are no



Savary's unparalleled sunsets take you to another world (Martine Bilodeau)

paved roads. Residents and visitors alike appear to be happy with the situation as fewer cars means more quiet and calm. While a carefully monitored amount of vehicles is permitted—transported from the mainland by the barge service—most people plan a car-free trip. The fastest way to reach the island is by seaplane, just a one-hour charter flight from Vancouver. And getting around is easy enough; you can walk, bike or book a water taxi, land taxi or crew cab.

Accommodations on the island are excellent, but limited, so be sure to book in advance. Choose from cabins, cottages, bed and breakfasts and rustic lodges. Bear in mind that there is no electricity on the island; power is supplied via mainly ecologically responsible sources such as solar panels, enhancing the island's 'castaway' experience.

Savary Island is a genuine retreat, somewhere to totally relax and recharge.

Martine Bilodeau, proprietor of Arbutus Cabin, deeply understands the magnetic pull of the place. Describing it as "a real sanctuary" where one can "let go of all urban worries," she says that the simplistic, back-to-nature island existence has been key to her personal happiness. Spellbound by the island's beauty and ambience, the many thousands of visitors that have graced its shores since 1900 have echoed Bilodeau's thoughts: Savary Island is a genuine retreat, somewhere to totally relax and recharge.

In keeping with its laid-back vibe, just three



The island's white sandy beaches dazzle (Tourism BC/Danielle Hayes)

general stores and a trio of restaurants cater to the volume of visitors in peak season. You'll find plenty of fresh seafood and casual fare on the menu at local cafes. A unique place to dine is The Mint Teahouse, an extraordinary establishment constructed entirely from driftwood and eclectic paraphernalia.

If you're after a little adventure, the warm, clear waters around the island provide ample opportunity for fishing, swimming and other water activities. Two favourite launch points are Indian Point on the western tip and South Beach on the southeast shore. The nearby mainland community of Lund—a quick ride by water taxi—has outlets for snorkelling, scuba diving and kayaking.

A magical place that exudes a sense of timelessness and mystery, the island has driven many writers and artists to produce dedicated work, including Vancouver-based painter David Burns. Showing in Vancouver's Diane Farris Gallery, his 19-canvas "From Savary Island" series is one stunning example of how the glorious sunsets, hazy summers and quality of light here can truly inspire.

Little is known about the island's history, contributing to its enigmatic reputation. One fact known for certain is that, on June 25, 1792, 18th-century British naval officer and explorer

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Captain George Vancouver gave the island its name. Happening upon it, he is recorded as having stated the island displays "beauty such as we have seldom enjoyed." Who—or what—"Savary" refers to, however, remains a mystery.

The Coast Salish First Nations people have inhabited Savary for 4,500 years, referring to this island haven as 'Ayhus', meaning "double-headed serpent" in obvious reference to its shape. Clams, found in abundance on Savary, have been a staple of the Ayhus Coast Salish diet for centuries. The north beaches yield a plentiful harvest of the mollusk, but you'll need a fishing licence if you wish to take them home for cooking,

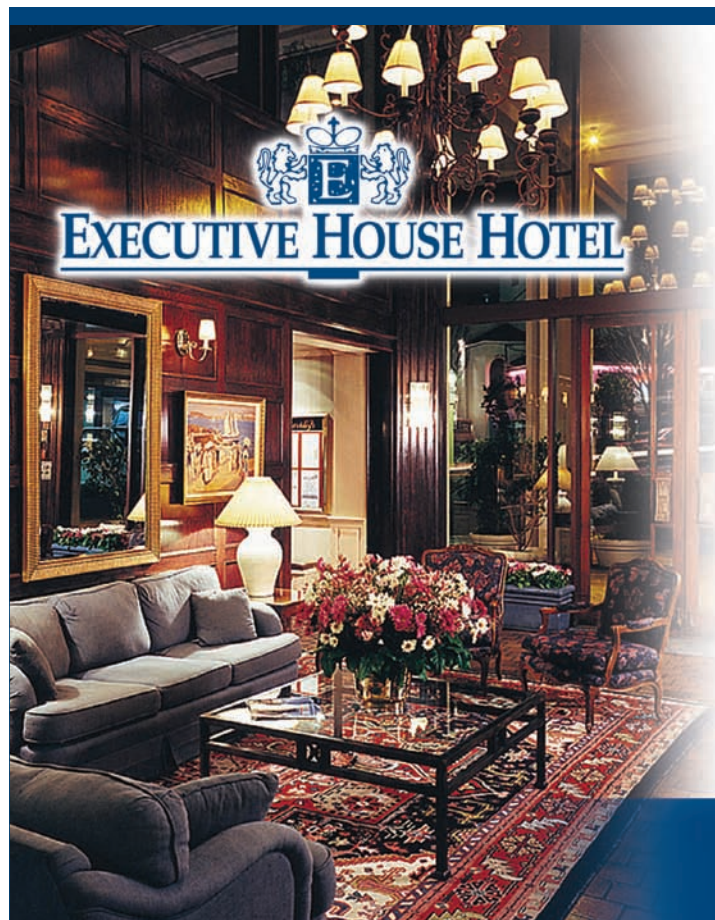
Wildlife and the exquisite vegetation are the island's main attractions. Be on the lookout for deer, hummingbirds, bald eagles and other colourful birdlife when exploring the enchanting woodland trails. Fir, yew and maple trees, as well as one of the B.C.'s biggest arbutus trees add to the island's loveliness, yet this is a delicate ecosystem that demands the utmost level of care and respect. So, as the saying goes, you should take only photographs and leave only footprints, ensuring that Savary Island remains an arcane natural paradise for generations to come.

—David Morrison

Tranquility defined
(Courtesy of Andrew Pinch)



"Let go of all urban worries"
(Tourism BC/Danielle Hayes)



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