

# Condé Nast Traveler

MARCH 2021

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THIS YEAR

why we travel → road trip

# Lightness of Being

In search of fresh seafood, warm-water beaches, and that elusive joie de vivre, *Shelley Cameron-McCarron* heads to Canada's Acadian Coast



The storybook Grande-Anse Lighthouse, on Chaleur Bay

**My plan in coming to New Brunswick** wasn't to learn about *Alice in Wonderland* and the importance of fun. But that's what happens to me at Le Moque-Tortue, a restaurant in the town of Shediac, where I sit beneath playing cards strung from the ceiling, surrounded by as many paused clocks, devouring the most perfect lobster roll.

Sébastien Després, owner of the Carroll-esque bistro, is an anthropologist and big-time Alice aficionado. At Le Moque-Tortue, he's all in on the *Wonderland* theme. The name is a reference to the scene in which Alice meets the Mock Turtle and learns to dance the Lobster Quadrille. It's an inside joke about Shediac, which locals call the World Lobster Capital.

"The book says a lot about our perceptions," explains Després as his youngest daughter, Alice, toddles between his legs. "The world is upside down; it's a view of games and fun and what life really should be....We tend not to think of fun, and I feel that's a problem. Stuffiness isn't fun. That's something that Alice would say."



Flowers and macramé at Cielo Glamping Maritime, in Haut-Shippagan

The Acadian coast of New Brunswick is in Canada's Maritime region, in the largest of three provinces on the Atlantic Ocean. The Acadians of the Maritimes, North America's first French settlers, are legendary for their indomitable love of life, and that's what my husband and I seek as we joyride more than 600 miles from our home in neighboring Nova Scotia along New Brunswick's coast, tracing a route from Shediac up to Bathurst and on to the northern tip of the Acadian Peninsula. On our first out-of-province road trip since the start of the pandemic, we're eager for a bit of playfulness.

The countryside is punctuated with boats, boardwalks, and wildlife. We brake for a mama bear and her cubs—and later, a gangly moose. As English gives way to French, we begin to see the blue, white, and red of the Acadian flag, with its Stella Maris adorning lighthouses and telephone poles.

Without fail, we're welcomed wherever we go. At a restaurant in Miramichi, the largest city in northern New Brunswick, a server calls his mom for insider tips. In the far-north hamlet of Petit-Paquetville, the co-owner of Distillerie Fils du Roy, Sébastien Roy, offers an impromptu tour and tasting. We're as smitten by his gin as by the storied local history he celebrates on evocative, artsy labels.



The Moonshell Pearl Dome at Cielo Glamping Maritime

In Shediac, after the lobster roll at Le Moque-Tortue, we pose next to a nearly 200,000-pound lobster sculpture and learn about the crustacean's life cycle at the compact yet impressive Homarus Eco-Centre on Pointe-du-Chêne wharf. There's a terrific chocolatier, Adorable Chocolat, where we snag almond-chocolate croissants before zipping 30 minutes up Route 11 to Le Pays de la Sagouine, which translates to The Land of the Washerwoman. It's an über-colorful theme town with food and music based on the fictional Acadian playground in Antonine Maillet's *La Sagouine*, a novel that celebrates its 50th birthday in 2021. Visitors walk a footbridge to Île-aux-Puces, a small island in Bouctouche Bay, where costumed actors bring the characters to life. Jokes fly and fiddles blaze, though there are serious moments too. An important part of the experience is learning about Le Grand Dérangement, the French colonists' shameful expulsion by the British from 1755 to 1763.

This is beach country, home to Canada's warmest saltwater (up to 84 degrees Fahrenheit in summer). To see it right, cruise coastal Route 475 to Irving Eco-Centre: La dune de Bouctouche, where three sets of stairs from a wooden boardwalk grant access to one of the last great dunes in this corner of North America. Estimated to be 2,000 years old, the dunes change with every major storm. When it's windy, you may see only seagulls. When it's calm, there are often cranes, foxes, and deer.



The serene Restigouche River

Before our night's stop in Miramichi, a village steeped in Irish influence and fabled salmon fishing, we push up Route 117—past tidy homes, steepled churches, and cliffs carved by wind and wave—to a monument at Escuminac wharf commemorating the 1959 hurricane in Miramichi Bay. The ground beneath our feet is where scores waited for news: 22 of 45 boats lost, 35 fishermen gone, and 24 widows and 83 fatherless children left behind.

En route to the Acadian Peninsula the next day, we rent bikes from Kayak Péninsule near Villégiature Deux Rivières Resort in Tracadie-Sheila. The cycling route, Véloroute de la Péninsule Acadienne, wows with nearly 200 miles of paved path paralleling small communities, forest, marsh, and sea. Giddy and grateful for the freedom, we sail through this sprawling nature, pausing by a little bridge to snap photos and breathe in the salty air.

Fishing's importance to the area is evident in Shippagan, home to the New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre, where massive, colorful crab boats sit in moorings during the off-season. "We're definitely going there," exclaims my husband. "Did you see the size of those boats?"

Crossing later to the Acadian isles, at the tip of the peninsula, we stop in Lamèque to see the shingled Sainte-Cécile Catholic church. Its plain exterior belies an unusually beautiful—and acoustically gifted—interior that explodes with candy-colored imagery painted by a former parish priest and helpers. I don't know where to look first: In 1968, Father Gerard d'Astous splashed joy into every nook. Pastel candles, crosses, and more peek out from walls and ceiling.

Continuing to Miscou Island, we cross an arched causeway bordered by fishing fleets where seagulls soar, taking in the pungency of low tide. We've come to windswept, wild Miscou for the Miscou Island Lighthouse, the oldest wooden lighthouse in the Maritimes (circa 1856). It stands at New Brunswick's northeastern edge like Canada's keeper, an Acadian chanteuse once mused. We spend an idyllic afternoon skipping stones, birding, and traipsing along a boardwalk over peat bogs, which carpet about half the island. Sun warms our shoulders as we try to identify blue-black berries and scan for orchids, gems of the bog, in a landscape so foreign it carries a whiff a mystery.

One of our last stops, an hour's drive away, is Caraquet, known as the capital of L'Acadie, near the popular Village Historique Acadien. We delight in the pin-straight road—no side streets, just sea on one side and town on the other.

Here, Victorian elegance reigns our final night, in a third-floor suite overlooking Chaleur Bay. Hôtel Paulin, built in 1891, is one of Canada's oldest family-run Acadian inns. It's helmed by third-generation hotelier Gérard Paulin and his wife, Karen Mersereau, who also runs the namesake restaurant. Earlier, she picked the blueberries that fill our tarts and joined local fishermen in the icy waters of the North Atlantic to source the Belle Baie cold-water shrimp on our plates. As we feast on grilled wild oysters and sustainably farmed Arctic char, good wine flows and we fall into leisurely conversation with our fellow guests. The celebration is unexpected, and I can't help but savor the hospitality and good-heartedness that have been our constant companions. We're not from here, yet it feels somehow that we, too, have come home.



The Hub bar at Cielo Glamping Maritime

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# Trip Planner

## GETTING HERE

Fly into the Greater Moncton Roméo LeBlanc International Airport, rent a car, and be on the dock devouring a lobster roll in 20 minutes. If arriving by car, Shediac is about 180 miles—a three-hour drive—from the U.S. border crossing at Calais, Maine.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Hôtel Paulin** (rooms from \$122; [hotelpaulin.com](http://hotelpaulin.com)) in Caraquet exudes Old World charm with its antiques and upscale dining. For a luxe camping experience, the recently opened **Cielo Glamping Maritime** (from \$370 for two nights; [en.glampingcielo.com](http://en.glampingcielo.com)) in Haut-Shippagan earns rave review for its geodesic domes parked on a secluded cove. **The Rodd Miramichi River** hotel (from \$115; [roddvacations.com](http://roddvacations.com)) has spacious rooms with kitchenettes, some of which open onto patios with dreamy water views. Plus, the on-site **1809 Restaurant & Bar** is one of Miramichi's best.

## WHERE TO SHOP

It's worth driving to Caraquet just for the artisanal breads from **Grains de folie**, a bistro in a century-old building. Other road trip gold: natural soaps and skin care from **Olivier Soapery** in Ste-Anne-de-Kent; hand-poured soy candles at colorful **Aloha Café-Boutique** in Lamèque; art and glassware at Miramichi's vintage and antiques shops; and who knows what from **Guy's Frenchys** in Shediac, the Maritimes' most iconic secondhand clothing chain. S.C.M.

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