

OUTDOORS

Delta island delivers the goods

SOME PEOPLE crave a place that feels a million miles away, provides a great launching point for recreation and yet is just on the outskirts of the Bay Area.

It turns out that such a place is hidden amid the rivers, sloughs and cuts of the Delta. It is called **Saug Harbor**, where waterfront cabins, cottages and campsites with boat docks can provide the answer for which many are searching.

Saug Harbor is found at Ryer Island on the Delta, off Highway 12 near Rio Vista. This getaway is unique in many ways, and it starts with the trip to get here.

Once you turn off Highway 12 at Rio Vista, driving up along the Sacramento River, you immediately become aware that you are leaving the beaten path. It is only the start. At the sign for the Real McCoy Ferry, you drive onto a floating car platform, a little-cahiled ferry ride (free) that will transport you across the Sacramento River to Ryer Island.

The launch for your trip has thus begun, and it only gets better.

TOM STENSTRA

Getaway

After the ferry ride, it is only a few minutes to Saug Harbor, a privately operated resort with a campground, recreational-vehicle hookups and a separate area with cabins and a cottage. Some say that the waterfront sites with docks give the place the feel of a Louisiana bayou. Yet, everything is clean and orderly, including a marina, store and related facilities. It's an excellent base for exploring the boaters' paradise of the Delta.

Some of the year's best weather arrived this week — clear, warm and no wind. By using a boat, fishing rods, golf clubs or trying out one of the little pedal boats (free), you can sample this paradise.

The place is suited for a family outing, a romantic getaway or a boating or fishing adventure.

Saug Harbor offers "Park Model" cabins — that is, small cabins that have been built off-site then transported to the resort; they are cozy, clean and comfortable. There also

is a large three-bedroom, two-bath home on a peninsula.

Saug Harbor is an excellent location for fishing and water sports, especially water skiing, and this is one of the best times of the year for those activities.

Anglers will find good prospects for many species. Salmon migrating upstream in the Sacramento are now featured. The biggest checked last weekend weighed 38 pounds. Striped bass also are coming in large numbers to the Delta to spend the fall and winter, joining good numbers of resident largemouth bass and catfish.

What else could you ask for? How about 300 restaurants in the Delta accessible by boat?

Saug Harbor was awarded the designation "2001 Best Small Park" by the California Travel Parks Association and is one of 20 finalists for the national award, to be given in November. A better honor, however, is the sight of the smiling faces of the people visiting there.

Find Tom Stenstra at stenstrat@sfchronicle.com.

Saug Harbor Getaway

■ **COST:** \$10 for day-use. Lodging. Cabin for two, \$98/night; cabin for up to 12, \$240/night; \$30/all campsites, even RV sites with hookups. Major credit cards accepted.

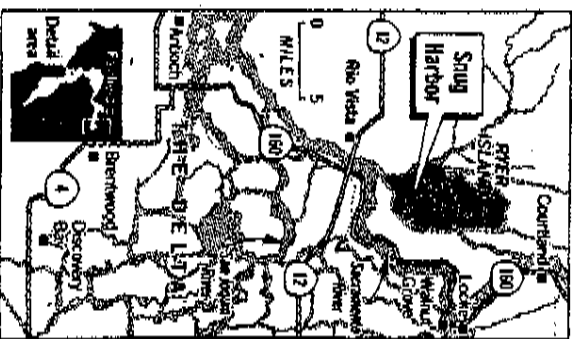
■ **FACILITIES:** Full-service marina, boat launch, store, barbecue, swimming beach, children's play area, arcade and movie room, paddle boats (free). Two golf courses within 10 miles.

■ **BOAT RENTAL:** Waterfies (will deliver), (916) 777-6431; Herman & Helen's, (209) 951-4634.

■ **FISHING:** Fish Hooker Charters, (916) 777-6498.

■ **DIRECTIONS:** From Bay Area, take I-80 to Fairfield Turn east on Highway 12 and drive to Rio Vista. Turn left on Front Street and go under bridge. To River Road, Turn right on River Road, drive two miles to Real McCoy Ferry (Signed Ryer Island). Take the ferry (free) across Sacramento River to Ryer Island and Levee Road. Turn right, drive 3.5 miles on Levee Road to find Saug Harbor on right.

■ **INFORMATION/RESERVATIONS:** (916) 775-1455, or www.saugharbor.net



Ocean views and other wonders of Bay Area campsites

Can you imagine waking up in your sleeping bag, poking your head out your tent and being greeted by a spectacular waterfront beach, the water lapping gently at the shore.

Then hearing a light scratching noise, quickly turning to scan the surrounding landscape, and spotting a dozen elk just 40 yards off, pawing at the ground, nibbling at fresh greenery.

Can you imagine doing this at a campsite in the Bay Area?

This is no dream. There's a place where fantasies like this come true. This scene can happen virtually any morning at the campsites along the west shore of Tomales Bay at Point Reyes National Seashore, where there are a series of boat-in camps set along sandy coves, ideal to reach by kayak or canoe.

Of the 50 campgrounds in the Bay Area, this is the best of them. Other camps feature redwoods forests, backpacking trail sites, ocean bluffs, stunning views, launch points for boating, and hidden spots within eyeshot of San Francisco. In most cases, reservations are required.

For the coming spring and summer season, here are my ratings:

1. Tomales Bay boat-in, Point Reyes National Seashore: There are 20 dispersed campsites nestled along the shore of Tomales Bay, from Tomales Point on south to just north of Indian Beach (at Tomales Bay State Park). This setting is gorgeous and quiet, and with Inverness Ridge to the west, sheltered from coastal winds. Opportunities for sea kayaking and canoeing are unparalleled in the region. Boaters must bring portable toilets. (415) 663-8054.

2. Kirby Cove, Marin Headlands: This is a drop-dead beautiful campsite set amid a small grove of eucalyptus and cypress. It is small and hidden, with space for just four tents, with a jaw-dropping view of the Golden Gate Bridge. San Francisco Headlands and



Tom Stienstra
Outdoors

7. Butano walk-in, Butano State Park: The reward here is a campsite secluded in dense redwoods in the coastal Santa Cruz Mountains, set on the threshold of excellent hiking. Very short walks are required to the best sites. (800) 444-7275.

8. Steep Ravine, Mount Tamalpais State Park: Ten primitive cabins are set on a bluff at Rocky Point, overlooking the ocean. That is why this is the most popular campsite in California, with reservations cleaned out within 10 minutes on the first day of each month. An additional half-dozen walk-in sites are exposed to coastal winds. (800) 444-7275.

9. Del Valle Regional Park: This is the best drive-to family campground in the Bay Area. The park features a recreation lake, boat ramp, boat rentals, swimming, fishing, biking and hiking and a wilderness trailhead. (510) 562-2267.

10. Snug Harbor, Sacramento River Delta: The best privately operated park by far in the Bay Area. The place sparkles and features park-model cabins, RV and tent campsites, boat launch, docks, and waterfront sites, with boat rentals available nearby. (916) 775-1455.

Others Bay Area campgrounds of significant note:

► **Marin:** Sky Camp, Coast Camp and Glen Camp at Point Reyes National Seashore, (415) 663-8054; Samuel-

SNUG HARBOR!

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River News & Herald

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*Tim Allen &
Snug Harbor
Staff*

Tim Allen Enjoys Delta

Tim Allen and friends stayed at Snug Harbor this past weekend, touring around the delta in their very fast boat, and joining in the Poker Run out of Tower Park. They also visited many local restaurants, to get a sense of the character of the delta. Pictured are Tim Allen (in hat, back center) and his friend Bret Gregory to his left. Snug Harbor staff include Spencer, Gene Tammy (with her daughter Carley), Adrienne and Vicki, along with Snug Harbor owner Nicky Suard along the bottom of

photo.

Allen enjoyed his peace and quiet at Snug Harbor, and on Sunday was very accomodating to some of the campers, even signing a large RV with his name and words like "Buz Lightyear" and words from his "Christmas movies".

Tim's friend Bret Gregory is very familiar with the Delta, having grown up summers in the delta at his parents vacation home at Oxbow Marina.



o, ho, ho: Adventures of the Delta

By Sarah Krupp
TIME STAFF WRITER

An adventurous traveler can find whatever the heart craves in the Delta, from camping and hiking to family resorts and historical adventures to quirky restaurants on an island of hedonism.

Grand Island Mansion

Where: Take Highway 4 to the Antioch toll bridge, which turns into Highway 160. At Lyde, turn left onto County Road 220. When it dead-ends at the river, turn right onto Grand Island Road. (Or just fly there: the mansion has a heliport.)

Why: This opulent Italian Renaissance-style villa in Walnut Creek was built in 1917 for Louis Lubin, a native of San Francisco, and his wife, Audrey, daughter of the Lubin of the Westlock Lubin department stores. The mansion is on an 800-acre ranch and is surrounded by manicured vineyards. It offers elegant three-course meals, pheasant and duck hunting excursions and guided fishing trips.

The 18-room mansion has a billiard room, bowling lane and elegant ballroom. The grounds include a tennis court, skatball court, pool, Jacuzzi, sauna, gym and docking facilities. For just a taste of the Grand Island Mansion, make reservations for its Sunday champagne brunch.

Contact: 916-775-1705 or www.grandislandmansion.com.

Lost Isle Bar & Resort

Where: There's only one way there: boat. It is at Light 24 on the San Joaquin River.

Why: Some call it Shangri-la, others an island of sin. The brightly colored buildings, palm trees, outdoor bar and volleyball court of Lost Isle are like a hedonistic mirage rising from the Delta. Although it's said to have quieted down in the past few years, the island, which is open Fridays through Sundays and is accessible only to those 21 and older, still promises a good time. It's a good place for barbecues and picnics. There is a swimming beach and grassy camp-



A PLACE TO MEAT: Foster's Big Horn Restaurant in Rio Vista will appeal to the serious carnivore. Bartender Tandy Vasquez chats with Debbie Palmer, center, and Bill Brockus.

ing areas.

Contact: 209-948-4135 or www.lostisle.com/html/home.html.

Snug Harbor

Where: Take Highway 12 to Rio Vista and hop on the free ferry to Ryer Island, home of Snug Harbor. For landlubbers coming from Sacramento, get on Jefferson Boulevard (Highway 84), turn right on Courtland and follow to Miners Slough bridge.

Why: Clustered on the waterfront of Ryer Island is a family-oriented resort with waterfront wooden cabins and recreational vehicle sites as well as tent camping. The island offers sandy beaches and bike riding, and is, of course, the perfect site to launch into the Delta for whatever suits the fancy. The bass fishing is good in the fall. During the summer, the warm Delta water is inviting for water-skiing, sailing, tubing and wind-surfing.

Contact: 916-775-1455 or www.snugharbor.net.



COZY AND FUN: Ryer Island's Snug Harbor is the place to go for family-type activities including biking, camping and fishing.

Delta Ferries

Where: For free ferry rides to Ryer Island, take Highway 12 to Rio Vista. Just to the west side of the entrance to the Rio Vista bridge, take the off-ramp that leads you to downtown. Go north along the west levee road of the Sacramento River to the ferry ramp.

Why: The ferries were essential modes of transportation in the 1800s. Many of the early ferries were guided across the water by rope or cable. Three of the five ferries still operating in the Delta are cable-drawn. Three ferries lead to private islands. But the two free ferries both go to