

# SOOKE

After living in Amsterdam for six months, my mental mountain and ocean reserves needed refilling. Home on the West Coast for a visit, I headed to Sooke, booked a B&B on the water, and woke up early every morning to cradle my coffee while staring out to sea. I sought out mountain views at every turn and hiked around East Sooke Park, my legs singing at the task of climbing even minor hills after months of flat, flat, flat.

At Whiffin Spit, the seaweed on the shores was drying in the sun. I closed my eyes and pulled the familiar air deep into my lungs. Just one breath brought all the longing I had buried to the surface; everything I missed about this coast that had been my own since the day I was born. The smell was salty and clean and ancient and new, green and astringent and dusty and home. It smelled like walking the railway tracks to secret beaches, sneaking out at night to make out on the shore, driving too fast with the windows open, and my bare feet up on the passenger-side dash. I didn't know I missed the smell of seaweed, but it seems I missed this most of all.

I am back in Amsterdam in time for the summer solstice. I walk down to the River IJ instead of my usual stroll along Kits Beach or English Bay. There's no seaweed here, no salty tang in the air, but the water is deep and vast. Squinting my eyes, I pretend it's the Pacific. The sunsets are pink and purple here instead of Vancouver's fiery orange, but the water still ripples blue. As the sun ducks behind the houseboats, I walk home. —CHRISTINA NEWBERRY

