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Site updated Monday, October 23, 2006 07:52 AM

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TRAVEL



NEWS photo Cindy Goodman Looking south from South Pender towards the San Juan Islands. The international border with the United States is one kilometre away.

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A TALE OF TWO ISLANDS

Pender splendour

- The Pender Islands Handbook by Richard Fox. Printorium Books, 356 pages, \$24, www.penderhandbook.com.

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Richard Fox may not have been the most authoritative source when he started writing his new guide on North and South Pender Islands but he certainly is now.

After Fox became a six-month-a-year resident in 2002 he found that there was very little information available about his new home. He began compiling material for visitors and from that expanded his findings into a book which he published this summer.

"Every aspect was researched and re-researched," Fox says. "I started writing the book in '03 and each piece of information has been changed and updated several times. I'm obsessed with getting the information correct."

Known as a whale-watching, bird-watching, hiking, biking and boating paradise Fox puts the two Penders in perspective and breaks his 356-page guide down into Travel, Recreation and Life on Pender sections.

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The islands get a lot of visitors each year with the permanent population of 2,200 tripling in the summer months. Three-quarters of the residents live on the northern island which has a couple of residential subdivisions, a shopping centre and ferry terminal at Otter Bay.

BC Ferries arrives twice daily from Vancouver (usually making one or two stops at other Gulf islands) and seven times daily from Victoria (usually non-stop).

"There's a lot of Vancouver people who have cottages on Pender," says Fox. "The Friday afternoon ferry is called the Party Boat because everybody knows each other. Those boats are crowded all year round."

In the travel section of his new book Fox goes into a lot of detail about restaurant options. Although there isn't a lot of variety available what's there is usually of a high quality, he says. "They are all geared to vacationers who want a nice meal out. Islanders is a favourite on the island. It has a nice view, great ambience and wonderful food. Georgina does all the cooking herself and she's a fantastic cook. It's up from the ferry terminal on MacKinnon Rd. I usually go there with visitors if they want to go to a nice restaurant because you always have a great experience there. The food is consistently excellent. I often go to Pistou (in the Driftwood Shopping Centre) in winter. It's great for a special dinner or a gourmet quick lunch at a reasonable price. Their chef Pierre is excellent." The waterfront Hope Bay Caf, is another good bet for a quality meal with a great view.

Both those restaurants are on North Pender with the only options in the south at Poet's Cove Resort which has two restaurants. Syrens is affordable and a fun place to go, while Aurora is pricier and better suited for special occasions.

The handbook's travel section also has a shopping and services guide as well as wedding planner for those planning to get married on the islands.

When you're talking about shopping on Pender you're mainly talking about the Driftwood Shopping Centre. Located in the centre of North Pender Island it's got all the action - liquor store, gas station, bank, pharmacy, True Value supermarket, Talismans bookstore and just about everything else you will need for your stay. If you can't find it at the Driftwood you'll probably have to go off-island to get it. "A lot of Penderites lament that it's not on the water like Ganges but I guess they had to do that for costs when they set it up. In the '90s we got a regular supermarket. It used to be a very small market and in the '90s True Value moved in and now we have a top quality market. It seems there's one of everything on the island and they are all pretty good quality. The new waterfront Hope Bay store also has some nice shops."

The recreation guide highlights everything that is special about the Pender experience. Whale watching the orcas in J, K and L pods is at the top of his list of things to do. "A lot of people on the island are part of a telephone tree," says Fox. "People on South Pender call people up the coast and people keep calling each other so everybody is notified and they know to race down to the various whale watching points if they don't live on the coast. You have to

know that they're coming sometimes. The whales only come by at most once a day in summer and if you don't happen to be there at a vantage point you'll miss them."

Bird-watching is also equally rewarding. Fox has been following generations of eagles since he arrived on Pender. One giant eagle's nest near Otter Bay provides a visual feast for passersby. Kayak Pender Island guides point out the nest as they paddle along the coast south from the ferry terminal.

One of Pender's best-kept secrets is the 27-hole Golf Island Disc Park in Magic Lake Estates. "Everybody loves that. It's fantastic," says Fox. "We've dragged people there because a lot of people are skeptical but everybody's thrilled that plays there. It's probably one of the best courses anywhere of that type. A lot of frisbee golf courses are in a field with no trees. They just put up the baskets in a park whereas in this one they've created fairways through the forest and it's just amazing. We're really lucky to have that here." The challenging course, first developed in 1982, winds around a hill and has more in common with the Grouse Grind than most other frisbee golf courses. Founders Alex Fraser, Dave Watson and Doug Keating made sure there were no easy shots but nothing is impossible either. It's a lot of fun for all ages and so far they've managed to keep the course in operation without charging admission. "A lot of people don't realize that," says Fox. "It's free now but they keep warning if people vandalize and abuse that they might change it in the future. Alex Fraser's still around and the park has strong community support."

The main part of the recreation guide is a 75-page hiking and coastal access section with numbered trails that are cross-referenced throughout the book and on 25 maps complete with trails and topography.

Fox closes out the new handbook with information directed at those who live on Pender. After summer ends the islands don't close down and he focuses on the best year-round activities. Almost everyone on Pender seems to be involved in The Fall Fair, held in late August, and he also says New Year's Eve is a special time for residents. "The Lantern Festival on Magic Lake on New Year's Eve is really amazing. It's a full pageant with characters on stilts holding fire batons and marching to New Age music. Spectators are given sparklers and it ends up with a kayak ballet on the lake. I was impressed. The festival starts around 5 o'clock rain or shine."

The new Pender Islands handbook is a goldmine of information for residents and visitors alike. For more information go to www.penderhandbook.com.

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published on 10/22/2006

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