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# Whidbey

## IS FOR LOCAVORES

Penn Cove  
sunrise.

M. DENIS HILL/COURTESY WHIDBEY & CAMANO ISLAND TOURISM



Halibut with sorrel and white asparagus, at the Inn at Langley.

COURTESY THE INN AT LANGLEY

*Visitors to Whidbey Island's farms and restaurants discover the true meaning — and delicious flavor — of locally sourced cuisine.*

STORY BY ALLEN COX

**T**HE TERM “LOCAVORE” sprouted up in English vernacular in 2005, tossed around by such heavyweight authors as Jessica Prentice and Barbara Kingsolver. But in case it’s new to you, it means to eat locally grown and produced food. It’s up to the locavore to determine what is local, typically defined by a radius in distance from where you are chewing and swallowing. In the case of an island, it’s simple. The boundaries are defined by the shoreline and the surrounding sea.

As islands go, Whidbey Island in Puget Sound is locavore central. This long, scenic island is known for its Penn Cove mussels and oysters that are sought around the globe. According to island Chef Matt Costello of The Inn at Langley: “Whidbey Island has the most beautiful, sweet, petite mussels in the world.” Add fine local wines, artisan cheeses, and wholesome heirloom produce extinct at most supermarkets, and you have a culinary paradise.

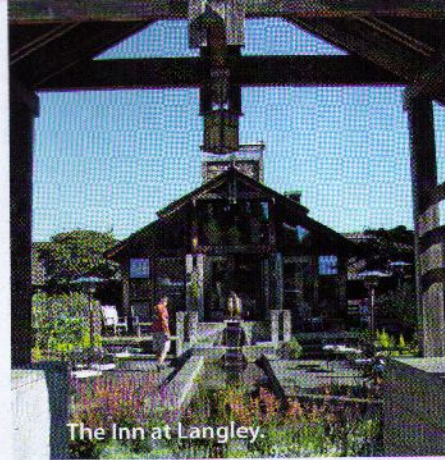
There are many ways to dip your spoon in the island’s local food scene. If you packed your boots, farm visits are a favorite. Friendly farmers abound on Whidbey, from veggie farmers who are resurrecting sought-after heirlooms, to goat cheese farmers, to beekeepers and more. And most of them love to talk about what they do and show your family around the farm.

One of the newest farming operations to pop up on the island is Little Brown Farm. Vickie Brown, a one-time CFO with a consuming corporate life, decided it was time for a change. She had visions of goats. And cheese. She knew how to run a business, but milking a goat and complying with stringent health regulations in the cheese production process would require mentoring. Brown found a mentor,



Penn Cove oyster harvest.

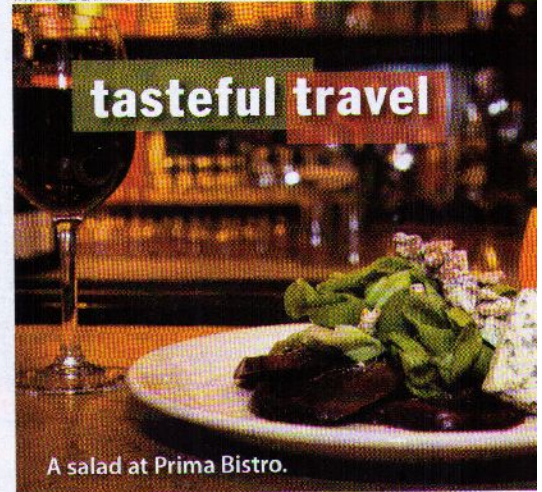
WHIDBEY & CAMANO ISLAND TOURISM



The Inn at Langley.

ALLEN COX

WHIDBEY & CAMANO ISLAND TOURISM



A salad at Prima Bistro.

bought a herd of 30, set up shop and just over a year later is producing some of the finest chevre, feta, brie, ashed pyramid, and blue cheese in the Northwest.

“Since I started raising goats my blood pressure has dropped,” Brown says. “They are very calming.” By appointment, Brown will introduce you to her “girls,” and will show-and-tell the cheese-making process (with tastes if she hasn’t sold out.)

Nearby, at an old homestead farm in historic Ebey’s Prairie, Georgie Smith carries on the family tradition. The fourth-generation island farmer and her farmhands plant and harvest 8 acres of abundance entirely by hand. Her heirloom vegetables are sought after by the island’s new crop of chefs who strive to serve local, seasonal, organically grown ingredients to their customers—chefs like Joe Scott, owner of Oystercatcher Restaurant in Coupeville, whose menu depends on what’s fresh from island farms. “Agritourism and culinary tourism are evolving fast on Whidbey,” Scott says. “In a few years, I hope to source entirely from the island.”

Scott and other chefs are agents in making that happen. They collaborate with farmers to grow the ingredients they want to serve. A locally grown program, Whidbey Island Grown, promotes island agricultural products and has been instrumental in putting the island on the map as a locus of local food.

For those who prefer one-stop shopping to making appointments for farm visits, Whidbey Island has five seasonal farmers’ markets where island farm products and artisan foods are the hot ticket. Whidbey farmers also offer a free annual farm tour (September 17 & 18), where visitors can drive from one participating farm to another, talking with farmers and learning about where real food comes from, a great experience for kids (and adults) from urban areas who assume cows pump out milk already in the carton.

No matter where your island travels take you, you won’t be far from a chef who’s proud to feature local ingredients in his dishes. Langley is home to The Inn at Langley, where Chef Matt Costello is to island food what a conductor is to a symphony orchestra. His menu changes every day, and ingredients are either cultivated or foraged on the island. Even the restaurant’s art and furnishings are 100-percent Whidbey. When diners sit down for the single-seating experience, Costello tells his audience that a whole group of island providers contributed to dinner and he promises a real sense of place or terroir.

Costello then proceeds with what to many in the warm, stylish dining room is a magic act. He transforms simple, island ingredients into works of art with color, texture and, above all, the aromas and tastes of place—just as he’d promised. And he’s a bit of a mad scientist with a penchant for molecular gastronomy, putting a Wow! factor in local food that could turn even a hardened meat-and-potatoes guy into a celery-foam-slurping locavore. ■

## Whidbey + Wines

Local foods and wines go together like Romeo and Juliet, but with a happier ending. People are often surprised when they hear that Whidbey’s cool, sometimes damp climate is wine country. In fact it’s part of the Puget Sound American Viticultural Area. Six relatively new wineries have joined one of the state’s oldest wineries (Whidbey Island Winery) in turning the island into a notable wine region. Growers are excelling in the varieties that thrive in Whidbey’s climate and soil, particularly Madeleine Angevine, Madeleine Sylvaner and Siegerrebe, and even taking some calculated risks with Pinot Noir.

## When You Go

### GETTING STARTED

**Whidbey and Camano Islands Tourism**  
([www.whidbeycamanoislands.com](http://www.whidbeycamanoislands.com))

**Whidbey Farm Tour**  
([www.whidbeyfarmtour.wordpress.com](http://www.whidbeyfarmtour.wordpress.com))

**Winery touring**  
([www.whidbeyislandvintners.org/map.htm](http://www.whidbeyislandvintners.org/map.htm))

### LOCALLY SOURCED FOODS

**The Inn at Langley**  
(360-221-3033; [www.innatlangley.com](http://www.innatlangley.com))

**Prima Bistro**  
(360-221-4060; [www.primabistro.com](http://www.primabistro.com))

**The Oystercatcher** (360-678-0683;  
[www.oystercatcherwhidbey.com](http://www.oystercatcherwhidbey.com))

**Fraser’s Gourmet Hideaway**  
(360-279-1231; [www.frasersgh.com](http://www.frasersgh.com))

**Bayleaf** (wine, cheese, and deli)—Two locations, in Coupeville (360-678-6603) and Oak Harbor (360-675-6600). ([www.bayleaf.us](http://www.bayleaf.us))

### LOCAL LODGINGS

**Saratoga Inn** (866-749-5565;  
[www.saratogainnwhidbeyisland.com](http://www.saratogainnwhidbeyisland.com))

**Boatyard Inn** (360-221-5120;  
[www.boatyardinn.com](http://www.boatyardinn.com))