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New Brunswick Journal: Maine's Canadian Neighbor Draws Visitors Seeking Foreign Experience, No Airfare Required

By Ron Bernthal

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The Canadian maritime provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have been long known to American tourists, but the maritime province closest to the United States is New Brunswick, and this spectacular region of Canada is just now catching on among Americans who are looking for something new, beautiful, somewhat undiscovered, and still within driving distance for millions of East Coast residents.

From the province's western border with Maine, to the Gulf of St Lawrence, and south to the Bay of Fundy, New Brunswick offers mountains, farmland, river valleys, and miles of scenic coastline dotted with hundreds of



New Brunswick lobsterman Chad Parks with 10-pound catch near village of St. Andrews. (Photo: Walt Malone, time capsule)

French or English-speaking fishing villages. One of those fishing villages is St. Martins, on New Brunswick's southern Fundy Coast. Road signs along the foggy beach road promote the best clam chowder in the world at the Caves Restaurant.

"The chowder we serve is from my wife's recipe, and needless to say there is lots of fresh fish in the bowl, and the way it is cooked makes the chowder really delicious," says Caves owner Bruce Hutchis, who does not shy away from talking about his famous chowder, even as bus loads of tourists start arriving as early as 10:30 AM for a taste.

For the crowd of visitors coming for a lunch of soup and clams or lobster, eating at the Caves, just steps from the Bay of Fundy, makes the food taste even better, and at the small harbor nearby the air smells of fish and salt, the pier littered with wooden lobster traps and pieces of fish bait, and visitors stroll into the half-dozen antique shops, all located within small, weathered, clapboard houses.



An hour north of St. Martins, heading inland and away from the sea, the sky clears and the air gets warmer with each mile. Beyond the capital of St. John, the terrain is stunning---farmland, rolling hills, and the winding sun-lit St. John river's is omnipresent, which means roads often dead-end at a river bank, where small, free, car ferries shuttle motorists to the other side.

Donald Raynes operates a ferry at the Hardings Point landing, and although it is a beautiful day on the water, Raynes can't stop thinking and talking about the long winter ahead.

"We just keep beating back and forth, through the ice on the underwater cables that keep the boat on a straight path. We sometimes have to shovel the entry and exit areas so cars can get onto the ferry, but this river is beautiful even in winter, and the ride across is only five minutes, so folks stay in their heated vehicles and enjoy the scenery," Raynes says as he pilots the ferry to the other side of the river, with three cars and

two bicyclists on the deck.

This type of transportation may be the cure to all travelers tired of airport crowds, or the mass tourism of huge cruise ships, and the slow, old-fashioned car ferries are a great way to meet the local Canadians who use the boats for everything from shopping trips and work commutes, to driving kids to schools and soccer games.

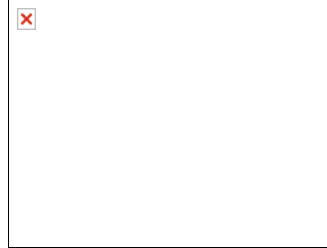
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The government of New Brunswick operates 14 ferry routes throughout the province, with five of them here on the St. John river. They make the free, five minute crossing using cables hidden under the water, and the villages along the river, like Grand Bay, Westfield, and Gagetown, are scenic examples of Canadian small town life.



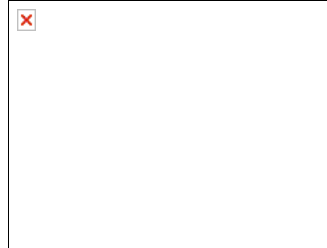
St Andrews is a small town in western New Brunswick, close to the border with Maine. It is one of the province's oldest and best known towns, where tourists come to stay at seaside bed and breakfast inns, or at the imposing 19th century Algonquin Hotel. On Thursday mornings a Main Street farmers' market attracts both locals and visitors to peruse tables laden with organic fruits and vegetables.



Donald Raynes operates one of the St. John River ferries. (Photo: Ron Bernthal)

Outside the Westfield Market, near the ferry landing, two boys while away a summer's day with snacks and soda pop. (Photo: Ron Bernthal)

It is in these small coastal towns, or along the interior rivers, where one feels truly in undiscovered territory. No mass tourism here, no big theme parks or traffic jams or toll roads. You see some license plates from Maine or New Hampshire, and the occasional New York car, but mostly it is the friendly folks from St. John, or Moncton, or Tweedside or Miramichi that wave hello and ask how your vacation is going.



Signs on the St. Andrews wharf provide times and depth of high and low tides on the Bay of Fundy (Photo: Ron Bernthal)

Contact; For information on visiting New Brunswick, including hotels, attractions, and upcoming events, contact the New Brunswick Department of Tourism and Parks at www.tourismnewbrunswick.ca.

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