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Seabrook

A Bucolic Destination On the Washington Coast



TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM DAVIS

After the three-hour drive from Kingston through vast differences in topography and aged towns, Seabrook almost jolts you awake, exuding charm, fresh ocean air and a pretty, decidedly Nantucket look. The first exploration downtown uncovers immaculate streets, cute stores and smiles. As you make your first drive around the 500-plus home village, you experience the very carefully curated architecture and layout, designed at every turn to encourage walking and biking by calming traffic. From crushed oyster shell driveways to parking behind homes with accommodations for two to 23 guests, this designed beach town has much to offer.

Perhaps it's best to start with what Seabrook is or was designed to be. According to the town's website, "Seabrook was built with a foundation of new urbanism design, seamlessly connecting the urban and natural

environments on a scenic bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Conceived in 2004 by Casey and Laura Roloff and modeled after Seaside, Florida [where the imaginative movie "Truman" was filmed], Seabrook was designed to accommodate both full-time residents and home rentals."

The homes in Seabrook were built to exact design standard to fit in, but not be identical. To the eye, it works, with just enough variety so as not to look Hollywood backstage. With about half of the homes available for short-term rental (most are dog-friendly), the idea was to offer a beach town experience with all the amenities only a short two and a half hours from Seattle and three from Portland.

Unlike the California and Oregon coast, Washington's coastal topography does not lend itself to a highway spanning its length. In fact,

the longest stretch of continuously running road on our 157-mile coastline is a mere 33 miles. As such, the state's coast doesn't offer near as many "destination" spots as our neighbors to the south. Ocean Shores and Westport are among the few other locations where you can vacation at the beach with services. And while these are very nice places to visit, they don't offer the unique vibe and many activities that Seabrook brings to the beach game.

But that uniqueness is not for everyone. It must be said that some call Seabrook a bit "too planned" or "Disney-ish." My bride and I wanted to see for ourselves.

A Stay with a View

We visited "Washington's Beach Town" in September of last year with our small pup, Josie, during a weather-perfect three days. Coming from the north on Highway 109, the



beach oasis of Seabrook greets you with signs encouraging visitors to “shop, dine and stay.” We stayed in the town center, in a beautiful townhouse located above one of the village’s cute stores.

Nicknamed (all homes have a moniker) “Top Shelf,” the two-story, three-bedroom, two-bath unit was very well equipped and offered a balcony situated above Market Street, the very heart of the village. We preferred this location since it was no more than two blocks from any one of the town’s seven food and dining locations as well as all the shops.

From our balcony, we could see the beach, feel the vibe of the town center and notice the family-friendly design. We saw more kids on bikes, skateboards and scooters (thankfully child-powered, not the all-too-ubiquitous electric ones) than we had in years. The speed limit through town is 10 miles per hour, and since so many visitors are families, it seems that ➤



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respect for this limit is organic.

Although we were downtown, the farthest home currently being built from the village center is less than a 30-minute walk away, further encouraging bicycle transportation. As you cruise through the town to experience its layout, you notice that the planners were careful to leave groups of the original tree growth to prevent a feeling that the development started with a clear-cut.

Exploring the Destination

So, what makes Seabrook a destination? Family amenities abound. This is a beach town, so let's start there.

The town is up from the beach, so all homes require a manageable stair and trail walk down to the sand. But when you get to the beach, it's simply amazing. We walked it when it was at mid tide and the expansiveness is incredible.

The fall is so gentle that from the trailhead to the water was probably around a quarter mile, and the view both north and south is endless — literally miles and miles. And we had that entire space to ourselves. At its very busiest, it's hard to imagine this beach feeling crowded. In fact, the beach alone makes the trip worthy. And note that there is a beach toy rental service in town, Buck's Northwest, which can outfit your crew with skimboards, surfboards, neoprene gear, clam digging kits and mountain bikes. Oh, and surfing

lessons as well.

Inevitably, the kids will say, "What's next?" — so back to town. Seabrook offers over 15 miles of trails, 4 miles for hiking, 4.4 for mixed use and 7 for mountain biking. The area boasts more than 20 parks; 15-plus outdoor fire pits; and outdoor game courts for tennis, pickleball, basketball, horseshoes and shuffleboard. Looking for freshwater swimming? There are both outdoor and indoor pools. There are also future plans for a small inn and more shopping.

Shopping and Dining

Shopping is sport for many, so the village center fills that need as well with at least 10 retail merchants serving up home goods, women's and men's clothes, candles, toys, Seabrook-branded clothes and swag and more. The goods are original and of great quality, well worth your time.

All this activity inevitably results in a need for sustenance. For that, Seabrook offers three proper "sit-down" dining locations, Rising Tide Tavern, Frontager's Pizza and Koko's Restaurant and Tequila Bar. All are open seven days a week.

The tavern serves up hearty pub-style food with the expected solid beer list and a surprisingly creative cocktail list. Frontager's Pizza will please the family, serving very good pizzas and a few pasta dishes.

The restaurant with a buzz was Koko's. Both friends who had stayed here and locals we spoke with sang



praises to this modern Latin restaurant, and Koko's didn't disappoint. While the other restaurants were decidedly quiet on our midweek September visit, Koko's was full up and lively, with many waiting for a table.

Our reservation had us seated directly, and we promptly received the creative menu and excellent margaritas. Every dish we were served was substantial, delicious and satisfying, and the cocktails were original and generous. Service was friendly, but focused. We felt that the price was fair.

Additional food stops include a wine bar offering a great selection of various-size pours and small bites. There is an excellent bakery, which also serves as the go-to for hot breakfast; a juice and salad bar spot; and the perfunctory ice cream shop, appropriately named The Sweet Life.

And, of course, a grocery store. Opened just a few months before our visit, Fresh Foods Market is sparkling, offering full- or self-service checkout



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and a full-service meat counter. We were pleasantly surprised at the low prices. One of the owners said that they operate three other stores on the Oregon coast and decided to offer like pricing here regardless of Seabrook's destination status. Refreshing.

So, who owns homes here that are not rented? A woman who works in one of the shops said that she and her husband were living in the Midwest several years ago and looking for a

change. They were recent empty nesters, and her husband had a remote-work job. Friends talked them into visiting Seabrook and in one visit, they decided to buy and move here. Years later they have no regrets and still love their move. And she claims that their story is not unique here.

Can bucolic be built? After three days in Seabrook, it seems that it wasn't built so much as planted, nurtured and carefully raised.

Seabrook, at its age, is showing just enough patina to come across as sincere and real. With half of its 500 homes occupied by permanent residents, it's not a seaside resort as such — but a welcoming, safe, clean and beautiful respite on a stunning Washington coast that has too few destination locations.

We loved our time here and encourage West Sound residents to make the short trek. It's well worth it. ♦