

A FAR

TRAVELERS WHO CARE

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Where to Go in 2023

THE
PLACES
ISSUE

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New Year, New Trips

AS AN OWNER of a travel media company, I'm fortunate to work with a knowledgeable team, publish great stories, and meet people who give me endless ideas about where to go next. The only challenge: It's hard to choose.

One of my favorite sources of inspiration is AFAR's annual Where to Go list. Our editorial team reaches out to writers, reporters, and correspondents around the world for their top picks of places our travelers should visit in the coming year. They then sort through them and select destinations that feel poised for "a moment," whether it's a new cultural institution, park, or food offering.

I just got back from a cycling trip to eastern Canada's Prince Edward Island (PEI). I went there based on an early preview of this year's Where to Go list (yet another advantage to being cofounder of AFAR!). In August of 2021, PEI opened the Island Walk, a 435-mile route that encircles this crescent-shaped province.

I love that a destination would develop such a trail and what it says about how they want people to experience "the Island," as locals call it: slowly, intimately, and up close.

I pedaled about 100 miles over three days in the central portion of the Island, starting in the capital, Charlottetown. At 2,195 square miles, PEI is the smallest of Canada's 13 provinces and territories, as well as the most densely populated. But to me, a resident of San Francisco and New York City, it certainly didn't feel crowded. The ride featured scenic views, family-owned farms, and a beautiful coastline. The people were warm and the seafood was fabulous. The lobster roll at Original Richard's, a fish shack just off the beach outside of Prince Edward Island National Park, was the best I've ever had. That alone was worth the trip.

I urge you to turn to page 31 to read more about PEI and the other 11 destinations we recommend traveling to in 2023. I hope you will find quite a few places to go and reasons to do so soon.

Good travels,

GREG SULLIVAN

Cofounder and CEO



The Island Walk on Prince Edward Island is a long-distance trail modeled after Europe's Camino de Santiago.

Best time of year to visit

May to October. Accommodations sell out quickly in July and August, so you should book well in advance if you're traveling then.



A 435-mile hiking and biking route around Canada's small but mighty province invites visitors to travel slowly and joyfully.

by DEBBIE OLSEN



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND, OR PEI, off Canada's eastern seaboard, is home to some of the country's most enchanting pastoral scenery. You'll find fields of potatoes and strawberries, beaches that stretch for miles, storybook villages (the 1908 novel *Anne of Green Gables* was set here), red-and-white wooden lighthouses, and docks anchoring fishing boats. The Island Walk, a new 435-mile walking and cycling route circumnavigating "the Island," as locals call it, gives travelers a unique opportunity to experience it up close.

My husband and I cycled 180 miles of the route in June 2022, starting in the compact capital city, Charlottetown, and spending six days working our way across a section in the central region of the province. From Charlottetown, we pedaled 35 miles along crushed-gravel trails, wide red-dirt roads lined with trees, and country lanes—all relatively flat. After checking into the Orient Hotel,

a historic B&B in the tiny village of Victoria-by-the-Sea, we browsed in shops, talked with local anglers bringing in the day's catch, and walked barefoot along an expansive beach with rose-colored sand at the edge of the village. The tide came in while I ate possibly the best lobster roll I've ever tasted—a buttery toasted roll loaded with chunks of tender fresh-caught crustacean and house-made mayo—at the Lobster Barn restaurant.

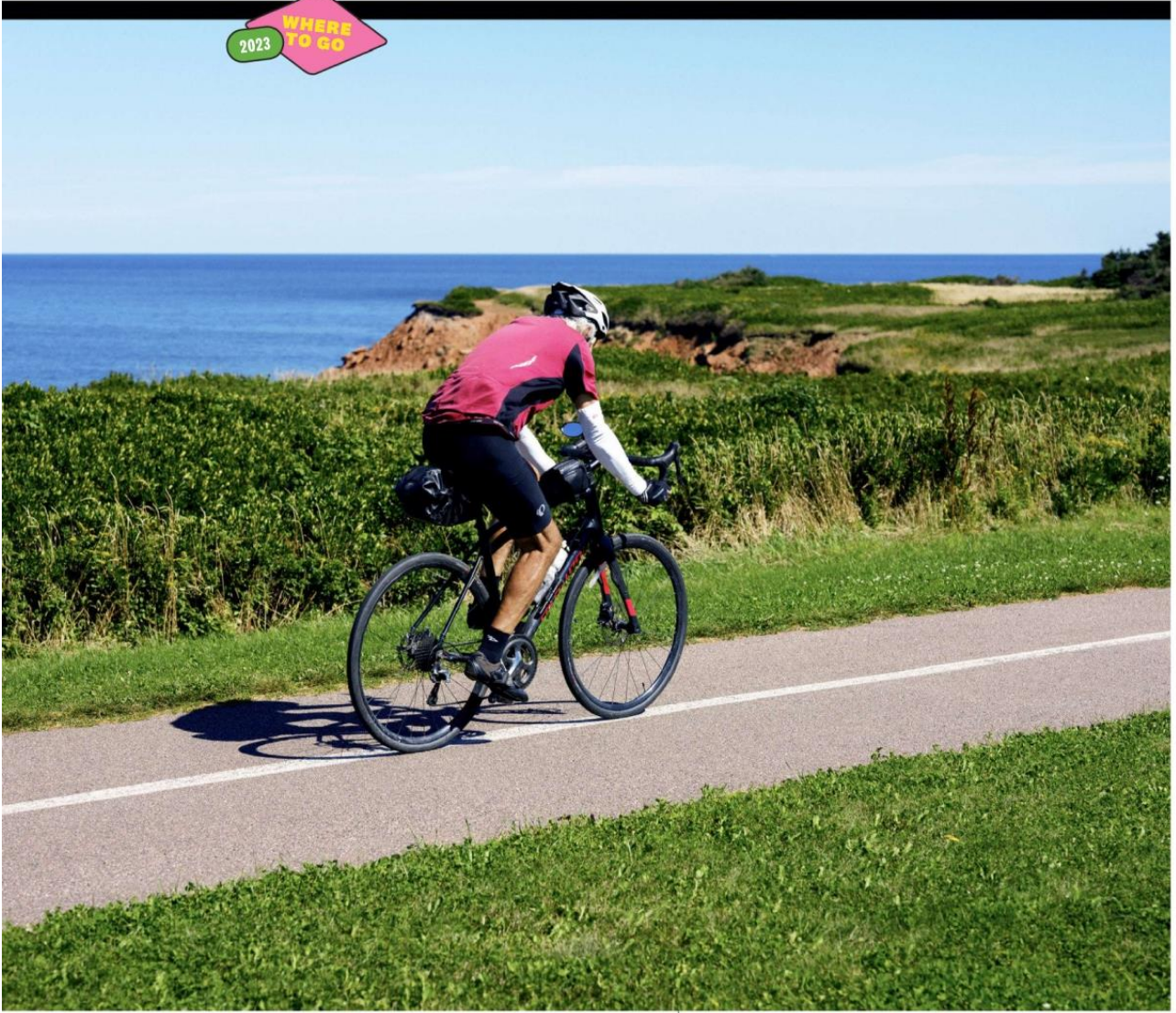
Over the following week, we cycled past the sand dunes of Prince Edward Island National Park and old wooden churches that date to the 1800s. We discovered national historic sites marking rarities, such as the iceboat mail service that ran in the Northumberland Strait from 1827 to 1917, and random attractions, including the "world's largest handheld egg beater" outside an antique store in the small town of Borden-Carleton. We pulled over whenever something caught our eye, which meant we stopped often.

Long-distance trekking has been a unique tourism niche worldwide for thousands of years. Since medieval times, pilgrims in Europe have traveled hundreds of miles to religious sites to pay homage to saints and penance for sins. El Camino de Santiago, also known as the Way of Saint James, is one of the most beloved pilgrimage routes in the world—and it inspired the creation of this Canadian (and more secular) trek.

Bryson Guptill, a longtime trail volunteer who lives in Charlottetown, conceived the idea of the Island Walk after he and his partner walked almost 500 miles along the Camino in 2016 and, three years later, about 150 miles of the lesser-known Rota Vicentina in Portugal. "My partner, Sue, and I had a wonderful time walking the Camino," Guptill said. "I kept thinking that we could have something like this in Prince Edward Island if we set our minds to it. The idea really gelled on the Portugal walk."

BRENDAN GEORGE KO





Guptill worked with other members of Island Trails, a nonprofit organization run by volunteers, to research, design, and map out the long-distance trekking route that is now the Island Walk using existing trails and secondary roads within the 2,195-square-mile province.

Once the route was laid out, Guptill and three friends hiked the entire 435-mile Island Walk over 32 days in autumn 2019. The Camino de la Isla, as some call it, opened in August 2021, but it's only now starting to come into its own after pandemic restrictions, with new signage and tour companies to support walkers and cyclists.

It was "wonderful and empowering" for Laura MacGregor of Waterloo, Ontario, who spent 31 days walking the route beginning in late May 2022. "It was an opportunity to take a time-out and step away from my life," she said. "My 21-year-old disabled son died two weeks into the pandemic, and I am still trying to move forward." MacGregor had always wanted to hike the Camino in Spain but never could, due to the demands of caring for



We pulled over whenever something caught our eye, which meant we stopped often.



The Lobster Barn in Victoria-by-the-Sea serves fish-and-chips with views of the beach.



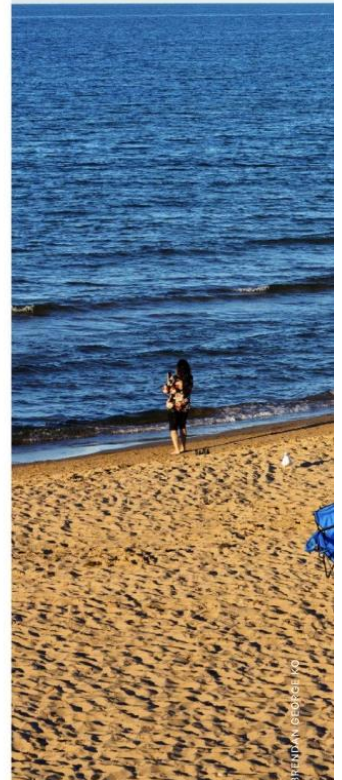
Travelers can rent bikes through MacQueen's Bike Shop & Island Tours in Charlottetown.

How to get there

Charlottetown Airport (YYG) is the main airport on Prince Edward Island. International flights may route through Montreal or Toronto. From the airport, you can catch a cab into the city, pick up a bike rental, and begin walking or cycling the trail.

Did you know?

Much of the Island Walk runs along the Confederation Trail, a 278-mile-long route built in the 1990s along a former railway line. The Confederation Trail is part of the Trans Canada Trail that stretches 17,400 miles.



her son. The Island Walk provided time to reflect and “come to terms with all the changes” in her life.

Whether or not travelers follow the trail, they could spend days immersed in the magical places that inspired Lucy Maud Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*—walking down Lovers’ Lane, wandering the Haunted Wood, and visiting Green Gables Heritage Place and Avonlea Village. Plus, as Anne said, there’s nothing more delectable than ice cream, and the Island is famous for it. A visit to PEI must include a trip to a great shop such as Holman’s Ice Cream Parlour in Summerside or the Cows chain, which started here and now has shops all across Canada.

Prince Edward Island is charming at every turn, but there’s something particularly special about exploring it on bicycle or on foot. My experience on the Island Walk may not have been as profound as MacGregor’s, but it was exactly what I needed. It was a chance to experience a remarkable destination in a special way and to gain a fresh perspective for coping with my own life’s challenges. I came back feeling refreshed, more physically fit, and more in tune with the natural world and the beings I share it with. For me, that was transformative.

Debbie Olsen is an award-winning Canadian-based Métis writer and a national bestselling author.



The reservation to make

Take in a play or live performance at the Confederation Centre of the Arts in Charlottetown or Harbourfront Theatre in Summerside.

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Founded on the south shore of the Island in 1819, Victoria-by-the-Sea has become a haven for artisans.

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You'll find many beaches ripe for strolling spread across PEI's hundreds of miles of coastline.

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Prince Edward Island is Canada's leading supplier of potatoes, so you definitely want fries with that.

