

The Cabot Trail

The Cabot Trail winds for nearly 300 km (185 mi.) through the beautiful highlands and plateaus of Cape Breton. A loop trail, visitors can begin or end their journey at a number of different points. This description of the Cabot Trail begins at Baddeck. Take Trans Canada Highway 105 west from Baddeck to Exit 7 to travel clockwise around the Cabot Trail, or east to Exit 11 at St. Ann's to travel counter-clockwise.

205 In a beautiful setting on the shores of the sparkling Bras d'Or Lakes, **Baddeck** is both picturesque and interesting. The diversity of accommodations, restaurants and activities makes it one of Canada's finest resort communities. Activities range from walking and hiking to guided sea kayaking or cycling tours and golf. For visitors wanting to get out on the water, several boat tours are available from the Baddeck area. Swimmers can enjoy the excellent supervised beach on Kidston Island, just offshore from the government wharf. A free shuttle boat service operates during July and August.

OFF TRAIL ► The Uisge Bahn Falls Park features picnic facilities and a hiking trail to the impressive 16 m (52 ft.) high Uisge Bahn Waterfall. Take the road to **Baddeck Forks**, and turn onto MacPhee's Cross Road; about 1 km (0.5 mi.) further turn left at the intersection.

105 From Baddeck, the Cabot Trail follows Highway 105 west to **Baddeck River**. A right turn at Exit 7 leads through the rolling hills and valleys of the Middle River area, a spectacular drive when fall foliage is at its best. **Hunter's Mountain** is at the centre of a vast network of snowmobile and cross-country ski trails that makes the region one of Nova Scotia's most popular winter playgrounds.

The picnic park at **Lake O'Law** includes family amusements and amenities, and features the often-photographed Three Sisters mountains.

The Margaree tourist area includes several communities along the Margaree River offering a range of accommodations, restaurants, attractions and outdoor experiences. The Margaree River, designated as a Canadian Heritage River, is renowned as a destination for salmon and trout fishing, canoeing, and sighting eagles and osprey.

OFF TRAIL ► Secondary roads throughout the Margaree Valley area lead to hiking trails, music venues, and other attractions. At **Big Intervale**, visitors can tour a working fish hatchery, and then at the interpretation centre learn how the streams of Cape Breton are stocked. Continue along the east side of the river through **East Margaree**, where you can visit a unique Acadian church and cemetery, and on to **Belle Côte** near Margaree Harbour, or return to the Cabot Trail.

OFF TRAIL ► At **North East Margaree**, the charming Margaree Salmon Museum presents the history of salmon fishing on the Margaree River. The Cabot Trail continues through the rolling green farmland of the south side of the river valley to **Margaree Forks** and on to Margaree Harbour.

Margaree Harbour is a colourful coastal village that wraps around a harbour filled with fishing boats and guarded by two lighthouses, presenting majestic views north and south along the rugged Cape Breton coastline. The village offers some services, beaches and canoe rentals.

219 Route 219 to the left is the Ceilidh Trail; across the bridge to the right the Cabot Trail continues along the shore, passing through the villages of **Belle Côte**, **Terre Noire**, and **Cap Le Moine**, home of Joe's Scarecrow Village. In **St. Joseph du Moine**, learn about one of the oldest Acadian traditions at the Centre de la Mi-Carême.

Chéticamp is a busy fishing village with a thriving Acadian culture. Visitors will often hear the lively sounds of Acadian French being spoken, and in the restaurants, visitors can sample typical Acadian food. The 18-hole golf course overlooking the harbour is a treat to walk and playable at every level.

Chéticamp is a centre for rug hooking and many other fine crafts, which can be seen in craft shops, galleries and museums. Some feature demonstrations of rug hooking and other local crafts. Les Trois Pignons displays artifacts and the fine hooked rugs and embroidery of internationally acclaimed artist Dr. Elizabeth Lefort and other noted local artists. The Acadian Museum, near St. Peter's Church, presents displays on the history of the early Acadian settlers.



The waters around the northern tip of Cape Breton Island are a summer feeding ground for minke, pilot and fin whales, and several whalewatching tours take visitors out for a close encounter with these gentle giants of the sea. Quai Mathieu, Chéticamp's attractive waterfront boardwalk, offers marine services.

OFF TRAIL ► Cheticamp Island's scenic roads and trails are popular with hikers and walkers as they follow the island's picturesque coast to a romantic lighthouse standing high above the island's sea-carved bluffs. The island can be reached via a road located near the south end of the village.

At the northern end of Cheticamp is the entrance to **Cape Breton Highlands National Park**.

Cape Breton Highlands is one of Canada's most stunning and diverse national parks, encompassing 950 km² (366 sq. mi.) of beautiful highland and coastal habitats. Park visitors can explore rocky shorelines, sandy beaches, mountain trails, old-growth forests, waterfalls and highland barrens carpeted in wild orchids and pitcher plants. Moose are often seen.

Hikers can explore 25 trails that range from easy strolls to challenging hikes through the park's magnificent highland back country. Campers will find facilities ranging from unserviced sites to modern RV campgrounds. Golfers can tee off on one of Canada's most exciting championship courses, the legendary Highlands Links. There is a visitor centre at the entrance, with displays, slide shows, and a nature bookstore. A park admission fee is charged.

The trail enters the park and rises along the coastal mountains, offering several lookoffs where visitors can enjoy breathtaking views of the highlands and Gulf of St. Lawrence. Eagles can often be seen soaring on the updrafts that rise along the coast, and pods of whales are sometimes seen feeding just offshore.

The Cabot Trail continues, turning inland to cross French and Mackenzie mountains. Just past French Lake, the Bog Walk is an easy boardwalk interpretive trail that introduces visitors to the beauty and diversity of the Highland Barrens.

The Cabot Trail descends MacKenzie Mountain, presenting dramatic views north along the coast,

and enters the working fishing village of **Pleasant Bay**, where visitors will find the fascinating Whale Interpretive Centre. The village also offers whale-watching boat tours, restaurants, shops and accommodations.

Just past Pleasant Bay, the Cabot Trail re-enters the national park. At MacIntosh Brook there is a campground with an easy woodland trail beside the brook leading to a small waterfall.

Leaving Pleasant Bay, the Cabot Trail climbs North Mountain. As the ascent begins, watch for signs for the Lone Shieling Trail. This easy 1 km (0.5 mi.) trail leads through a magnificent virgin forest of 300-year-old sugar maples to a replica of a Scottish crofter's hut.

The Cabot Trail descends into the beautiful Aspy River Valley. Near the bottom, a right turn follows a narrow gravel road to Beulach Bahn Falls, which cascades like a liquid curtain of white lace 15 m (50 ft.) down into a clear flowing stream.

The Cabot Trail exits the park and continues through the Aspy Valley. Cape North, where 3 m (10 ft.) of snow in March is often the norm, is a cross-country skier's dream. The North Highlands Community Museum displays artifacts and photographs that highlight local history.

OFF TRAIL ► A left turn at **Cape North** will take visitors on an exploration of stunning coastal landscapes and towering mountains. The road descends to a low coastal plain, passing through the villages of **Aspy Bay** and **Sugar Loaf**. At **Cabot's Landing**, a provincial picnic park features a 1.6 km (1 mi.) red sand beach facing Aspy Bay. A cairn with a National Historic Site plaque features a bust of Italian explorer Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot), believed to have landed in this region in 1497.

The road continues into **Bay St. Lawrence**, an attractive seaside village offering amenities and services. Tucked against the seaward-curving rocky bluffs of Cape North, Bay St. Lawrence is a popular destination for deep-sea fishing and whalewatching, and several boat tours operate from the pier.

Leaving Bay St. Lawrence, a right turn leads to Meat Cove. This 14 km (9 mi.) unpaved road winds along the sides of the coastal mountains, offering panoramic views of the highlands rising above the pounding surf. The



stunning vistas make it one of Nova Scotia's most unforgettable scenic roads.

At the end of the road, the tiny community of **Meat Cove** clings to the mountainside high above the rocky shore. This magnificently wild and remote setting is noted for its rare orchids, some of which can be found nowhere else in Nova Scotia. Whales are often seen swimming just offshore and eagles can frequently be spotted soaring above the coastal cliffs.

Returning to the Cabot Trail, turn left to continue.

OFF TRAIL ▶ A short distance past Cape North a left turn leads to **Dingwall**, a quaint fishing village on the shores of Aspy Bay, which features a sandy beach, a coastal resort and, for the diving enthusiast, a number of shipwrecks off nearby St. Paul's Island to be explored.

The Cabot Trail continues inland, re-entering the national park at **South Harbour** to begin a slow, steady climb along the ridge of South Mountain. A dirt road to the right leads to Paquet Lake, which features several hiking trails into the barrens.

OFF TRAIL ▶ Just past South Harbour, a left turn leads to a scenic coastal road. In the ruggedly picturesque fishing village of **White Point**, a small harbour protects the colourful boats from the crashing surf of the open sea. From White Point, return to the coastal road and follow it to **Neil's Harbour**, a busy fishing community with a variety of shops and services.

The Cabot Trail continues along the coastline, offering access to the shore in a number of places, including a picnic park and sandy beach at **Black Brook**. Further along, at **Green Cove**, visitors can explore a unique shoreline of huge blocks of pink granite, worn smooth by the constantly pounding surf of the open sea. And just past the campground at **Broad Cove**, a right turn leads along a gravel road to a picnic area that overlooks the tumbling cascade of Mary Ann Falls.

The Cabot Trail exits the park and passes through **Ingonish**, a popular resort destination that annually attracts thousands of visitors who come to enjoy breathtaking scenery and outdoor recreational activities

that include hiking, whale watching, bicycling, sea kayaking and, in winter, skiing. Set along the coast with two large bays separated by the ruggedly beautiful Middle Head Peninsula, the area includes the communities of Ingonish Centre, Ingonish Beach, **South Ingonish Harbour** and **Ingonish Ferry**.

At **Ingonish Centre** the Cabot Trail re-enters the park. Here visitors will find the beautiful Keltic Lodge gracefully perched atop the rocky bluffs of the narrow peninsula that separates North and South Bays. The lodge features swimming, tennis, a spa, coastal hiking trails and the renowned Highlands Links Golf Course, one of the top golf courses in Canada. A park entry permit is required.

Shortly thereafter a left turn leads to **Ingonish Beach**, a full-service community that offers both saltwater and freshwater swimming. The Freshwater Lake Trail is an easy 20-minute scenic walk.

Near the back of Ingonish Harbour, the Cabot Trail passes a popular ski resort where in summer and fall, visitors can ride the ski lift high up the coastal mountains to an elevation of over 300 m (1000 ft.). From the top, the view of Ingonish Harbour and the surrounding highlands is breathtaking in all seasons, especially when blanketed in fiery autumn colours.

The Cabot Trail continues, climbing from Ingonish Harbour to the crest of Cape Smokey, a 365 m (1,200 ft.) high promontory often capped by the white mist that gives the mountain its name. At the top, Cape Smokey Provincial Park provides magnificent vistas of the mountainous coastline and the vast arc of blue sea. Visitors with binoculars can often spot pods of whales feeding in the waters just offshore. The park features several picnic areas and is the start of the popular Cape Smokey hiking trail, an 11-km (7-mi.) return trail that leads to a lookoff at the very tip of the Cape.

The Cabot Trail descends steeply from Cape Smokey until it reaches the coastal plain at **Wreck Cove** and passes through small communities along the North Shore such as **Skir Dhu** and **North Shore**. In this area there is a rich history of the Gaelic language and traditions, including milling frolics. **Indian Brook** offers shops and some services.



312 At Barrachois River Bridge, Route 312 offers an interesting coastal alternative route, the Old Cabot Trail, which leads to **Jersey Cove**, where a 24-hour ferry (\$5, STC) crosses St. Ann's Harbour to **Englishtown**. At Englishtown, the Giant MacAskill Museum displays photographs, artifacts and articles of clothing of Angus MacAskill, a 2.4-m (7 ft. 9 in.) giant who lived here in the 1800s. Boat tours to the Bird Islands are available at Englishtown. These islands, rising like rocky pillars from the sea, are the nesting grounds of thousands of seabirds, including razorbills, kittiwakes, and over 300 pairs of Atlantic puffins. From Englishtown, Route 312 continues along the eastern side of St. Ann's Harbour to join Highway 105 at Exit 12, above South Gut St. Ann's.

The Cabot Trail turns inland at **Barachois River Bridge**. From **Tarbotvale** to St. Ann's, you can watch artisans at work in their studios in an area known locally as the Artisans' Loop. At **North River Bridge**, a right turn on Oregon Road leads to North River Provincial Park, a favourite with anglers who come to test their skill in the pools of the North River. A challenging 9 km (5.5 mi) footpath leads to North River Falls, the highest waterfall in Nova Scotia (30 m/100 ft). A Telemark ski hill is in **Goose Cove**.

At **St. Ann's**, the provincial park features a picnic area and a short walking trail that leads to a vantage point overlooking St. Ann's Harbour.

The St. Ann's region was first settled by Highland Scots. The Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts at South Ann's is the only one of its kind in North America. The College's Great Hall of the Clans features artifacts and displays that highlight the 200-year history of Scottish settlement in Cape Breton. The College also celebrates their Scottish heritage with several musical and cultural festivals during the summer months.

105 The Cabot Trail joins Highway 105 at Exit 11. Turn right and continue to Exit 10, where a left turn follows Route 205 to Baddeck.

Bras d'Or Lakes

The Bras d'Or Lakes' unique tidal waters create a rich ecosystem to explore. Known for gentle, fog-free waters, beautiful anchorages, and hundreds of coves and islands, the lakes are an international cruising destination, attracting hundreds of boating enthusiasts every year. The Bras d'Or Lakes are also a traditional home of Nova Scotia's native Mi'kmaq, and the Mi'kmaq language and culture are still evident today in the four reserves along its shores: Waycobah, Eskasoni (the largest reserve in the province), Wagmatcook, and Chapel Island in St. Peter's Inlet.

105 From the Canso Causeway, take Highway 105 towards the centre of Cape Breton. Visit the Father John Angus Rankin Cultural Centre in **Glendale** and discover the story behind the resurgence of traditional Scottish music in Cape Breton. At **Iron Mines** turn right to **Orangedale**, an attractive lakeside community where the Orangedale Railway Station Museum, a classic station built in 1886, displays memorabilia and railway cars from that era. The living quarters of the station master and his family, on the upper floor of the station, have been restored as at the turn of the century.

From the railway museum, retrace your route through the village and turn left to go to Marble Mountain. After Crowdis Bridge, which crosses River Denys, turn left on the gravel road that follows the shoreline. This route is marked by numerous bays and quiet coves that are an important habitat for herons, ospreys, bald eagles and many varieties of ducks and other waterfowl.

Sea kayaking among the islands and beautiful inlets of this region is a popular activity.

Marble Mountain is a small picturesque village that perches high above Clark Cove on the Bras d'Or Lakes, offering splendid views of the southern end of the lake and the many islands that lie just offshore. A museum details the fascinating history of the village and the nearby marble quarry, and there is a unique marble-chip beach.

