

Prince Edward Island

Introduction

The long red beaches and warm gentle waters of Prince Edward Island represent, to us, the accumulated memories of idyllic summers. Those happy Julys and Augusts meld in retrospect into one long beach, punctuated by pots of fresh-dug clams steaming over a campfire, with a backdrop of miles of green, gold and terracotta fields covering a rolling landscape, like a lumpy featherbed. Please don't expect us to be objective here.

This chapter is divided into four parts: the short introduction is followed by sections on the central, eastern and western parts of the island. We have provided a general introductory section because, although PEI is small, it has a cohesive history; many activities, outfitters and adventures involve the whole island. Many people, for example, cycle the entire length of the island on the Confederation Trail in a single trip, or rent a kayak in Charlottetown to paddle in bays from St. Peters to Malpeque. But don't let the island's size mislead you: it packs a lot of activity in a tidy little sea-wrapped package.

The eastern and western parts of the island are very similar, yet they differ in many ways. The east seems more populated and heavily farmed, with ports and fishing along its eastern and southern coasts. The west is a bit wilder, more forested and less populated, with the vast protected Malpeque Bay along its northern shore. Between them is the central section, which, like the rest of the island, is heavily agricultural, but in the Charlottetown area and along the northern coast there is more development than you'll find in the other two sections. The north also has some of the island's most beautiful beaches, as well as the highest concentration of tourist-related businesses and attractions. There are enough activities in each of these three sections to occupy an entire vacation, or you may choose to move from one to the other, spending a few days in each.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Central PEI: Borden-Carleton, Cavendish, Victoria, Charlottetown, PEI National Park**
- **Eastern PEI: East Point, Pooles Corner, Wood Islands, Panmure Island, Mount Stewart, Cardigan, Murray River, Mount Stewart**
- **Western PEI: Summerside, West Point, North Cape, Tignish, Alberton, Campbellton**

Geography



Geographically, the island is a great red sandstone mass cast adrift in the **Northumberland Strait**. It is separated from New Brunswick by nine miles of sea between Cape Tormentine and Borden-Carleton and from Nova Scotia by 14 miles of sea between Caribou and Wood Islands. Much of the shoreline is **red sand beach** backed by eroded **red sandstone cliffs**, 15 to 30 feet high in places. This soft stone has eroded beautifully, forming natural arches – and, off the North Cape, even a giant elephant.

The rolling hillsides are covered with rich fields of **farmland**. In spring, summer and fall the landscape is a kaleidoscope of color – brick-red soil contrasts with golden fields of wheat and green masses of potato plants. Behind them are dense forests of evergreens, which, along the coastal regions, are stunted by the strong prevailing winds. Deep **river estuaries** cut into the land, almost dividing it into three segments. On the north coast, barrier beaches from Alberton, in the west, to Tracadie Bay, in the east, protect harbors that provide not only a bounty of fish and shellfish but exciting canoeing, kayaking and fishing.

History



The first European settlement on the island was late by North American standards. In 1720, the **French** settled at Port la Joye, at the entrance to what is now Charlottetown Harbour and on a point of land directly across the water from present-day Charlottetown. These early French settlers, like their brethren in Nova Scotia, are referred to as **Acadians**. Other French settlements began at about the same time, notably on the west end, where the French flavor of its original Acadian settlers is still strong. After only 38 years, Port la Joye was captured by the British, who tore down the old French Vauban-style fort and built a new one, Fort Amherst.

Charlottetown was settled soon thereafter, and in the next several decades Scottish and Irish settlers began to arrive in large numbers. To this mix were added a few settlers and refugees from the American colonies before and after the Revolution. Originally farmers, the settlers soon took on fishing and then shipbuilding, succeeding in all. They also became merchants and traders and, to this day, have a broad-based economy in which fishing, fish farming, farming and commerce play equally important parts.

We should note two more historical events that you will meet in PEI. Charlottetown was the scene of the conference where the **Articles of Confederation** were drawn up, creating Canada as we know it (but without Newfoundland). This and related sites have the same hallowed significance to Canadians that Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell have to Americans, as do the men who met here, who are called the **Fathers of Confederation**, sometimes simply referred to as The Fathers. Charlottetown has some very nicely done historical programs centering around this exciting time in its history.

THE FATHERS OF CONFEDERATION

Of all of the places we have been in Canada, Prince Edward Island is the most proud of its “Canadian-ness.” Charlottetown reveres and commemorates the Fathers of Confederation in one spot more than all US national heroes are honored in similar circumstances. PEI leaders were in the forefront of the confederation movement that led to the conference here in 1864. That conference led to union, though PEI didn’t join the confederation until later. Everywhere you will find references to the “Fathers” and you can’t escape them. They landed at Peakes Wharf, paraded up Great George St., met at Province House, partied at Argowan (and other places) and stayed at the Pavilion and Wellington Hotels before heading back home to set up Canada. The Confederation Centre for the Arts was erected in 1964 by the national government to commemorate PEI’s role as a nation builder.

The second event is a more recent phenomenon, based on an endearing series of children’s fiction by Lucy Maud Montgomery that center around the adventures of *Anne of Green Gables*. Anne has so captured the hearts of the world – most recently the Japanese – that the entire north-central part of the island is known by the tourist designation of “Anne’s Land.” Much is made of Anne, some of it quite charming, but some of the attractions are... well, how do we say it nicely? A quarter of a million people visit the sites annually. When it all becomes too suffocating, just think of the local people, who can’t even run to the corner for a gallon of milk without fending off tour buses and wedding parties. Fortunately, it’s only a short way through Cavendish to the island’s loveliest beaches and miles of woodland walks.

Getting Around



The primary route to Prince Edward Island is **Rte. 16** in New Brunswick, which runs from Aulac to Cape Tormentine. This trip once required a 45-minute ferry ride, and often a wait. The 24-hour ferry service was part of a commitment to permanent communication that was made to the island when it joined the confederation. That commitment took another step in the summer of 1997 with the opening of the **Confederation Bridge**, a nine-mile span over the Northumberland Strait from Cape Tormentine to Borden-Carleton.

The other vehicular access to the island is still by ferry. At Caribou, Nova Scotia, Bay Ferries operates a car ferry to **Wood Islands** on PEI; ☎ 902/566-3838 (in PEI), 506/649-7777 (in New Brunswick) or 888/249-7245 (SAIL), www.nfl-bay.com. This 14-mile ferry ride takes 75 minutes, and boats make nine trips a day during peak summer season. The rate is about \$50 per car, including passengers. You can cross as a foot passenger for \$11, or \$9 for those over age 65; children under 12 free. From Rte. 104 west of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, take Rte. 106 to Caribou.

From Borden-Carleton or Wood Islands, take **TransCanada-1** (also called TC1) to get to the provincial capital, Charlottetown. Three designated touring routes, one for each county, lead travelers around the island. The western, more sparsely settled part of the island, is explored from the **Lady Slipper Drive**, which circles the shoreline of **Prince County**, a distance of about 180 miles. Follow the signs with the pink lady slipper; the route numbers change often but the signs don't. The faster route is **Rte. 2**, which runs pretty much up the center.

The eastern region, **King's County**, has **King's Byway Drive**, which also circles the shoreline, a distance of about 230 miles. Follow the signs with the purple crown; expect the route numbers to change frequently here, too. From Charlottetown, **Rte. 2** will take you north along the Hillsborough River and then across the peninsula to the port town of **Souris**, the starting place for the ferry trip to the Magdalen Islands. **TransCanada-1** serves the southern part of the county, as far as Wood Islands, and **Rte. 3** is the fastest route to the Brudenell area, with **Rte. 4** leading to the southern shores of St. Mary's Bay.

Queen's County, in the central third of the island, is circled by **Blue Heron Drive** along its outer edges and close to the ocean, about 120 miles. **Rte. 2** runs almost straight across the center of Queen's County from Charlottetown to Kensington but, as a look at the map will tell you, there is no fast straight road from the entry point at Borden-Carleton to the north shore area. **TransCanada-1A** from Borden will take you quickly to Summerside and Rte. 2.

Information Sources



Information on the province is available from **Tourism PEI**, PO Box 940, Charlottetown, PEI C1A 7M5, ☎ 888/PEI-PLAY (888/734-7529), 902/629-2400, fax 902/629-2428, www.peisplay.com, e-mail tourpei@gov.pe.ca.

On the PEI side of the Confederation Bridge, stop at the **Borden-Carleton Visitor Information Centre**, ☎ 902/437-8570, Gateway Village, which has a large selection of materials. It is open daily, 8 am to 10 pm, in early summer; 9 am to 9 pm from mid-August to early September; and from 9 am to 5 pm the rest of the year.

Charlottetown Visitor Information Centre, 178 Water St., Charlottetown, PEI C1A 4B7, ☎ 902/368-4444, is open daily in July and August; Monday through Friday the rest of the year.

Other Visitor Information Centres are in **Wood Islands**, on Rte. 1 near the ferry terminal, ☎ 902/962-7411; **Pooles Corner**, at the intersection of routes 3 and 4, ☎ 902/838-0670; **Souris**, Rte. 2 in the Souris Beach Provincial Park, ☎ 902/687-7030; **Brackley Beach**, Rte. 15, ☎ 902/672-7474; **Cavendish**, at the corner of routes 6 and 13, ☎ 902/963-7830; **Mount Pleasant**, Rte. 2, ☎ 902/831-7930; and **Summerside**, Rte. 1A, ☎ 902/888-8364. Call for hours of operation; most of these centers are open daily from mid-June to mid-October.

A WORD ABOUT SPELLING

When the British and American people divorced in 1776 they also apparently decided to spell words differently and to use different words for the same things. The Canadian colonies, later provinces, followed the British spelling rules (father knows best!). In writing this book we have used the American spelling in text, but for place names we have used the local (British) spelling. For example, we will speak of an attractive *harbor*, but we will refer to Charlottetown *Harbour*. We will also refer to the Confederation *Centre* for the Arts but will tell you that it is in the *center* of town. This should not only make it easier for you to find what you are looking for, but it adds just a touch of the exotic as well. As for the words we use and the way we pronounce them, Maritime Canada is divided between British and American forms, so you may hear a few words that sound British to you; but, for the most part, Americans and islanders speak the same language.

Adventures

The differences between the adventures here and in other Atlantic provinces are a matter of degree. Yes, there are some cliffs, but they are friendly drop-offs where the sea has eroded the sandstone shore. The bays are low and gentle, most of them quite protected from the full fury of the sea. There are abundant routes for bicycling, but no athlete-challenging mountains to climb, just rolling hills through colorful countryside. In short, this is a more gentle landscape for relaxed enjoyment.

Many of the activities in the center of the island are located inside **Prince Edward Island National Park**, Parks Canada, 2 Palmers Ln., Charlottetown, PEI C1A 5V6, ☎ 800/213-PARK or 902/672-6350. The National Park includes most of the north shore of Queens County from Tracadie Bay on the east to New London Bay on the west. It protects the delicate shoreline from excessive use, while keeping it available to the public. Within its borders are sand dunes, beaches, red sandstone cliffs, salt marshes, clam flats, freshwater ponds and woodlands. The park offers opportunities for hiking and walking on the beaches and designated hiking trails, swimming in the warm waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, sailboarding, kayaking and canoeing in its protected bays and rivers, cycling on its roads and around the periphery, tennis and bird-watching. While the park season is from June through September (when park fees are collected), the facilities are open the rest of the year without services and without fee.

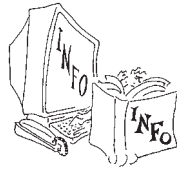
■ On Foot

The Confederation Trail



Canada's exciting new TransCanada Trail, known in PEI as the **Confederation Trail**, is built here upon the bed of the former Canadian National Railway and runs a total of 217 miles. In 1989 the rail line was shut down; since then, many miles of the railbed have been converted to rolled stonedust surface. Along its way the trail passes through small towns and villages, presenting many choices of lodging and dining. The problem with rail-trails, of course, is that they don't loop, so if you want to end up in the same place you started you have to double back.

If you intend to backpack across the province, this is the best place to do it. The only traffic you will encounter on the trail, except at highway crossings, is bicycles. The runs between towns are short enough to give you a great deal of flexibility in planning your stops. Many of the outfitters and trip planners listed in the *On Wheels* section below can help make arrangements for you along the trail; some can arrange luggage transfers, so you don't even have to carry a full pack. See particularly those listed in the Central area; most of them operate throughout the whole province.



CONFEDERATION TRAIL MAP: A map is published and updated annually by the association that is overseeing the building of the Confederation Trail, changing as new sections are added. You can get a copy at the major information centers, particularly those along the trail route.

The trail is also good for those touring by automobile, who just want to get out of the car periodically and wander into the countryside. Get the map and stop for a short walk or pedal on the trail whenever your highway crosses it. A look at the map will show you what is interesting along the trail nearest you – good view points and even beaver dams are shown on the trail map.

On its eastern end, the trail starts at **Elmira**, fittingly at the old railroad station, now a museum. Segments along the trail generally run about five miles between towns; most segments have special attractions. For example, between Elmira and Baltic is an attractive pond and between Bear River and Selkirk is the Larkin's Pond Bridge Lookout.

On the west side of the island, the starting point for the trail is the zero mileage marker at **Tignish**, on the northern tip. From there, the trail drops down to **St. Louis**, just over 6½ miles, and then to **Alberton**, on Cascumpec Bay, an additional six miles.