

WEEKEND

A Weekend in Baddeck, Cape Breton

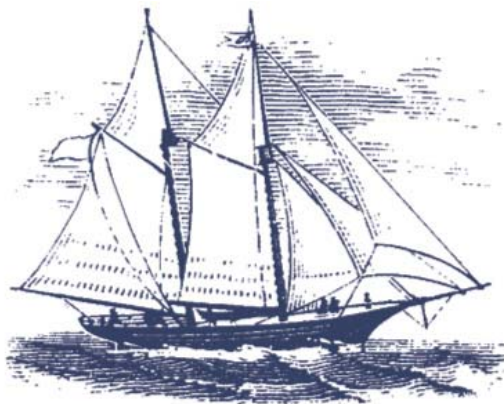
We call in on Alexander Graham Bell's home away from home in Baddeck, Cape Breton.

BY GREGORY PYNN



Photo: Gregory Pynn

After setting his eyes on [Baddeck](#) for the first time, Alexander Graham Bell, who made Canadian aviation history when he flew his *Silver Dart* over Baddeck Bay in 1909, fell in love with the region and decided to make it his permanent home. Located on the shores of Bras d'Or Lake on Cape Breton Island, Baddeck doesn't get the same hoopla as the Cabot Trail. But after discovering the town's bustling Chebucto Street (filled with local handcrafts shops and deli-style restaurants) and hiking through the foothills of the Cape Breton Highlands in search of the 15-metre Uisge Ban waterfalls, we too decide to stick around for a while.



Out on Bras d'Or Lake, conditions are perfect for an afternoon cruise aboard the 67-foot schooner *Amoeba*. A few bald eagles, on the lookout for fish, circle overhead as the crew raises the sails, and within minutes, we're moving at a good clip. The cruise offers the best views of Spectacle Island's bird sanctuary and of Beinn Bhreagh, the 37-room mansion, built in 1893, where Alexander Graham Bell lived and conducted many of his aviation experiments.



Photo: Gregory Pynn

At [North River Kayak Tours](#), our affable guide, Angelo Spinazzola, kits us out for an afternoon on the water. We navigate past flocks of cormorants sunbathing on the pillars of an old wharf before moving from North River into the ocean at St. Anns Bay. After a steady 30-minute paddle along the rugged coastline, we reach our destination – a secluded beach, complete with waterfall. Here the bay's rolling Blue Mountains give way to the open Atlantic, and we take a few moments to soak in the surroundings and recharge on baked snacks and tea before embarking on our return journey.



Photo: istockphoto.com / Tomazl

When Scottish Gaels settled the area more than 200 years ago, they brought their tradition of community gatherings with them. Today the [ceilidh](#) (pronounced KAY-lee, Gaelic for get-together) is a celebration of Cape Breton's thriving Gaelic culture. Luckily, you don't have to be a local to duck into one of these parties along Baddeck's Chebucto Street. We squeeze into a packed house at St. Michael's Parish Hall just as a show is getting underway and are instantly swept up in the uptempo fiddle music and storytelling.



Photos: Gregory Pynn

The [Crown Jewel Resort Ranch](#), in the heart of the Baddeck River Valley, is heated with geothermal energy, while our room is devoid of such urban amenities as TV. "In a place like this, there's no need to spend much time indoors," ranch co-founder Nahman Korem assures us. So we head out to drive a team of Norwegian Fjord horses, fly-fish on Baddeck River and admire the landscape from above in a Cessna that takes off from the ranch's own airstrip. After all that action, we reward ourselves at the property's restaurant, with chef Iris Kedmi's slow-roasted Highland beef over cauliflower purée, adorned with garlic scapes and day lilies.

Here are the addresses you'll need for a memorable weekend in Baddeck on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.

Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site 902-295-2069, capebretonisland.com/AGBell.html

Amoeba Sailing Tours Baddeck Wharf, 902-295-2481, amoebasailingtours.com

Baddeck Gathering Ceilidh 902-295-2794, baddeckgatheringceilidh.blogspot.com

Crown Jewel Resort Ranch 992 Westside Baddeck Rd., 902-295-1096, crownjewelresort.com

North River Kayak Tours R.R. 4, 888-865-2925, northriverkayak.com

St. Michael's Parish Hall 8 Old Margaree Rd.