The San Juan Islands

Junior reporter Liam Mellor and his parents visited the San Juan Islands. The San Juan Islands are on the north-west coast of America – about 100 kilometres north of Seattle, USA, and a short boat trip from Victoria, Canada. With tall, green forests, blue water and pretty white houses, the islands are very beautiful. But are they a good place for a holiday?

There are 172 islands in the area, but a lot of them are very small, and most tourists visit the four main islands: San Juan Island, Orcas Island, Shaw Island and Lopez Island. We stayed in Friday Harbor, on San Juan Island. When we arrived at our hotel, there was no TV or WiFi! ‘I’m going to be very bored here,’ I thought. But I was wrong!

There are lots of different things to do on the main islands. Shaw Island is very small, so you can walk around it in a day and visit interesting places like an old monastery. Lopez Island is a great place to go cycling. On Orcas Island, you can buy great food at the Eastsound Saturday market – and listen to some cool local bands. San Juan Island is a great place to take tours. Most fishing tours and kayak trips leave from Friday Harbor.

My dad’s really interested in history, so he took us to the Pig War Festival at the National Historical Park on San Juan Island. For a few days every July, actors at the park wear costumes from the 1850s to re-enact the story of the Pig War. In 1859, an American man shot an English pig because it ate one of his potatoes. That started a 12-year conflict between Britain and America – but fortunately only the pig was shot!
Orca whales visit the San Juan Islands from May to October. Some of these magnificent animals are eight metres long and weigh more than six tonnes – and they often jump out of the water. We saw them from a kayak! They came very close to us, but they weren’t dangerous.

Another great activity on San Juan Island is going on a zip line (a very long cable down a hill). They connect you to the cable, and then you go down it, very fast! We went on a three-hour zip line tour of the island, and it was fantastic. We flew over trees, lakes and rivers at about fifty kilometres an hour! It was my favourite tour on the islands, but my parents hated it!
After seven days in Friday Harbor, we caught the boat back to our hometown: Seattle. I was sad to leave the beautiful San Juan Islands. I lived without the Internet and TV for a week – but I had lots of fun, and I really want to visit the islands again.