



Nautical Communities

Visit Port Hadlock this summer to learn the art of boating and experience life near the shore.

If you're one of those nautical types who mystify the medical community every time a blood test discovers saltwater in your veins, here's an "education vacation" for you.

It includes soul-soothing vistas of gunmetal-blue waters; protected lagoons for kayaking among whole fleets of water birds; water-view hiking trails among blushing madronas and

eagle-topped fir snags. And an opportunity to learn how to properly varnish your boat, or even build a new one.

Port Hadlock is home to the Northwest School of Wooden Boatbuilding, one of the most respected academies of its kind, with about as salty a crowd of instructors and students as ever rollicked to a sea chantey.

The boat school started in 1981 in nearby Port Townsend, home to one of

the world's leading annual wooden-boat festivals. In pursuit of more space and a waterfront location, the school moved in 2004 to Port Hadlock, at the south end of Port Townsend's long bay.

Between the two communities, "I think we're unique in the United States," said school director Pete Leenhouts, a retired U.S. Navy officer. "Nowhere else is there . . . such a concentrated pool of talent in the marine trades."

The school typically hosts from 35 to 50 full-time students in long-term studies. But it also offers a range of shorter courses, from weekends to a couple of weeks, that can fit into vacations for couples or families.

When Dale Simonson, a college instructor from Burnaby, British Columbia, came last August for a two-week class to build a 12-foot sailboat, he camped at scenic Fort Worden and Fort Townsend state parks. His wife came down for a weekend and they sampled the restaurants and brew pubs of Port Townsend.

"My first contact with the school was a phone call, and I think it was Pete (Leenhouts) who actually answered the phone," Simonson said. "It was a very good experience from that moment."

Kathy Liu, of Port Townsend, has a 24-foot wooden sailboat that "has issues now and then," so she took the school's five-day Painting and Varnishing course, offered in May and September this year (tuition: \$300).

She praised instructor Diane Salguero's knowledge and flexibility with her students. Salguero focused on "simplicity and getting a job done," Liu said.

A third of the school's students come from within 300 miles of Puget Sound. Others have come from all over the United States, plus Japan, Scotland, South Korea and beyond.

"Here's an Air Force colonel

working next to our young student from Japan," Leenhouts told me recently as we toured a busy workshop where students clustered around the steam-bent planks of a 14-foot Davis Boat, a design from the island community of Metlakatla, Alaska.

The shop was like a sensory chamber for woodworking obsessives. The spice of red cedar mingled with the tangy smell of teak oil, while the whiska-whiska rhythm of hand planes got backup from a keen-ing power saw.

When lessons are over, other diversions aren't far. Across the street from the school's waterfront office is

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the Ajax Cafe, a longtime fixture in the 1890s-era home of the town's founder, Samuel Hadlock.

The night I dined on herb-coated chicken with gnocchi and baby

spinach (\$16), washed down by aged cider from nearby Finnrivier cidery, a dozen boat builders at a long table were celebrating Friday.

At the playfully informal Ajax, where your dinner menu is apt to come wrapped in the jacket of an old LP vinyl record (for me, "Rod McKuen's Greatest Hits," which sort of seemed like an oxymoron), celebrations involve wearing all sorts of hats plucked



from pegs on the cafe's wall. As a piano player plinked out Elton John tunes, the boat builders sported everything from a striped Cat in the Hat chapeau to wide-brimmed ladies' evening hats of the 1940s.

Port Hadlock isn't the quaint "Victorian seaport" of Port Townsend. Rather than a lot of galleries and boutiques, there's Big Pig Thrift Store and a propane depot. Beyond the Ajax, prominent eateries include Zoog's Caveman Cookin.

There's plenty more to do and see nearby, especially if you're a hiker, birder or kayaker. About a half-mile east on Oak Bay Road, turn toward Indian Island and cross the bridge over the man-made canal that serves as a boater's shortcut to Port Townsend.

On the road's north side, Indian Island is a securely fenced naval-munitions depot (don't even think about trespassing). But on your right over the next couple miles is Jefferson County's Indian Island Park, with beach-access points linked by marvelous water-view trails that traverse wooded hillsides and drop down by lagoons and pretty Oak Bay.

Along the snowberry-lined Portage Trail, I stumbled upon a lagoon with a sort of waterbird convention: more than 100 flapping and "wheezily mewing" (so the bird guide described it) Northern pintails, named for their sharp-as-a-quill-pen tail feather, mixed with buffleheads,

whose bulbous, white-patched heads made each appear as if it was wearing a Stay Puft-marshmallow bonnet.

From Lagoon Beach (a turnoff is marked), you might launch a kayak and explore the protected waters, or set off to poke into the paddler's haven of hidden, lakelike Mats Mats Bay, 4.5 miles to the south (carry a chart and watch for rocks outside the narrow, dogleg entrance).

Find more paddling opportunities on long, eel-shaped Kilisut Harbor, between Indian Island and neighboring Marrowstone Island.

At the head of Mystery Bay, a scenic apostrophe of water on Marrow-

stone's western shore, island life centers on almost-century-old Nordland General Store, with its postage-stamp of a post office, well-trodden wood floors, good wine selection, and kayaks for rent in warmer months (\$10-\$15 an hour). Classic sailboats rock on mooring balls just off the dock. Want excitement? Storekeeper Tom Rose will tell you to come back Memorial Day weekend for the tractor parade.

South of Port Hadlock, the Chimacum Valley is a growing haven of organic farms, some with their own stands, guarded by visiting posses of trumpeter swans. Or stop by Chimacum Corner Farmstand at the four-way stop

on Highway 19, with local foods from around the region. Up Center Road, Finnriver Farm and Cidery is open for tastings from noon to 5 p.m. daily. To warm up the first days of spring, they'll party with habanero-infused cider and mole pizza March 30, co-owner Crystie Kisler said.

If that's not enough, Port Townsend is 20 minutes up the road, with more classic boats and saltwater views than you can shake a belaying pin at.

After all this, have you caught a bad case of boat envy? Better sign up for a workshop.



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⚓ Before you go: ⚓

BOATING WORKSHOPS:

Here's a sampling of upcoming workshops open to the public at the Northwest School of Wooden Boatbuilding (Port Hadlock campus unless otherwise noted):

- Camp, building a 12-foot pocket-cruiser sailboat at Port Townsend's Northwest Maritime Center, Aug. 5-16, \$1,895 plus materials.
- Painting and Varnishing, May 20-24 or Sept. 23-27, \$300.
- Half Model Workshop, July 26-28, \$400
- Intro to Welding for Teens & Adults, Aug. 12-16, \$400.

More workshops and information: 360-385-4948 or nwboatschool.org

LODGING:

I found a great value on a well-equipped two-bedroom Oak Bay waterfront rental. About 50 feet from beach, a good base for paddlers as well. \$135/ night in low season; 360-437-7791 or beachgetawayonoakbay.blogspot.com.

Or try the nearby Beach Cottages on Marrowstone Island, \$90-\$140 in low season, with \$110 special through mid-March; 800-871-3077 or beachcottagegetaway.com.

Fort Flagler State Park on Marrowstone Island has rental quarters in historic military buildings. parks.wa.gov/vacationhouses/ftflagler/

There is seasonal camping at Fort Flagler, Fort Townsend and Fort Worden state parks (parks.wa.gov) and at Jefferson County's Oak Bay Park (countyrec.com/info/facilities).

RESTAURANTS:

Ajax Cafe is at 21 N. Water St., Port Hadlock. 360-385-3450 or ajaxcafe.com.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS:

Finnriver Farm and Cidery, Chimacum, 360-732-4337 or finnriver.com.

MORE INFORMATION:

Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce, 360-385-7869 or jeffcountychamber.org