

Biking on Gabriola

Welcome to Gabriola! Here are a few insider tips for cycling on Gabe.

The ferry

Buy a ticket on the Nanaimo side; the return trip is free. Cyclists walk on/off with the foot passengers, before the cars are loaded/unloaded. Thanks to lobbying by Gabriola cyclists, bikes travel free with an Experience card.

Roads

A North Road–South Road circuit of the island is 27km. Cycling **counter-clockwise** around the island is (arguably) easier than clockwise.

Gabriola is all hills, with few flat stretches! The biggest:

- “Ferry Hill” climbs from the ferry to The Village. An unpleasant ride with a long line of disembarking cars roaring uphill beside you. Consider waiting till the cars have gone.
- Brickyard Hill, on South Road, is the steepest at 18% (going east is downhill).
- Horseshoe Hill (on North Road; downhill to the east)
- Many other hills, some long and steep, on the side roads into the centre of the island.

Our roads are **narrow**, with little or no shoulder. The shoulders come and go without sense or warning. Many road edges are poorly defined, some have a dangerous drop-off lip. Pay attention!

Many side roads are gravel, with potholes. There is moderate traffic—more in summer.

Cycling

Gabriola roads are winding — you don’t see cars coming up from behind, and they don’t see you till they’re close. This makes it problematic to ride two abreast — please don’t. Treat car drivers with respect — be courteous, make it easy for them to see you and get past you.

Be visible. Gabriola cyclists wear bright clothing and use a flashing rear light, even during the day. Our roads are dark at night — lights required!

Descanso Regional Park campground is on Taylor Bay Road, 0.8 km from the ferry.

WATER is in short supply. No public fountains, so carry some.

SHOPPING: “The Village” has most stores: head up Ferry Hill and veer off to the left (North Road). One small store at Silva Bay.

Driving on Gabriola

Welcome to Gabriola! Here are a few insider tips for driving on Gabe.

The ferry

Buy a ticket on the Nanaimo side; the return trip is free.

Check the Gabriola ferry-cam for queue length (ferrycam.clayrose.com). The queue builds quickly as departure time nears. Locals plan ahead to spend **30–60 minutes** in the queue.

JOINING THE FERRY QUEUE: The queue runs up Ferry Hill and turns along Taylor Bay Road. Whatever you do, join the line **at the end** — don’t butt in, even if it looks like there’s space. This is a VERY BIG DEAL on Gabriola.

Obey all the signs. U-turn only at the official turnaround — the hydro pole at Ivory Way (0.6 km from the corner). The pullout (150m from the corner) also works if the queue is short.

OVERLOADS — The Quinsam fits about 70 cars, packed tight. The blue “One sailing wait” sign 220m along Taylor Bay Rd. marks the approximate spot where you’ll have to wait for the next ferry. (It’s a conservative estimate).

Overloads are worryingly common in all seasons but winter. Do yourself a favour, if you can — leave the car at home and walk, bike, carpool, or use Gabriola’s GERTIE.ca transit (\$2.50 cash fare). Nanaimo’s downtown is very walkable, and the bus service (bctransit.com/nanaimo) is good (\$2.50 cash fare, all-day pass \$5). By bike or e-bike, most of Nanaimo is readily accessible.

Busiest sailings are through the mornings from Gabriola and later afternoons from Nanaimo. Overloads are common from May through October. The “Dangerous Cargo” sailings (no passengers) are on Wednesdays: 10:40am from Nanaimo, 5:50pm from Gabriola.

Roads

Our roads are **narrow**, with little or no shoulder. Many side roads are gravel, with potholes. There is moderate traffic—more in summer. Please respect the speed limits (**50 km/h** on most roads; watch the school zone), and give our many pedestrians and cyclists ample room.

Please treat cyclists with respect — Gabriola has a lot of them, and every cyclist is one less car on the road to create traffic or take up a ferry spot. Many are on **e-bikes**, and travel faster than you might expect. Pass with care!

