

Naturalist Journeys, LLC Nova Scotia Sampler: Birds, Whales and History August 18-26, 2012



Famous for the world's most dramatic tide shifts, the Bay of Fundy is surrounded by extensive forests, rustic fishing villages, and rugged shorelines. The area is also known for diverse wildlife: shallower waters of the bay support rich marine habitats that attract migrating shorebirds and waders, while the deeper waters are feeding grounds for many whales and seabirds.

We start from Halifax, with a day exploring the scenic south coastal areas of Lunenburg and Peggy's Cove before heading to the northwest tip of the province and Brier Island. We spend three nights on the island and during daylight hours visit different migrant traps in the lush Acadian forest searching out autumn migrant birds. During our stay on the island we venture out on two half-day whale watching trips into the Bay of Fundy where we should see signature seabirds such as Atlantic Puffins and Razorbills, along with a good variety of murre, jaegers, shearwaters, storm-petrels, and phalaropes. Marine mammals include Harbor Porpoises, White-sided Dolphins, Fin Whales, Humpback Whales, and the endangered North Atlantic Right Whale! We enjoy being honorary locals amid this rural, charming village life. Our hosts make the island's history come alive, and we enjoy walks along wild beaches. We will be in the peak of shorebird migration and should see Piping Plovers, Hudsonian Godwits and White-rumped Sandpipers.

Then we travel east towards [Cape Breton Island](#), birding in the morning and visiting historic lighthouses during the afternoon. Most of our outings are along the coast of the Bay of Fundy, known for its huge tide changes (56-foot difference between low and high tide) and the tidal resonance (the time it takes for a wave to enter the bay on the west and make it to shore in the east). We choose a hotel near the Bay so we can see boats stranded at tide, somewhere in the tidal cycle. Waiting for



these phenomena, we can also visit Grand Pré National Historic Site, a stunning park in the Annapolis Valley that tells in a compelling way the story of the expulsion of the French Acadian people by British forces from this fertile region. This is also the heart of Nova Scotia's wine industry and there are some lovely boutique restaurants that beckon us to linger.



We then reposition to Cape Breton, one of Canada's most scenic national parks. We want to approach on the north side, a scenic route all along the way, and spend the night at Chéticamp, where we have a great introduction to Cape Breton Highlands National Park at the Visitor's Center. We then spend a full day exploring the park en route to Ingonish Beach and our lodging for the next two nights, the historic and lovely Keltic Lodge.

We explore the park in detail, searching for birds, moose, grand scenery and local arts and culture. The Skyline Trail is well maintained and allows us to experience the spectacular scenery of this ancient and geologically significant island (there is evidence that Cape Breton Island was once joined with Scotland and Norway). We explore some of the less-frequented areas and enjoy lunch with the locals in a small fishing village. Keltic Lodge sits high a bluff, with a fine view of cliffs and the sea, and their gourmet dining room is a perfect spot for our final dinner.

We think you'll enjoy the culture and history of the Nova Scotia's picturesque coastline and all the wildlife along this maritime coast. The local seafood is a treat as well!



ITINERARY



Saturday, Aug. 18 - Arrival in Halifax

Plan to arrive in Halifax, Nova Scotia by 2:00 PM today (or arrive early at your leisure, it's a fun small city with a lot to see!). Our lodgings are near the Waterfront of Halifax at the historic Waverly House. After settling in, we will walk to [Citadel Hill](#) where we will visit the "Citadel", a fort first constructed by the British in 1749 to protect its fleet at anchor in the harbor below. Living history docents and period displays help with understanding what life and politics were like during that time frame. There are some centuries old cemeteries close to our lodging. Exploring headstones and wondering about life in the 17th and 18th centuries is as easy as a walk down the street. We then return to the Waverly House where we relax and then head off to our welcome dinner at a nearby bistro

restaurant.

Accommodations the Waverly Inn, Halifax, Nova Scotia (D)

Sunday, Aug. 19 – Peggy's Cove, Lunenburg and Brier Island

After finishing breakfast we take a short drive over to Peggy's Cove, a small fishing village with a world-famous historic lighthouse. Whether it is a foggy day or the sun is bright, there are always ample opportunities to photograph the unique maritime scenery along this section of the Nova Scotia coast.

Next we drive a short distance west to the community of Lunenburg, a UNESCO World Heritage Site famous for its preservation of a planned British colonial settlement. Architecture and the Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic are two of the cultural highlights we will visit prior to our lunch at a great restaurant along the waterfront.



After lunch we drive through the center of the province to its north shore. We are heading to Brier Island, on the very northwest tip of Nova Scotia. We have two ferries to catch to make it to the island and we take it at our leisure to enjoy the day. Tonight we dine at a great seafood restaurant across from the lodge, and if typical, sunset is long lasting and vivid with colorful skies. The Brier Island Lodge is our home for the next three nights, so we settle in after this tasty seafood dinner supplied from the local fishing fleet.

Accommodations at the Brier Island Lodge – Brier Island, Nova Scotia (B,L,D)



Monday, Aug. 20 – Brier Island: North Lighthouse & Whale Watching

After breakfast we set off on a short hike down to the North Lighthouse. The road is lined with alder, spruce and shrubs and there are always a number of little spring-fed pools that seem to have migrant songbirds milling about. That Brier Island is at the northwest corner of the province and abuts the Bay of Fundy makes it an ideal trap for migrating passerines. And we should get opportunities to see lots of east coast warblers and other songbirds including: Common Yellowthroat, Black-throated Green Warbler, American Redstart, Baltimore Oriole and Red-breasted Nuthatch (we watched a flock of close to 100 all make landfall within twenty minutes of one another). There are days

when the trees are dripping with birds and there are days when they aren't. We may encounter a bird banding team that has done research on the Island for many years.

Once down at the North Lighthouse we will scan the Bay of Fundy looking for Northern Gannet, maybe a Black Guillemot and definitely whale spouts. You never know what is going to fly through your field of view.

After lunch we head for the docks to board the Mega Nova, our dedicated whale watching and seabird boat. We move out the passage that separates Long Island from Brier. Great Black-Backed Gulls call as we head out to sea. Common Eiders dot the rocks that line the coast as we head out to areas favored by whales and seabirds. Along the way we should see lots of Greater Shearwaters that spend their non-nesting months in the maritime province area, along with flocks of Red Phalaropes and some Atlantic Puffins flying by.



The seas are usually calm at this time of year, so we should have good viewing conditions. Our goal beyond seeing the pelagic birds are the cetaceans, specifically the North Atlantic Right Whale! They are uncommon at best, but the Bay of Fundy is one of the better locations to find this ultra-rare whale.



We will see lots of Humpback Whales, cow/calf pairs and smaller groups that seem to approach the boat with a curiosity. There are not uncommon and anyone of us with a camera will get some outstanding photographic opportunities. It will be a show of fins and flukes as these large marine mammals lull alongside the boat. They roll over on their backs, lie on their sides and peer up at us with those eyes. It really is a treat to have these huge animals approach the boat! The local whale expert aboard knows each one by their unique white patterns.

Accommodations at the Brier Island Lodge – Brier Island, Nova Scotia (B,L,D)

Tuesday, Aug. 21 – Brier Island: Western Lighthouse and Whale Watching

After a lovely breakfast in the dining room with its large picture windows (try haddock and eggs?) we drive out to the scenic coast by Western Lighthouse. Along the way we stop and bird the thickets hoping for good looks at Canada Warblers, Magnolia Warblers, Alder Flycatchers and Scarlet Tanagers.

Mixed in these woodlands are patches of carnivorous plants, primarily sundews and pitcher plants. This habitat is found alongside



the upland shrub and is where we look for Northern Waterthrush and Ovenbird, two ground skulkers.



We continue our drive out to the lighthouse where we end up in the middle of a Herring Gull nesting colony. Although most of the nesting is finished, we are sure to see numerous adults and possibly a few young that have yet to learn to fly. The lighthouse area is also a great area to sit and hawk watch for raptors. The breeze off of the ocean creates updrafts as it hits the coast and we should see lots of birds of prey including Broad-winged Hawks and possibly N. Goshawks. We may also visit a rocky beach good for

finding shorebirds.

After lunch in town, we head back to the dock for another trip out on the Bay of Fundy. The opportunity to look for rafts of storm-petrels and Razorbill, while having whales and dolphins around makes taking a second trip on, perhaps on a different boat, a must!

Accommodations at the Brier Island Lodge – Brier Island, Nova Scotia (B,L,D)

Wednesday, Aug. 22 – Brier Island to Bay of Fundy and Minas Basin

Bird migration is all about weather conditions and we never know which morning is going provide those conditions. We take some time first thing in the morning to bird the road to North Lighthouse. Then we head back to the lodge for breakfast before heading back to the mainland, and on to narrower reaches of the Bay of Fundy, where the tidal effects can be seen. It's a several hour's drive, and we make some scenic and birding stops en route. Our day is



dictated by the tides, and we want to position ourselves at strategic spots for low tide, when boats are stranded and the full effect of the phenomena is prime. We may return to the same spot for a higher tide shot so you can compare! On this day we also visit Grand Pre National Historic Site, where exhibits, a film, and an evocative statue of Henry Wadsworth's Evangeline help us to understand the hardship of losing their beautiful lands, and where the Acadian people dispersed to upon expulsion. Tonight you can choose a simple dinner close to the hotel, or dine at a winery, where fine food can be paired in harmony with some of the region's best for a real taste of Nova Scotia.



Accommodations on the Bay of Fundy, Nova Scotia (B,L)

Thursday, Aug. 23 – Cape Breton Island

Today, we head to Cape Breton Island. The interior of this part of the province is crisscrossed by inlets, rivers and other bodies of water as we head towards the west side of the island, past Margaree Harbor to our lodgings at Chéticamp. En route we pass some beautiful headlands and beaches, a Celtic Music center, and we have lunch at a wonderful local restaurant. By afternoon we are in the park, where we start our scenic exploration at the Visitor's Center.

Accommodations at Chéticamp, Nova Scotia (B,L)

Friday, Aug. 24 – Cape Breton Highlands National Park

We stay in Chéticamp before moving on to Ingonish Beach and Keltic Lodge on the east side of the park, as there is SO much to see in between! Witness a dramatic coast line where the ocean surge relentlessly pushes against eons-old rock as walk out onto almost barren balds littered with plants normally found in the tundra. We'll take several walks today, sampling scenery, wildflowers and wildlife.

Photography and just enjoying the vistas is a must as we explore the #1 rated island in North America for sheer beauty. The Cabot Trail is world famous as a scenic drive and we will take advantage of that designation. It will be a wonderful day exploring the very best!

Dinner is at your leisure at the lodge or nearby village.

Accommodations at the Keltic Lodge, Ingonish, Nova Scotia (B,L)



Saturday, Aug. 25 – Cape Breton Island

Today we explore a few lesser known but highly scenic sites on or near the park. Here we find small fishing communities that dot the coast set in picturesque setting. These are post card shots with colorful homes and small boats that ply their trade in the Atlantic Ocean. We walk to a lovely small waterfall, search for Moose, perhaps with calves on a trail around a lake, and as we explore the northernmost reaches, we check out some of the local arts, crafts and restaurants. We return to Keltic Lodge in the late afternoon, enjoy a last sunset on rocks at a beautifully sculptured beach, and host our farewell dinner in the lodge's gourmet dining room.

Accommodations at the Keltic Lodge - Cape Breton, Nova Scotia (B,L,D)



Sunday, Aug. 26 – Cape Breton Island to Halifax and Flights Home

We get an early start (6AM, you can have coffee in your room and stop for breakfast en route), as its quite a drive back to Halifax, about five hours duration. We will accommodate flights out after 2:00 PM, with plans to be back at the airport by Noon. One of the other benefits of the Halifax airport is that U.S. Immigration and Customs has a station at this airport for individuals flying to the U.S. So there will be no need for the lines upon your arrival in the States. If you prefer to stay over in Halifax, there are several hotels near the airport, or it's about a 20 minute taxi ride into the city. Halifax is a wonderful city with lots of museums, art galleries and boutiques. You might want to take some time to explore this city prior to or after the tour! (B)



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COST OF THE JOURNEY:

Cost of the journey is \$3690.00 from Halifax, based on double occupancy, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada (YHZ).

This cost includes: accommodations for 8 nights, most meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), airport welcome and transfer or hotel shuttle, land transportation during the journey, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Single supplement is \$695.00.

Cost does not include: round-trip airfare to and from Halifax, items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, or gratuities for luggage handling or personal services. With fewer than 4 participants, a small-group surcharge (to be discussed with those interested) may apply if the smaller group wishes to still participate in the journey as a private tour.

Group Size: This is a sampler trip, maximum of 12 and minimum of 4 participants.

TRAVEL INFORMATION:

The airport for this journey is Halifax, Nova Scotia (YHZ). Doing the circle route (we drive and take a ferry between the two to see pelagic birds) should not change your overall cost. The hubs for these cities include Toronto and Newark if using Air Canada and its partners, but several routings are available. Plan on arriving in Halifax no later than 2:00 PM on Aug 18th if you wish to explore the city. If you arrive after that time you can taxi in to our first night hotel. The tour departure is from Halifax (YHZ) on Sunday, August 26th.



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Photo Credits:

Row boat and colorful chairs, fishing village, Atlantic coast and cliff view, Susanne Dyal; all photos by Greg Smith.