

Nova Scotia: Cape Breton Island

Tour-Only Itinerary

The band launches into a jaunty Acadian tune, and locals take to the floor for a traditional dance. Sipping a dram of house-made single malt after today's walk in Canada's Celtic heartland is pretty sweet. Even sweeter, this distillery-inn is your home for the night, so dinner and a cozy bed are close at hand. As the musicians hit their stride, your mind wanders to the pleasures that lie ahead on your self-paced Nova Scotia hiking tour through the Cape Breton Highlands. Galleries and craft shops, stunning coves and headlands, wildlife and walking trails. All worthy of anticipation—but don't get too far ahead of yourself. The night is young, the music's just begun, and your bowl of seafood chowder is on its way.



Highlights

- Enjoy spectacular coastal views from the Skyline Trail, gazing down from headlands 1,000 feet above the Gulf of St. Lawrence.
- Indulge in a stay at the Keltic Lodge, an elegant seaside resort, and take advantage of its private beach, luxurious spa, and 18-hole golf course.
- Enjoy nightly live music performances by local Cape Breton musicians during your stay at the Glenora Inn & Distillery.
- Delight in the freedom of having your own transportation as you explore the Cabot Trail by car and on foot.

On all Self-Guided Adventures you can count on ...



A local representative available 24/7.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Detailed maps & route notes featuring turn-by-turn directions and places of interest.



Experts to handle all the details, including moving your luggage between hotels while you're out exploring.



Scheduled taxi transfers to bring you to and from each day's walks.



Access to a Self-Guided Flight Concierge—ask our knowledgeable team to find flights that sync with your planned trip.



Delicious meals—many are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Self-Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 3 to 7 miles per day and options available. The walks have elevation gains and losses up to 1,100 feet. Walking terrain includes dirt roads, gravel paths, and packed earth trails with roots and rocks in some places, mainly in the national park. Cape Breton's scenery is wild and seemingly untouched, ranging from deep forests to dramatic Atlantic coastal rocky shores with occasional sandy beaches, tiny fishing villages to bustling small towns that have conserved Scottish or Acadian culture. Opportunities for viewing fauna and flora are ubiquitous—including whale-watching cruises out of several harbors or simply looking out to sea from a rocky promontory. Moose, bear, and bald eagles are not uncommon sights on the walks or drives.

Remember: preparation is the key to ensuring your tour readiness; the more you walk or participate in aerobic exercise prior to your trip, the more you will enjoy your experience!

DAY 1

Your Nova Scotia: Cape Breton Island tour begins

Your destination today is the lovely town of Baddeck, in the heart of Cape Breton Island. It is the official starting and ending point of the Cabot Trail, the coastal road around the northern tip of the island. Completed in 1932, the Cabot Trail is named for the English explorer John Cabot, who first sighted the island in 1497, staking England's claim in North America. Baddeck is ideally situated on the northern shore of 60-mile-long Bras d'Or Lake. Alexander Graham Bell maintained his cherished summer home here for 37 years, and the nearby Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site houses a museum commemorating his work. Upon arrival, you can explore the town and its historical properties and shops, or relax at your charming inn.

DAY 2

Inverness Beach & Boardwalk and West Mabou Beach & Trails

4+ miles, easy. Total driving time: 2.25 hours

This morning, you can choose to meander through the Margaree River Valley, passing through the small communities that call the valley home. Perhaps you'll consider fly-fishing in one of the local rivers or simply learning about the history of fishing in the area at the Salmon Museum. Make a visit to the shops and studios of renowned local crafters, including potters, painters, and quilters. Contributing to the area's culture are the Scottish tenant farmers, or crofters, who came to Cape Breton Island in the early 1800s. Cast out of their highland homes by the English, the crofters brought many of their traditions with them when they settled in Cape Breton. Reaching Margaree Forks, you leave the Cabot Trail to arrive at Inverness, a scenic seaside community and top getaway for the golf set. Choose from two easy walks, the first along an idyllic boardwalk, and the second along a long stretch of soft sand at beautiful Inverness Beach. With the average ocean temperature hovering around 68°F, Inverness Beach is home to the warmest ocean waters north of the Carolinas (including Cape Cod and Long Island). Following a swim or

refreshment at the beach café, you make your way south along the Ceilidh Trail (Hwy 19), which snakes along the western coast of Cape Breton Island. This area is renowned for its *ceilidh* music performances, square dances, and parties. Reaching Mabou, the hot spot of Cape Breton's Celtic music scene, consider popping into the Red Shoe Pub, owned by the sisters of Nova Scotia's popular musical family, the Rankins, for a pint or bite to eat. After enjoying the delights of Mabou, travel along country roads to secluded West Mabou Beach Provincial Park. Highlighted by a wide sweep of sandy beach backed by sandy dunes, the park offers several walking trails along the bluffs and through agricultural land and marshes, all with fine views. Your destination for the evening is North America's first single-malt whiskey distillery (and inn) in the small town of Glenville, where a tour and tasting await. After dinner, be sure to visit the on-site pub to enjoy their daily *ceilidh* of Cape Breton music and musicians.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 3

Acadian Trail. Optional Walks: Le Chemin du Buttereau or Le Buttereau Day 3: Acadian Trail. Optional Walks: Le Chemin du Buttereau or Le Buttereau

5.2 miles, moderate, 1,100-ft. elevation gain and loss, with some steep sections. Optional walks: 2.9 miles, easy to moderate, 100-ft. elevation gain and 200-ft. elevation loss or 1 mile, easy to moderate, 50-ft. elevation gain and 200-ft. elevation loss. Total driving time: 1 hour 5.2 miles, moderate, 1,100-ft. elevation gain and loss, with some steep sections. Optional walks: 2.9 miles, easy to moderate, 100-ft. elevation gain and 200-ft. elevation loss or 1 mile, easy to moderate, 50-ft. elevation gain and 200-ft. elevation loss. Total driving time: 1 hour

Today you enter the Cape Breton Highlands National Park, a truly stunning portion of the winding Cabot Trail. The Acadian Trail begins near the Chéticamp Visitor Center and rises almost 1,000 feet above the Chéticamp River. As you hike, admire panoramic views of the Acadian Coast, the river valley, and the park's highland interior. Follow the trail as it winds to the top of Burnt Mountain, making your way through thick blueberry bushes, keeping an eye out for evidence of bear and moose. Should you prefer an easier walk option—or an additional walk option—head further up the Cabot Trail to Le Buttereau Trailhead. Here, you retrace the steps of the Acadian pioneers who traveled this cart path from Le Buttereau (a small settlement of seven families) to Chéticamp. Choose from an easy out-and-back walk or a longer loop option. Your home for the next two nights is the fishing village of Chéticamp, originally settled in the 1760s

by exiled Acadians from the French territory further south when it was surrendered to the English. This vibrant community has maintained its cultural roots, as you can see from the exquisite hooked rugs and other crafts. Here in Chéticamp, you may also be able to catch a Celtic musical performance.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4

Skyline Trail. Afternoon option: Corney Brook or whale watching excursion (at your own expense)

5.7 miles, easy to moderate, 400-ft. elevation gain and loss. Afternoon option: 4 miles, easy to moderate, 450-ft. elevation gain and loss. Total driving time: 1 hour

This morning's walking route is the famous Skyline Trail, with its spectacular views from 1,000 feet above sea level. You don't have to climb the whole way, as the trail begins at about 950 feet and reaches a maximum of 1,300 feet. From the dramatic headland cliff, you can trace the Cabot Trail around the mountainsides and, on a very clear day, you may be able to see the French archipelago of Les Îles de la Madeleine in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It is not uncommon to sight whales in the water far below, and, along the trail, moose and eagles. After a picnic lunch, you may choose to set off on an exciting whale-watching boat tour out of Chéticamp—humpback, minke, pilot, and fin whales are common in this Gulf corridor, known as the Cape Breton Trough. Alternatively, the Corney Brook trail follows a meandering brook through mixed hardwood forest to a small waterfall—again, keep an eye out for moose, birds, and snowshoe hare.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5

Bog Trail. Lone Shieling Trail. White Point Trail

0.3 miles, easy. 0.4 miles, easy. 4.8 miles, easy. Total driving time: 2 hours

This morning you have two easy (and very short) warm-up walks. The Bog trail takes you on a boardwalk through a highland plateau bog with interpretive plaques along the way introduce you to the fascinating flora and fauna that make up the bog's unique ecosystem. The Lone Shieling loop trail begins at a historical crofter's hut and leads through a hardwood forest of sugar maple trees, some of which are 350

years old! Continuing your drive along the northernmost part of the Cabot Trail to the White Point Trail, you'll find some of the most dramatic coastal scenery in Cape Breton. Reaching a grassy point, you'll gaze out to sweeping views of Aspy Bay, as waves crash on the rocky coast below. A small cemetery at the tip of the point dates back to the settlement of this area in the late 1700s. Return to the trailhead and continue to your day's destination, the award-winning Keltic Lodge Resort & Spa, located on a peninsula jutting into the Atlantic, with a backdrop view of Cape Smokey.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6

Franey Mountain. Optional Walks: Clyburn Valley and Middle Head

4.6 miles, moderate with a challenging section, 1,150-ft. elevation gain and loss. Optional walks: 5 miles, easy and 2.4 miles, easy. Total driving time: 10 minutes

This morning, you may opt for the exhilarating walk up Franey Mountain, a steep and steady ascent through Acadian forest and a stand of hardwoods. Rising from sea level, your surroundings change to balsam fir, with trailing arbutus and pipsissewa underfoot. At Franey's peak, you are rewarded with a panoramic view of the open sea with Middle Head and Cape Smokey to the east, Money Point to the south, and the Clyburn Valley below. Another walk available today (either instead of, or in addition to your morning outing), is a path through Clyburn Valley at the base of Franey Mountain. This riverside walk takes you on a path through spectacular stands of hardwood trees, impressive boulders (some bigger than cars!), old, abandoned beaver ponds, verdant meadows, and fragrant apple trees. You'll pass the remains of an old gold mine—gold was never discovered in the area, and after years of fruitless effort, the mine finally closed in 1916. Returning to your resort, you may opt for a dip in the heated outdoor pool or enjoy the spa facilities. Those with more energy to burn may also choose to walk from the hotel on the Middle Head Trail that snakes along the cliff-bound peninsula that divides Ingonish Bay.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7

Your Nova Scotia: Cape Breton Island tour concludes

This morning, options include a relaxed stroll on the pink granite stones of Ingonish Beach, or perhaps a round of golf at the renowned Highland Links course, or indulging in the spa's offerings before departing

for onward travels. (Golf and spa fees are not included in the tour price, advance reservations required.)

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Tour Only

Boutique accommodations 7 meals: 6 breakfasts and 1 dinner Detailed water- and tear-resistant Route Notes and maps Orientation meeting with a Country Walkers representative Local representative available 24/7 Scheduled taxi and luggage transportation (Please note: If unable to walk, it is possible to travel with your luggage from one accommodation to the next at no additional charge.) Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary: Cape Breton Highlands National Park Pass and distillery tour and tasting Access to Self-Guided Flight Concierge—Ask our knowledgeable team to find flights that sync perfectly with your planned trip.

