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Set expectations high for Prince Edward Island, and prepare to be wowed



The Cardigan River Heritage Centre and Marina in Prince Edward Island. (Photo Moira McCarthy)

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I had deep-rooted assumptions about what a trip to Prince Edward Island would be like, and to be honest: they worried me a bit.

Not because I'd heard negatives; not even close. Rather, my preconceived notion of peace, beauty and friendly folks – thanks to a combination of my beloved Aunt Barbie and Uncle Bill's lifelong love of visiting the spot and a lifetime of loving "Anne of Green Gables" – put me at risk of being let down by high expectations.

After a week-long first time visit in October, the expectations were exceeded by the experience. There I found breathtaking beauty, more activities than I could fit in on a first trip, and possibly the nicest people I've come across in years. PEI (<https://www.tourismpei.com/>) lives up to the dream.

We arrived as darkness fell, having taken a two-leg flight (Boston-Toronto-Charlottetown; there are no direct flights from Boston so this or a car/ferry ride are the best options). We settled into our big yet cozy room with a working fireplace at The Barachois (<https://barachoisinn.com/>) a two-building set up in Rustico. We dozed off, knowing only a large and historic church sat across the road.

Morning dawned and out our windows we had our first wow moment: in the dark of the night we had no idea we were nestled right up next to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, an inlet dotted with fishing and oyster boats. It was beautiful.

After an amazing made-to-order breakfast around a table filled with chatty and kind guests, we headed off to deep dive into PEI life.

First up: the one-two combo of playing golf next to the famed Anne of Green Gables home and then visiting the home itself. As simple as it may sound, when I first spotted the instantly recognizable green trimmed house from the fairway at Green Gables Golf Club (<https://greengablesgolf.com/>) my heart fluttered. It was this actual house, after all, that inspired lifelong resident Lucy Maud Montgomery's 1908 novel, "Anne of Green Gables," set in the fictional town of Avonlea on Prince Edward Island.

After our round, we checked out the house and grounds, now an historic destination (<https://parks.canada.ca/lhn-nhs/pe/greengables>), with displays, tours, and walking trails to explore it all.

Just down the road and still in Cavendish sits the recreated village of Avonlea (<https://avonlea.ca/>), a mashup of real historic buildings and recreated spots, along with tons of great dining. You'll find the original schoolhouse Montgomery taught in, the Minister's residence and the 1872 Historic Long River Church. Better yet: entrance is free.

We were there late season – most spots were getting ready to close for the winter or were already closed, but we were told in summer months the place is jammed. We were able to sit down for lunch at the Turkey Tavern (<https://www.turkeytavern.ca/>) where I savored what I might call the best turkey sandwich I've ever had.

That night we attended the famed Fall Flavours Festival (<https://fallflavours.ca/>), a multi-course lobster dinner hosted by the PEI lobster industry folks themselves. We ate, we danced, we laughed and cheered like a local. PEI perfection.

We spent the next days exploring beaches with red stone backdrops out of a painting, dunes, small towns and long, winding roads. What struck me was how simple life is there: unlike the McMansionization of some of my favorite US seaside towns, PEI towns are still dotted with simple and lovely homes; even oceanfront. And the pride of location speaks loudly: Even tiny homes are meticulously maintained. It's refreshing.

The boardwalk and beach walks in Cavendish, as well as the many naturally maintained spots in the PEI National Park gave us plenty of fresh air and open space moments.

One afternoon after a beautiful golf round at The Links at Crowbush Cove (<https://peisfinestgolf.com/crowbush/>) we retreated to the Mysa Nordic Spa (<https://mysanordicspa.com/>). I'm a fan of Nordic spas, their hot and cold plunges, relaxation rooms and quiet setting, and this one outdid itself with direct water views and a fabulous restaurant. It's the perfect way to pause while still soaking in PEI's vibe.

Food is an easy reach in PEI. Famed – of course– for oysters, lobsters and other seafood, it's clear that they take pride in their offerings. At Clam Diggers (<https://clamdiggerspei.com/>) in Cardigan – recommended by fellow golfers – we savored fresh caught seafood in a casual setting.

And everywhere we went – even the turkey sandwich spot – served us fresh biscuits. I'm told it's a salute to their heritage; a symbol of their Scottish roots and self-sufficiency.

Me? I saw it as a symbol of the very thing that drew my Aunt and Uncle back there yearly for most of their lives: the kindness, hospitality and inclusion embraced by all the folks there.

I get it, Uncle Bill. It's now on my “must return” list as well.



The Covehead Harbour Lighthouse on PEI. (Photo Moira McCarthy)



The Cavendish Dunelands at Prince Edward Islands National Park. (Photo Moira McCarthy)

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