

COMMUNITY PROFILE

SALT SPRING ISLAND BRITISH COLUMBIA

Based on 2001 census data



Location, climate, topography:

Salt Spring Island, the largest of the Gulf Islands, has a land mass of 182 square kilometers and a moderate climate influenced by the surrounding waters. It is located southwest of Vancouver, almost due north of Victoria, and southeast of Nanaimo. Access is by three BCFC ferry routes – one from Tsawwassen on the mainland, one from Crofton on Vancouver Island, and one from Swartz Bay on Vancouver Island 20 kilometers north of Victoria – as well as by float plane from the mainland with several scheduled flights daily, weather permitting.

A great deal of the island is mountainous and forested, with farming to be found in the valleys and wherever there is suitable soil. There are eleven fresh water lakes, miles of rural winding country roads, an abundant deer population, eagles soaring overhead, all in the middle of one of the most scenic boating areas in the hemisphere.

Governance:

The CRD (Capital Regional District) provides governance and services for Salt Spring, defined as an electoral area because of its unincorporated status and designated as “Capital F”. Besides creating partnerships between member municipalities and electoral areas for specific services or projects, the CRD is responsible for by-law enforcement, building inspection, parks and recreation, water supply, sewage disposal, garbage and recycling.

The Islands Trust, set up by the province under the Municipal Act, deals primarily with land use issues.

VIHA (Vancouver Island Health Authority) is responsible for septic systems, health inspections, the Lady Minto Hospital, and health care.

A variety of provincial government agencies are responsible for fire, roads, education, taxation, etc.

Any other form of organization – i.e., transportation, library, or a specific issue such as Gypsy Moth infestation, logging of ecologically sensitive areas, etc. is done by volunteer committees. This multi-level governance causes not only confusion of the local citizens, but at times leads to gaps in service.



Willis Stark, his hound, and an unfortunate cougar,
Circa 1880

History:

Salt Spring Island has been a seasonal home of the First Nations of the Coast Salish language group since the time of European settlement, and evidence suggests that permanent settlements existed for centuries before that on the south coast of the island where the Tsawout Band Reserve is today. The Wsanec people of the Saanich Peninsula and the Cowichan people from the Cowichan Valley frequented the island's shores and harvested its resources.

The island was explored by the Spanish and British in the 1700's and settled in the 1850's by pioneers who had abandoned the Fraser River gold rush hopes. A group of slaves, who had purchased their liberty in the United States, arrived at Vesuvius in 1857.

Further black settlers, mainly from California, were in turn followed by European immigrants from Portugal and Scandinavia, and British and Hawaiian (Kanakas) settlers originally recruited by the Hudson's Bay Company. As well, many Japanese settlers arrived on the island to fish. There are still descendants of all these groups living on Salt Spring Island.

In the 1960's and 1970's, many young people moved to the island attracted by the carefree, artisan lifestyle and the mild climate. During the Vietnam War, the "hippie" lifestyle attracted many draft dodgers and those opposed to the US-lead war.

Population:

Census figures list the population of Salt Spring as

9249 in 1996

9279 in 2001

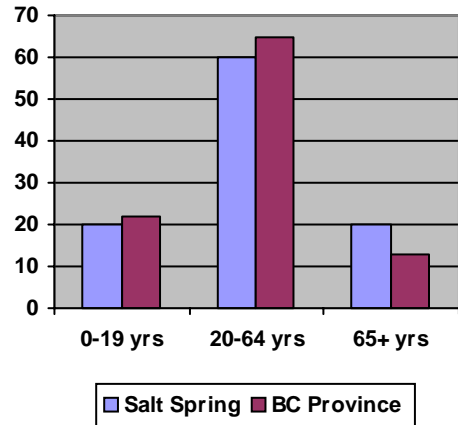
9640 in 2006*

Which translates to a population density per square kilometer of

50.9 in 2001

52.9 in 2006*

** Beyond these figures and the numbers of private dwellings, there is no further information from the 2006 census.*



Using the 2001 population figure of 9279, the Salt Spring population breaks down to 20% in the 0-19 bracket, 60% in the working years bracket age 20-64, and another 20% in the senior bracket 65+.

This compares to province wide figures of 22% in the 0-19 bracket, 65% in the working years, and 13% retired seniors.

So Salt Spring has slightly fewer in the youngest bracket and in the workforce, but half again as many in the over-65 category as indicated for the the province in general.

Population densities occur in the villages of Fulford Harbour in the south, Vesuvius on the western shore, Fernwood on the eastern shore, and the largest in Ganges, centrally located with a very busy harbour that has float planes coming and going, the Coast Guard Station, the Government Dock, two marinas, the reception point for incoming heavy cargo, and myriad mooring spaces for local boats. In the summer, so many boats anchor out that a small “water taxi” plies the harbour to take people to and fro.

Ganges is the heart of the island with shops and services, banks, a grocery store, the liquor store, art galleries, the Market in the Park on Saturdays, as well as the library, ArtSpring (our arts centre), schools and school board offices, plus the hospital, the RCMP detachment and the soon-to-be finished indoor pool on the perimeter. When somebody is going into town, they are going to Ganges. Otherwise, they will “just pop down to the village “.

New densities are occurring in the north (St Mary’s Highlands) and on the outskirts of Ganges at Bullock Lake Estates.

The People:

Present day Salt Spring is a polyglot mixture of races, creeds, cultures, and ages, all of whom tend to be independent thinkers. This can lead to arguments, and Salt Springers are good at that. It has been said that Salt Spring is a difference of opinion surrounded by water.

Yet, it is also a very tolerant society, perhaps because we live so closely together and are exposed to the values and eccentricities of our neighbours. Craftsmen, actors, authors, farmers, cheese-makers, bakers, restaurant owners, fishermen – all rub elbows together. It is not uncommon to meet your physician or your dentist in the grocery store or the video shop. The gay sector is both active and open, a pair earning the “Business of the Year” award from the Chamber of Commerce. Nationally known celebrities move freely and participate in community affairs on a first name basis without special favour.

Contributing to the community is a way of life. Volunteering is almost universal, and many are involved in two or three volunteer activities, as it provides the satisfaction of a job well done, the feeling of being useful, opportunities for socializing, and that wonderful, warm, fuzzy sense of knowing you have helped someone else. The “Rants and Roses” column in the local paper is used to the maximum with the “roses” outnumbering the “rants” by about 15 to 1. Many folks have come to visit and decided to stay because of what they term “the love and caring” shown them.

Children are cherished. One of our core group brings her not-yet-one-year-old son to meetings, and we are all delighted. Volunteer coaches do a tremendous job with soccer, swimming, hockey, golf, track, football, sailing, and farming. The skateboarders have a park of their own thanks to huge support in terms of know-how, labour, and materials (including a truckload of cement) while they provided the vigor of youth and the enthusiasm to see a dream come true.

Seniors, as well as the ill or incapacitated, have hot meals delivered five days a week by Meals-on-Wheels volunteers with special goodies added on holidays by individuals and church groups. Seniors also have their own building housing the Seniors for Seniors group with social events, card sessions, computer lessons, and hot lunches for the more mobile. Every Christmas there is a turkey dinner with all the fixings given free of charge to any member of the community in need, and everyone from infants to alternate lifestyle folk to seniors enjoys a sit-down Christmas dinner with an eclectic group of people.

Minorities:

Visible minorities (a census category) on Salt Spring account for about 2% of the population. This is included as a separate item only because of the great interest in literacy for minorities. For BC as a whole, the number is 22%.

Comment: Prior to starting work on the Literacy inventory, both of us compiling the inventory, long term residents, “knew” that Salt Spring had aboriginal territories but had no resident aboriginals. We were proven wrong on our first contact with the Superintendent of School District 64. When we asked him to explain why the School District had just signed an Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement promoting academic excellence for aboriginal students, he said we probably did not know of our aboriginal population, in spite of our many years on the island, because the First Nations people did not live in enclaves or on reservations, but were so assimilated into the community that they did not classify themselves as Aboriginal. He added that these students were equal or more advanced than their non-aboriginal peers, and that they now proudly proclaimed themselves as First Nations people – with a picture in the local paper the following week to prove it.

Language:

English only, as the first language learned and still understood, is predominate, by far, with 89% of the island population falling in this category, compared to 63% throughout British Columbia.

Religion:

Approximately 50% of Salt Spring residents list “no affiliation” when asked about religion. Another 33% list Protestant, while the province shows 42% with “no affiliation” and 34% Protestant. Clearly, there are other denominations present in smaller numbers. Salt Spring has Catholics, Mormons, Unitarians, Baha’i, Gospel, Pentocostal, Jehovah’s Witness, spiritualists, and Wiccans, among others.

Education:

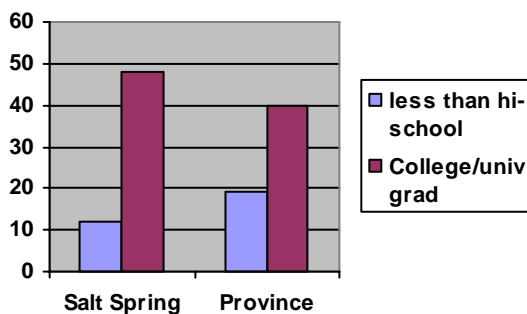
School District 64, headquartered on Salt Spring, also includes several of the less populous outlying islands that may have pre-school, kindergarten, and elementary schools locally, but send the high school students to Salt Spring. Students may come daily via water taxi or float plane, or they may come and board on Salt Spring for the week, returning home on weekends. There is an effort to supplement the outlying elementary schools with on-line instruction.

Evening courses on a secondary level are offered on Salt Spring, and there is a GED program. Further detail will be found in the "Inventory of Programs and Resources" available on Salt Spring, included later in this document.

Comment: School District 64 actively recruits international students and had 50 such in school year 2006-2007, boarding with local families They expect to have at least 70 in 2007-2008 from such far flung places as the US, Slovakia, Germany, Italy, Brazil, Mexico, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and perhaps Iceland. These students are enrolled in the normal curriculum supplemented by some extra hours of ESL (English as a Second Language).

While Salt Spring Literacy is primarily concerned with the literacy issues of island residents, we are aware of the educational experiences these students offer simply by being here and mixing with islanders.

Highest level of schooling:



The 2001 census data have figures for the "highest level of schooling" only for adults in the age bracket of 19-64, the years they would be expected to be in the workforce. Undoubtedly, some of the senior citizens have graduate degrees and/or college diplomas; however, the census does not reflect this rich resource.

Within the workforce, ages 20-64, those with less than a high school diploma amount to 12% on Salt Spring as opposed to 19% province wide. Islanders with a college diploma or university graduation are 48% compared to 40% for all of British Columbia.

As a community, Salt Spring is considerably better educated than the average for the province. Perhaps this accounts for the high degree of enthusiasm accorded our Literacy efforts and the expressed desire to see everyone have all the help needed to function adequately in their daily lives.

Housing:

Affordable housing is a big issue on Salt Spring. More and more we are seeing families with moderate and low incomes move off island because they can find no affordable place to live, and we are seeing an increased number of people who live off island and commute to work on Salt Spring for the same reason. The following figures were taken from the 2001 census and do not necessarily reflect the current situation.

	Salt Spring	Province
Total number of dwellings	4,195	1,534,335
Owned dwellings	3,355	1,017,490
Rented dwellings	840	512,365
Average monthly payment:		
Owner occupied dwellings	694	904
Rented dwellings	676	751
Average value of dwelling	274,598	230,645

Comment: Statistics will only take you so far. Comparing 2001 figures to 2006, Salt Spring added 936 dwellings (a 22% increase) but only 361 people (3.9% increase. So, do we have 575 dwellings sitting empty? Highly unlikely.

Some may be summer homes for those with a permanent address elsewhere or future homes of soon-to-be-retired people still at work elsewhere. Some may be newly established homes of residents who have matured to the stage of “getting my own pad”, or perhaps communal residents tired of sharing space. And some may be “vacation rentals” which will never be occupied by a permanent resident with a stake in the community – a belief that is widely held and hotly disputed by islanders. Of course, if there were errors in reporting, the statistics could be wrong.

All of this is supposition. Nobody knows for sure. What the statistics do tell us is that the number of dwellings on Salt Spring is increasing at a much faster rate than the number of people. Undoubtedly, the island is becoming less rural year by year.

Occupations:

It has been said of Salt Spring that, to make a living here, you either go into business for yourself or you work for the ferries – an exaggeration, of course, but with a grain of truth.

The island boasts an inordinate number of craftsmen (and women), for many of whom the craft is far more than a hobby, it provides their daily bread. Anyone visiting the summer-long “Artcraft Show and Sale” or the “Market in the Park” on summer Saturdays can attest to the variety and quality of crafts created on the “Crafty Island”. It is quite common for the artisans to work a part-time job, however menial it may be, and devote the remainder of their time to making and selling their crafts. In fact, many people work two jobs. A sheep farmer also runs a local business, a home care worker moonlights cleaning houses, a trained interpreter works as a waitress.

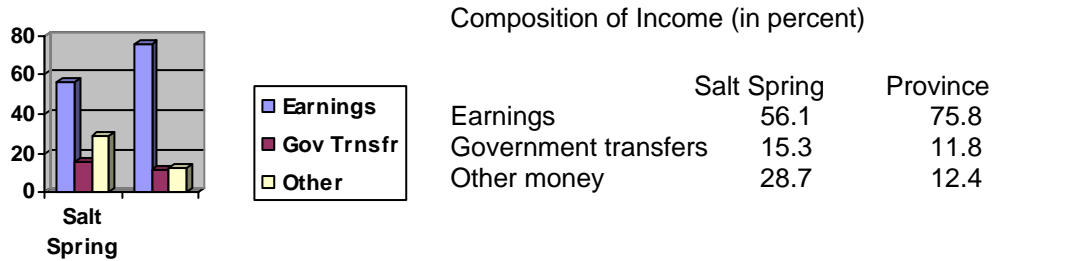
It is difficult to see how this kind of lifestyle fits into the categories outlined in the census data as shown below. Nevertheless, here is the data from the 2001 census in numbers of individuals engaged in each category.

	<u>Salt Spring</u>	<u>Province</u>
Sales and service	1130	514,985
Trades, transport & equipment operators, and related occupations	790	288,940
Management occupations	570	218,445
Art, culture, recreation, and sport	425	67,325
Occupations unique to primary industry *	380	84,525
Social science, education, government service, and religion	335	160,650

** Despite hours of research, no further definition of this category was found.*

Income:

There are millionaires on Salt Spring, and there are paupers. It is doubtful if anyone knows from whence either group derives income, much less that the census takers were informed. However, there are also all the people in between, and the 2001 census figures give us some information.



	<u>Salt Spring</u>	<u>Province</u>
Persons 15 years and older with income	7,575	2,990,520
Median total income	\$21,284	\$22,095
Median household income:		
One person households	\$22,439	\$23,703
Two or more person households	\$50,194	\$57,773
All persons with earnings (number of people)	5,045	2,128,545
Average earnings	\$22,800	\$31,544
Worked full time, full year (number of people)	1,625	1,024,240
Average earnings	\$35,369	\$44,307

Comment: Since Salt Spring has a high percentage of seniors, we would have liked to include retirement income in this profile, However, the census offers no data on retirement income unless that is included in the “other money” category shown above, along with, presumably, investment income and lottery winnings.

It is obvious that islanders make less money than their counterparts across B.C, yet their cost-of-living must reflect all the costs of getting people and materials delivered to the island. Real estate prices have doubled in the past decade, and it is commonplace to hear “If I had not bought my place when I did, I wouldn’t be able to live here now”. It is especially difficult for the low income families with children to raise, a couple or a single parent household, and for certain seniors who retired on fixed incomes.

Transportation to work:

Although Salt Spring has no public transportation (unless you count the ferries), the 2001 census includes 60 persons using public transit to get to work. One can only surmise that they must be working off island and take the bus when they leave the ferry.

The most common mode of getting to work on the island is, of course, to drive (2485 individuals). The second most common is to walk or cycle (295), and the third most common is as a passenger with another driver (265), either as a car pool member or as a hitch-hiker who just got lucky. Hitch-hiking is still a prevalent practice hereabouts, and there are more than a few who use it as their only means of transportation. That still leaves us with another 55 folks who have found “another method”, according to the census. Living on an island, this must mean going by boat – fishermen, caretakers on out island properties, those who care for docks and power lines and such on nearby islands only reached by private boat.

Dependency on tourism:

Salt Spring would not be the same without the tourists. Many marginal craftsmen and recreational businesses (kayakers and marinas, for instance) could not survive without it, and several restaurant owners would be tightening their belts. The shops do a major part of their yearly sales during the tourist season. They do bring congestion and some odd notions of rural behavior, but, by and large, they are warmly welcomed.

Hospital:

While there is no college or university on the island, we do have a small, but good, hospital that serves not only Salt Spring, but also the outlying islands with ambulance, helicopter, and/or water taxi available for severe cases they cannot treat. The hospital is treasured by residents. They have but to say they need new equipment for this or that, and islanders respond with their checkbooks. Our lives depend on that hospital and those dedicated people. We do not take them for granted.

Our Library:

Unique in British Columbia, the library is run by one part-time, qualified Chief Librarian in charge of about 150 volunteers working half day shifts, many of whom are qualified librarians in their own right, doing this in their retirement years. The library is a focal point of the community, providing programs and services that run the gamut from babies to seniors. Details are included in the Inventory later in this document.

The Arts:

Then there is ArtSpring, a building with a 250-seat theatre and meeting, rehearsal, display space for all of the arts. Students use it to showcase their dance, drama, and musical endeavors. Visiting artists of all descriptions, many well known nationally and internationally, are booked for performances. Art shows by students, amateurs, and professionals take place here. Local bands, choral groups, and solo performers are on the roster as well as theatre groups from on and off the island. The entire Community uses it. Salt Spring Literacy welcomed Leona Gadsby for her first visit there. Unfortunately, the weather was foul, the float plane never flew, and the visit was conducted via speaker phone.

Communication:

Salt Spring has a weekly paper, *The Driftwood*, complete with news of local happenings (which are often scooped by the island grapevine, but the *Driftwood* is a bit more accurate, and myriad letters-to-the-editor commenting on local concerns. There is a community cable channel, although the cable company has recently been acquired by Shaw Cable from Victoria, and the local cable efforts have suffered from the inattention of off-island owners. There are prospects for a local radio station on island, although it is not currently available.

Salt Spring Island Society for Community Education:

This is a non-profit, charitable society dedicated to offering, promoting, and maintaining an array of educational opportunities and experiences for the community of Salt Spring Island. Details of the program are located in the Literacy inventory.

Community Services:

Salt Spring Island Community Services Society (SSICSS) is a non-profit society that develops, promotes, and coordinates community services for Salt Spring Island, North and South Pender Islands, Mayne Island, and Galiano Island. Their services touch all aspects of island life, and SSICSS is the primary contact for the disenfranchised/homeless portion of our population. Their services and programs are catalogued in the Literacy inventory.

The homeless:

Attracted by the moderate climate, the beauty of the island, and the laid back lifestyle, many people subscribing to the “universe-will-provide” philosophy have migrated to Salt Spring. Unfortunately, they often wind up living in tents or flinging their sleeping bags on the ground. Islanders find this disconcerting as these folks tend not to participate in the day to day life of the island – yet, here they are, a part of our community. Perhaps because we are bounded on four sides by water, Salt Springers feel a great sense of looking after each other. They will bring necessities in a snowstorm and stay to plow the drive, but they don’t know what to do with those who opt out of the communal life of the island.

This has been dramatically demonstrated in our work with the literacy program. Everyone attending our Launch wanted every single person in our community to have help available when they needed it. No exceptions. They also wanted it done in a very practical way – no duplication of effort, no re-inventing the wheel, early detection of those in need, centralization of program and resource information, and a means of keeping everybody posted so they would know where to go for help when they saw a need.

**Salt Spring Literacy intends to do just that,
as fully as possible and as quickly as possible.**

