



Freshwater Lake Trail

CAPE BRETON HIGHLANDS

NOVA SCOTIA
ESTABLISHED 1936
948 sq km/235,000 acres

Cape Breton Highlands National Park was the first national park designated in Atlantic Canada. The Cabot Trail, a world-famous scenic highway, runs along parts of the coastal borders on both sides of the park and crosses the highlands. Renowned for its hiking trails, the park is home to a diverse mix of boreal and temperate species not found elsewhere in Canada.

The human history of northern Cape Breton reaches back 10,000 years. The Mi'kmaq have lived here about 4,000 years. Portuguese, French, Scottish, Irish, and Dutch immigrants settled here from the 1400s onward, and there continues to be a rich cultural history in the region that is active and engaging.

The park is often referred to as the place “where the mountains meet

the sea.” The dominant feature of this region is the elevated plateau, divided by steep-walled river canyons; northern species and habitats on the plateaus coexist with the more temperate habitats and species of the lowlands. Consequently, there is much diversity.

Approximately 88 percent of the park is forested. The plateau or upper reaches is dominated by both

boreal and taiga vegetation and is part of the worn-down Appalachian mountain chain that stretches from Georgia to Newfoundland. The boreal land region part of this plateau features large swaths of coniferous trees, sprinkled with barrens and wetlands. Most of the entire population of Nova Scotia's endangered Canada lynx live here, as well as moose, hare, grouse, and marten. The taiga land region of the plateau features a tundra-like landscape characterized by scrub forest, barrens, and bogs.

In the lowlands, the Acadian forest includes a mix of northern and temperate plants and animals. Most worthy of note are the old-growth stands—more than 350 years old—as well as some pure sugar-maple stands found only in the northern part of this species' range.

The park and its treasures have been shaped by the Gulf of St. Lawrence, which flanks it on the westward side, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. The shorelines range from rocky shores and dramatic headlands to cobbled and sandy beaches. A healthy marine food chain includes krill, lobster, and salmon. Minke whales, pilot whales, and harbour seals are frequently seen along the coast. Around 230 species of birds frequent various sections of the park, the most noticeable being bald eagles.

The park has six campgrounds, 26 hiking trails, several beaches, and a world-class golf course. Bordering communities have seasonal amenities, recreational programs, and cultural activities.

How to Get There

Airports are located in Sydney, in Cape Breton, and Halifax, in mainland Nova Scotia. From Sydney, take Rte. 125 to Hwy. 105, then take the

Cabot Trail at the Englishtown ferry or at St. Ann's to Ingonish Beach. Driving time is two hours.

If driving from Halifax, take Hwy. 102 to Truro, then Hwy. 104 to the Canso Causeway that links mainland Nova Scotia to Cape Breton Island. Allow 3 hours to reach Cape Breton. At this point you need to decide which park entrance/visitor centre you want to check into: Ingonish Beach or Chéticamp.

For the Ingonish Beach entrance, take Hwy. 105 to exit 11 at Southaven. Follow the Cabot Trail north to the visitor centre. Driving time is 2 hours. Approaching the park from the west side, once you've crossed the Canso Causeway, follow Rte. 19 (the Ceilidh Trail) along the coast to Margaree Forks, then follow the Cabot Trail to Chéticamp. Allow 2 hours. The park entrance is ten minutes from Chéticamp.

When to Go

The park is open year-round. The best time to go will depend on your interests. Bird-watchers may prefer spring and early summer as there is less foliage and chances are better for spotting birds, although peak breeding activity is June through July.

Hiking is great from May to November, when the ground is usually snow free. Some people prefer to hike in the fall as there are no flies and fall foliage is spectacular. It's also when the Celtic Colours International Festival takes place, which is a bonus.

The best time for cycling is summer and fall. Ocean temperatures warm up by July and start to cool off in September, so beach activities are best during the summer. Although there is limited infrastructure during the winter, snowshoeing and skiing in the park can be a once-in-a-lifetime experience; valleys and plateaus become veritable winter wonderlands.



How to Visit

The possibilities at Cape Breton Highlands are endless. You can be as busy or as laid-back as you please. The best place to start is at one of the visitor information centres located at either end of the park. The views and vistas are spectacular no matter where you enter the park.

INGONISH BEACH TO SOUTH HARBOUR

a full day

Beginning at **Ingonish Beach**, pack a lunch and head for the stunning view at **Lakies Head** (20 mins.), where you can learn about bird migrations, whales, and sea turtles.



A few minutes later, you'll arrive at **Green Cove** rocky ocean headland for a look at the 375-million-year-old granite formations along the shore. Next head to **Black Brook Beach**, a small beach divided by Black Brook. A little farther on is **Jigging Cove Lake**.

For lunch, stop at the picnic area near **Neils Harbour**, or carry on another

20 minutes to **South Harbour**. Not listed on most maps, the stunning yet rather secluded beach here draws few visitors. Drive north to see the gypsum cliffs—a relic of when Cape Breton Island lay in the tropics. A short excursion leads to **Dingwall**, a tiny fishing village on a scenic harbour.

You can do the entire loop—a two-hour drive from one visitor centre to the other—in one day, selecting a few activities en route. Or, return to Neils Harbour taking the alternate route along the coast. Carry on to Ingonish Beach, enjoying the view from a different perspective.

CHÉTICAMP TO NORTH MOUNTAIN & BACK

a full day

From Chéticamp head toward Pleasant Bay, where the Cabot Trail turns inland. Your first destination is just past Pleasant Bay at **MacIntosh Brook**, where a short hike of 15 to 20 minutes will take you through an old-growth forest to a lovely waterfall. Next is **Lone Shieling**, a 15-minute loop through a 350-year-old maple stand, where you'll see a reproduction of a Scottish crofter's hut.

Ascending **North Mountain**, you'll see the oldest rocks in Nova Scotia—more than one-billion-year-old Grenville gneiss and anthracite, once part of the Canadian Shield. At the top look down on **Aspy River**, whose slopes are especially resplendent in the fall, when vibrant yellows and reds paint the maples.

As you descend on the return trip toward **Pleasant Bay**, look for the sparkling waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the V of the mountains ahead. If it's time for lunch, drive to the picnic area at MacIntosh Brook. After lunch, ask one of the locals for directions to **Gampo Abbey**, a Buddhist monastery perched on the coastline, or the Whale Interpretation Centre. Guided tours are available in summer.

On your way back to Chéticamp, stop at the look-off where the road narrows to a ridge called the **Boar's Back**. About 305 m (1,000 ft) below you is **Fishing Cove**, once a tiny Scottish

settlement reached only by footpath or boat, and now a wilderness campsite.

Your next stop is **the Bog**. A 15-minute walk on a boardwalk will take you through some fascinating terrain with several interpretive panels. The treasures here include frog eggs, orchids, and carnivorous plants.

If you want to see a moose, head for the **Skyline Trail**. You'll need two to three hours; it's worth keeping to the right and walking the entire loop. Part of the trail leads to a dramatic headland overlooking the **Gulf of St. Lawrence**, where you're likely to catch sight of bald eagles and pilot whales.

As you travel back down North Mountain to meet the Gulf, there are two more places to pull over and enjoy the view: **Veterans Monument** and **Cap Rouge**. The latter has an excellent geology exhibit. You may also see gannets here plummeting 20 to 30 m (66–98 ft) in a nearly vertical dive for food. Next, pull over at **La Bloc**, a picnic area with a great beach—the perfect place for a swim, stroll, or rest. Close off your day with a visit to **Pillar Rock** at Presqu'île. If there's been a wind, the waves hitting the rock will be mesmerizing.

KAYAKING

The shore along the western side of the park just above Chéticamp up to Corney Brook is accessible in several places. If you paddle north along the coast, you'll pass by **Jumping Brook** and find yourself beneath some towering cliffs. A little farther on you'll find a large sea cave with a high, vaulted ceiling. If the tide is up, you'll be able to paddle all the way in.

Experienced kayakers can launch at Pleasant Bay and paddle to **Pollets Cove**. Pack a few apples for the horses that may greet you when you arrive. If the winds rise and the seas become agitated, you will need extra



A tranquil view of a Cape Breton sunset

time to wait for calmer waters to paddle out. Bring extra food.

On the Atlantic Coast, the best launching and takeout points are the beaches at Neils Harbour, Black Brook, Broad Cove, and Ingonish. On both coasts there are outfitters where you can rent gear or hire guides for paddling excursions.

HIKING, BIKING, & MORE

Up for a challenge? Hike to **Franey**, a two- to three-hour loop from the Information Centre. At the top, follow the narrow gravel trail near the look-off for a breathtaking view of the **Clyburn Brook canyon** and the Atlantic.

For a more relaxed pace, spend the afternoon playing golf at the world-famous **Highlands Links**, voted the best public course in Canada. Or head to **Ingonish Beach**, named one of the top 25 Canadian beaches by *Canadian Geographic Traveller*.

Or consider the **Slacker's Guide**: Sample ten short trails in one day in a variety of habitats. If you have two or more days, you could explore all the trails that lead to a waterfall

including **Mary Ann Falls**, **Beulach Ban Falls**, or **MacIntosh Brook Waterfalls**, and **Corney Brook trails**.

Or go geocaching; 14 caches are strategically placed throughout the park including an Eco-Cache, Cultural Cache, Earth Cache, and the Boomer's Kid Cache. Learn more at the visitor centres.

Cycling can be hugely rewarding along the **Cabot Trail**. A number of private companies offer personalized tours, and many provide shuttle service to get up the steep hills.

Lively and informative interpretive events take place throughout the park during July and August. Programs focus on everything from moose and mountains to whales and local history. Sunset hikes, lake safaris, and Acadian-Scottish concerts are just a few popular programs, along with a star party in August. Schedules are available at the visitor centres, campgrounds, and online.

As well, the local communities host dozens of suppers, ceilidhs, cultural events, and festivals throughout the region. Check local papers and community bulletin boards or ask park staff for more information.

CAPE BRETON HIGHLANDS NATIONAL PARK

(Parc national des Hautes-Terres-du-Cap-Breton)

INFORMATION & ACTIVITIES

VISITOR & INFORMATION CENTRES

Chéticamp Visitor Centre Western entrance near Chéticamp. Phone (902) 224-2306. Features interpretive exhibits, a nature bookshop, and a family corner with games for children ages 3-12.

Ingonish Visitor Centre Eastern entrance in Ingonish Beach. Phone (902) 285-2691.

SEASONS & ACCESSIBILITY

Park open year-round; full services from late May to early October.

HEADQUARTERS

Ingonish Beach, NS BOC 1L0. Phone (902) 224-2306. www.parkscanada.gc.ca/capebreton.

ENTRANCE FEES

\$8 per person, \$20 per group per day; \$40 per person, \$100 per group per year. (A group is up to 7 people in one vehicle.)

PETS

Pets must be in physical control at all times. Owners must control noise levels.

ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

Many of the washrooms and look-offs are accessible, as is the Chéticamp Visitor

Centre, some campsites, and the Bog and Freshwater Lake Trails.

THINGS TO DO

Interpretive events in July and August. Interpretive exhibits at 14 look-offs including **La Bloc**, **Cap Rouge**, the **Veteran's Monument**, and **Fishing Cove**, as well as 7 short trails.

The park also offers 26 hiking trails, geocaching, and swimming at **Ingonish**, **North Bay**, **Black Brook**, **Warren Lake**, and **La Bloc**. Fishing permits \$10 per day, \$35 per year.

Golfing at Highlands Links (www.highlandslinksgolf.com); permit \$105 per day. For tee time, call (800) 441-1118. Cross-country skiing in winter. Call (902) 285-2549 for snow and trail conditions.

SPECIAL ADVISORIES

- Be aware of wildlife encounters, especially with coyotes, black bears, or moose. To report incidents, call (877) 852-3100.
- Rogue waves and riptides can be a concern during and after storms.
- Blackflies and mosquitoes are common in the summer; bring insect repellent.

OVERNIGHT BACKPACKING

Permit required for backcountry trekking. Wilderness camping at **Fishing Cove**

campground, accessible only on foot, with tent pads, food cache, and pit privy. Beach nearby. For information and reservations for backcountry camping, call (902) 224-2306.

CAMPGROUNDS

Open year-round; full services available from late May to early October. Unlimited length of stay; for information on camping for longer than 7 nights, visit park website. Maximum four people per site. For reservations call (877) 737-3783 or visit www.pccamping.ca. For information on winter camping, call (902) 285-2691.

Chéticamp, open year-round, has hot showers, kitchen shelters with wood stoves, group fireplaces, playgrounds, and an outdoor theatre. Full services available from late May to early October; flush toilets and kitchen shelters available from October to mid-May. Serviced campsites with electricity, water, and sewer \$35 per night. Serviced campsites with electricity \$29 per night; unserviced campsites with washroom building (toilets and showers) \$26 per night. Winter camping available.

Ingonish, unserviced campsites with washroom building (toilets and showers) \$26 per night. Winter camping available. **Broad Cove**, open late June to early September. Serviced campsites with electricity, water, and sewer \$35 per night; unserviced campsites with washroom building (toilets and showers) \$26 per

night. **MacIntosh Brook** and overflow unserviced campsites with washroom building (toilets only) \$22 per night. **Corney Brook**, unserviced campsites with washroom building (toilets only) \$24 per night. **Big Intervale**, primitive campground with pit privies \$18 per night. Winter camping available at **Black Brook**.

HOTELS, MOTELS, & INNS

(unless otherwise noted, rates are for a 2-person double, high season, in Canadian dollars)

Outside the park:

Inverary Resort 368 Shore Rd., Box 190, Baddeck, NS B0E 1B0. (902) 295-3500 or (800) 565-5660. www.capebretonresorts.com. Packages \$99-\$229.

Inverness Beach Village Ceilidh Trail, Inverness, NS B0E 1N0. (902) 258-2653 or (902) 463-1663 (Feb.-April). www.macleods.com. \$140-\$160.

Keltic Lodge 313 Keltic Inn Rd., Ingonish Beach, NS BOC 1L0. (902) 285-2880. www.kelticlodge.ca. Packages \$140-\$409.

The Normaway Inn & Cabins 691 Egypt Rd., Margaree Valley, NS B0E 2C0. (902) 248-2987 or (800) 565-9463. www.thenormawayinn.com. \$159-\$259.

EXCURSIONS

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE BADDECK, NS



Teacher, inventor, and humanitarian Alexander Graham Bell accomplished wonders. Located in Baddeck, this site celebrates the life of the man who not only invented the telephone but also produced important inventions and discoveries in medicine, aeronautics, and electrical science. Bell even developed teaching methods to help deaf people better communicate. This site has fascinating exhibits and activities for all ages. (902) 295-2069. 95 km (60 mi) southeast of Cape Breton Highlands on Hwy 105.

FORTRESS OF LOUISBOURG NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE LOUISBOURG, NS



Founded by the French in 1713, later fortified and twice besieged, Louisbourg was demolished and abandoned in the 1760s. In 1961, the Government of Canada invested in what would become the largest reconstruction project in North America. Interpreters in period clothing reenact life as it was before the first siege. There are a multitude of programs and activities. (902) 733-2280. 140 km (87 mi) from park on south side of Cape Breton Island.