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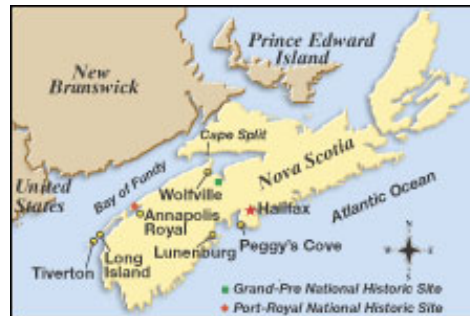


A Step In Maritime

Stroll along rugged coastlines, through picturesque gardens and in historical towns on a Nova Scotia walk.

By Marge Peterson

Whale on the right!" yelled the captain. The passengers on the whale-watching boat, including myself and 14 fellow Backroads tour members, watched as the animal breached three times in a row. "That's the best I've ever seen," said Backroads guide Todd Fetter with tears in his eyes.



That was just one of several soul-stirring experiences I had during a six-day walking trip through Canada's ocean playground, Nova Scotia. Stunning scenery, Victorian inns, gourmet meals and knowledgeable, well-organized guides combined to create a memorable jaunt.

Backroads is in its 27th year of providing walking, hiking, biking and multisport vacations, and it knows how to make a smooth trip. Before the start of my adventure, Backroads sent me a detailed itinerary, packing list and suggested reading list about Nova Scotia, as well as information on the climate, time zone and currency.

ACADIAN HISTORY

Our group, 15 walkers from all over the United States and two guides, met in Halifax. We loaded our luggage into two roomy vans and hit the road.

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For Nova Scotia information, contact (800) 565-0000 or novascotia.com. Your AAA Travel agent can book your tour.

Our first stop was Grand-Pre National Historic Site of Canada, a memorial to the roughly 10,000 Acadians -- Nova Scotia's early French settlers -- who were deported by the British, beginning in 1755, for not taking an unconditional loyalty oath to the crown.

The visitor center tells the story of their pioneer life, tragedy and survival. The memorial also features a statue of Evangeline, the heroine of Longfellow's poem, which describes a fictionalized account of two lovers separated by the British. This year, the site will commemorate the 250th anniversary of Le Grand Derangement, or the Great Upheaval.

After a picnic lunch, our group walked along the dikes of the Minas

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Basin, the easternmost point of the Bay of Fundy where the highest tides on earth occur. We ended the day in Wolfville and stayed at Victoria's Historic Inn for two nights. After a wine and cheese reception at the inn, we headed to dinner. The quality of the food, especially seafood, was very good throughout the trip.

After breakfast at the inn the next morning, our group packed lunches from a table loaded with breads, chicken, salmon, fresh fruits and vegetables, peanut butter and cookies, then traveled to Cape Split trailhead, where we began our most challenging hike -- eight miles mostly uphill through a canopied forest.

Just when I thought I couldn't make it another step, I heard the roar of the ocean beating against the cliffs, and the path opened into a wildflower meadow high atop the bluff. The view was breathtaking -- the wild Bay of Fundy to the west and the tranquil waters of Minas Basin to the south. Our group sat on the bluff, eating lunch and drinking in the beauty of the peninsula. That evening, we sampled wine at Domaine de Grand Pre winery and dined at its restaurant.

ANNAPOLIS ROYAL

After loading the vans the next morning, we headed for Blomidon Provincial Park where our group hiked through white spruce, yellow birch and maples, while listening to migratory songbirds along the way.

We had another sack lunch at Camp Blomidon, the highest point on the ridge, and then we shuttled to Annapolis Royal, the colonial capital of Nova Scotia until it moved to Halifax in 1749.

With its quiet, shady streets, beautiful gardens and more than 150 heritage buildings, Annapolis Royal is one of the province's most visited towns. We checked into the Queen Anne Inn, a Victorian-era mansion set in five acres of gardens.

After dinner, we went to Garrison Graveyard, the oldest English graveyard in Canada, to take its popular Candlelight Tour. Carrying lanterns, we followed costumed interpreter and Acadian Allan Melanson, who wove 400 years of Annapolis Royal history into his tour.

WHALE WATCHING

After an early breakfast and a ferry ride to Long Island, we boarded the Fundy Voyager, a converted fishing boat, for a three-hour whale-watching cruise. I've never seen so many humpback whales. In addition to the triple-breaching whale, we saw three whales taking a little snooze and watched a mother and her calf.

History of the Acadians

Settlers from France were the first Europeans to settle in the land they called Acadia, which covered what is now called Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and parts of New Brunswick. Over time, this group of farming people developed a rich culture with its own music, dance and food.

Because of its important geographic location, Acadia controlled the Gulf of St. Lawrence and was close to valuable fishing grounds, shipping routes and the British colonies along the Atlantic Coast. The French and British constantly battled over the territory.

Most of the settlers located along the southeastern shore of the Bay of Fundy, which today is the Annapolis Valley area of Nova Scotia. Port Royal was the first real settlement in Acadia and became the capital.

Between 1755 and 1763, thousands of Acadians were forced from their homes and shipped to other parts of the continent and to Europe. Although they lost their land, homes and possessions, they kept their culture. Many eventually returned to Acadia and they are now recognized as a unique culture group. Others settled in Louisiana and their Cajun food and music is known all over the country.

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After lunch at Lavena's Catch Cafe, we strolled through the fishing village of Tiverton to Beautiful Cove, named for its picturesque coastal vistas.

The next morning, we took a four-mile walk on the Annapolis Royal Rails to Trails path with naturalist Mona MacDonald, who pointed out the everyday uses of the flora we found along the way. After lunch on our own, we had free time to visit the Royal Historic Gardens, Fort Anne National Historic Park or the many museums and shops.

After visiting Port-Royal National Historic Site and touring the location of Canada's first European settlement, we headed for Lunenburg, one of the province's most historic and beautiful towns.

WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Our group began the day with a walking tour of Lunenburg narrated by kilt-wearing historian Eric Croft, who pointed out



Granite rocks smoothed by the Atlantic outline the area around Peggy's Cove.

Photo: James P. Rowan

many of the features that led to the city's designation as a World Heritage Site, including homes dating back to 1760.

According to Croft, the early settlers (mostly German and some English French and Swiss farmers) were highly superstitious. They dressed their boys in girl's clothes until they were 10 years old in order to trick the devil who liked to kidnap young boys. And since the devil

always came in the back door, they made their front and back entrances exactly the same.

After a visit to Peggy's Cove, where a lighthouse sits high on the granite coast and its harbor is a photographer's delight, we shuttled back to Halifax. There, we said our goodbyes and made our way home.

Marge Peterson is a contributing editor of Home & Away.

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