

Nova Scotia's Spectacular Evangeline Trail

The rental-car-friendly Evangeline Trail runs north from the town of Yarmouth at the most southerly tip of Nova Scotia, following the coastal crenulations of the province's west coast facing the Bay of Fundy. The easy-to-navigate country roads make a well-marked self-drive exploration of one week, while meandering around tranquil coves, visiting picturesque lighthouses (some still working and others now museums), and sampling super-fresh seafood including lobster and Digby scallops.



As a top priority, visitors want to witness the dramatic tides of the Bay of Fundy in action. These have justifiably been nominated as one of the 28 finalists for the New 7 Wonders of the Natural World. Twice each day tides rise and fall 19 to 24 feet, leaving entire inlets and harbours waterless and good-sized fishing boats tilted askew alongside towering wharves and breakwaters. The volume of water moving through the Bay of Fundy each day is estimated at 14 BILLION metric tons ... the combined flow of all the rivers on earth. Not surprising that it is a world wonder!

It is because of these extraordinary tidal changes churning up delicious meals for marine mammals that the Bay of Fundy is an ecotourist paradise with 17 species of whales, including an occasional thrilling visit from a giant Blue Whale, and numerous other marine species besides. Such activity around the bay also attracts 450 resident and visitor bird species making it a prime birdwatching area.

Just over a century ago, Yarmouth was the fifth largest shipping port by tonnage in North America and the third largest shipbuilding town in the world. No wonder it exudes such grace and polish even today, boasting wide residential streets lined with canopy trees and imaginatively designed multi-storey mansions that once comfortably slept a dozen family members and several servants. Today Yarmouth is a picturesque, relaxed town of 7,000 still looking to the sea with its fishing fleet and two regular US ferry services that deliver tens of thousands of American visitors to the province each year.

The Evangeline Trail is a series of historic working villages living on fishing, farming and, of course, tourism. There are also award-winning wineries like Domaine de Grand Pré where you may stop for lunch, a vineyard tour and a leisurely tasting. You will be tempted by side-roads, peninsulas and island-hopping ferries to mini-islands with little fear of getting lost even without a map. As the proverbial crow flies, there are less than 100 miles between Yarmouth and the northern end of the Trail at Annapolis Royal, but all visitors agree that the crow flies much too straight and much too fast to be on holiday.



Travellers will find little conventional hotel/motel accommodation along the Evangeline Trail, but they are guaranteed memorable sleeps in some of the finest settings in North America. There is a happy balance in spending a few days sampling the quiet, laid-back serenity of unique countryside inns interspersed with the dress-for-dinner, sweeping staircases, 12-foot ceiling elegance of the restored town mansions in Yarmouth and Annapolis Royal. I stayed in some very special properties and sampled signature breakfasts where restoration and furnishing, architectural style, garden landscaping, and quirky family history were to be expected. The best internet resources for bed & breakfast inns are Nova Scotia Association of Unique Country Inns, (uniquecountryinns.com) and Nova Scotia Bed and Breakfasts (nsbedandbreakfast.com).

When vacationers tire of whale watching, observing the Bay, and hiking or kayaking the protected shoreline, there are plenty of other attractions along the Evangeline Trail. Bear River First Nation Heritage & Cultural Centre (bearriverculturalcenter.com) near Digby has an impressive interactive museum showcasing native culture and artifacts dating back thousands of years. It is open daily from mid-May to mid-October, Annapolis Royal Historic Garden (historicgardens.com), is worth a long stroll in a beautiful setting with first class ocean views. And Fort Anne National Historic Site in Annapolis Royal was built as a military fort through three centuries of Acadian and later British settlement of the region. Its 1702 earthworks and moat as well as its museum and setting are exceptional, open from mid-May to mid-October.



So where does Evangeline fit into all this delightful exploration? Fans of American poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, will recall his harrowing, quasi-historic tale of Evangeline's lifelong search for her intended bridegroom, snatched by the British military on the day of their wedding. He and thousands of other French Acadians were deported in 1755 from what is today southwest Nova Scotia. What could be a better name than the Evangeline Trail to highlight the region's rich settler history, enticing visitors to wander the Acadian, British and United Empire Loyalist lands occupied by Europeans since 1604?

By Alison Gardner

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