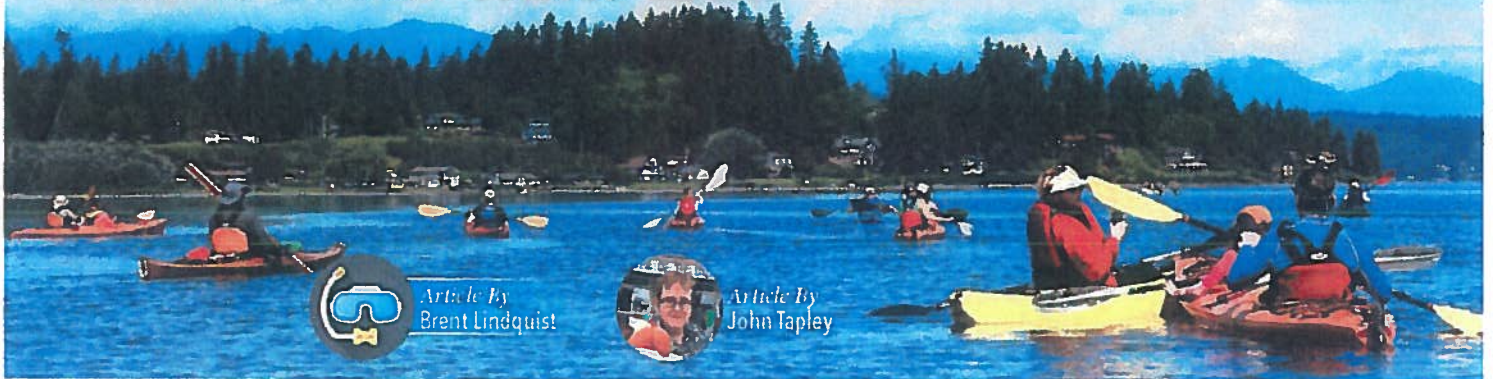


KITSAP PENINSULA

Blazes a New Water Trail



In just 30 minutes, visitors to Washington's Kitsap Peninsula can travel from sandy beaches and to the bright lights of the fastest-growing city in the United States. Combining prominent communities such as Bremerton, Port Gamble, and Kingston, the peninsula is almost entirely surrounded by water. That makes it perfect for a variety of water-based sports including diving, paddleboarding, and kayaking. In fact, the peninsula recently became one of very few places in the country to feature a nationally recognized water trail for adventurers to paddle.

Patty Graf-Hoke is the executive director of Visit Kitsap Peninsula. Founded in 1983, Visit Kitsap Peninsula is dedicated to spreading the word about the peninsula and its attractions.

"We love the idea that people are able to have the best of both worlds without having to travel a great distance," she says. "You can enjoy the bright city lights in Seattle and come over and enjoy the moonlight in Appleseed Cove."

Kingston

Located on the north end of the peninsula, Kingston boasts an impressive port and marina, which offers a prime waterfront facility for recreational and leisure activities: adventurers can launch off the dock and return for plenty of amenities such as

overnight moorage, restroom facilities, Wi-Fi access, covered picnic shelters, and more.

When it comes to diving, northern Kitsap offers Appleseed Cove, situated near Kingston, which boasts uniquely warm water. According to Beth Brewster, owner of Kingston Adventures, unlike most of Puget Sound, it is warm enough to swim in during the summer months; that warmth is accomplished via a sequence of natural steps.

"Most of Puget Sound is just way too cold any time of the year to swim in, but the tide comes in and then completely clears the cove each day. You have this crystal clear water that comes in slowly and rolls in over the sand that's been baking in the sun all day at a pretty slow rate," she explains. "It's kind of getting heated up as it's rolling in, so it creates this pocket of just really nice warm water to swim in."

Kingston Adventures rents out paddleboards and kayaks, which visitors can use on the area's unusually clear water. The company offers bioluminescence in the summer, providing views of glowing fish and the tracers they leave behind them.

Also located in Kingston, Hula Kai Adventures specializes in scuba diving. Its owner, Jim Gunderson, used to be a research diver at the University of Hawaii. Hula Kai offers dive training, tours, and travel.

"We focus on the most important thing, and that's the student themselves," Gunderson says. "We don't have any manufacturer's quotes or anything like that to meet."

Port Orchard

While Kingston is on the north end of the peninsula, Port Orchard is nestled further south. Here, the charming waterfront opens

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of the peninsula, and is a prime destination for fishing and taking in some spectacular panoramas of nature. Throughout the city, and along the coast, plenty of parks allow for convenient relaxation, and many of them offer water access. Add to these features the city's large marina and naval shipyard – Bremerton should be on any adventurer's short list.

"Bremerton has really interesting views of the mothballed Navy aircraft carriers, majestic views of the Olympic Mountains and has fun tidal current to work within the Port Washington Narrows," Casey says. "It's an under-paddled destination and offers a lot of nice, unique views."

Poulsbo

Resting on Liberty Bay, Poulsbo was founded by Norwegian and Scandinavian immigrants in the 1880s – this heritage is proudly displayed throughout the streets and shores of this charming city. "Little Norway", as it is nicknamed, offers three marinas and a harbor for superb anchorage, and plenty of parks ready for fishing adventures.

Marc Abshire has only been working as the director of the Poulsbo Chamber of Commerce for about six months, but he's already well-versed in the many recreational offerings around the city.

"It's just a wonderful place to be because

you're surrounded by water. We're practically an island ourselves," he says. "There's quite a bit of kayaking in Liberty Bay, and there are outdoor businesses located on the docks. There's a lot of wildlife to see and interact with on a kayak."

Silverdale

According to Kuntz, Silverdale stands out as a retail center on the peninsula: the Kitsap Mall, and a nearby REI outdoor center, make a great shopping destinations before, after, or between Kitsap adventures. Back to nature, guests can enjoy Silverdale's easy beach access, stunning views of Mt. Rainier, and beautiful scenic water trails. The area became famous among water recreationists in the late 1990s when three pods of orca whales stuck around the water near Silverdale feeding on chum salmon.

Water Trails

Spanning 371 miles of ideal waters for paddling, the Kitsap Peninsula Water Trails (KPWT) are officially open all year, 24 hours a day. Along these trails, guests can take in the full bounty of aquatic excursions the peninsula has to offer: easy access, scenic views, occasional mammal encounters, and much more.

In June 2014, the KPWT gained the distinction of joining the National Water Trails System: a network of recognized

water trails and collaborative effort to share information impacting these areas. It is the only salt-water water trail in the United States; one of only 27 such trails nationwide; and one of only two water trails on the West Coast. According to Graf-Hoke, the water trails stretch even further than Kitsap County, and go into nearby Pierce and Mason counties.

Kuntz has been involved with the KPWT program since its inception, and is excited to help plan the upcoming Kitsap Peninsula Water Trails Festival, which will feature an official acceptance of the designation: local dignitaries and persons involved with the National Water Trails System will help commemorate the celebration. Taking place June 27 at Silverdale Waterfront Park, the event will also include many paddling and kayaking activities for the entire family, and a five-mile paddle poker run, Ride the Tide, complete with plenty of prize opportunities.

For more information on these events, and to register for the poker run, visit Olympic Outdoor Adventures' website at www.olympicoutdoorcenter.rezgo.com.

Water adventures abound in one of Washington's top class locales. Whether in it, on it, or under it, aquatic explorers of all stripes should add the Kitsap Peninsula to their short list of upcoming destinations. They won't be disappointed. ■

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