

A tall, white lighthouse stands on a grassy island. In the foreground, there is a field of tall, brownish grass. In the background, a body of water is visible under a clear blue sky. The lighthouse has a red top section and a white base.

Small island –
BIG reasons
to go

Just a causeway away

by Sandra Phinney

Ukrainian philosopher and author Dagobert D. Runes (1902-1982) once said, "People travel to faraway places to watch, in fascination, the kind of people they ignore at home."

A few years ago, I realized how we often associate the word "exotic" with far-away travels. Yet, there's lots of exotic people and places in our own backyards. For me, that's Southwest Nova Scotia.

Consider Cape Sable Island: although I drove the 35-kilometre figure-eight loop around the island in 2016, I barely took the time to give it a passing nod. This year, in the past four months I've returned four times, including spending a couple of nights on the island with my husband, Barrie MacGregor.

Why have I returned so often? Taking the time to engage with residents, I've become fascinated by the island and her people. For example, on my last visit to Cape Sable Island, referred to as "Cape Island" by the local residents, Barrie and I met Marsha and Darren Newell at the end of Delma Street in Clark's Harbour. They have a garage full of antiques – everything from old squid hooks and eel spears to pinball machines and memorabilia from times long gone. None of these items are for sale; collecting stuff is simply their passion.

When we arrived, the Newells were in the garage unpacking boxes of bottles from an old pharmacy in Bear River, N.S. Although the containers were ancient, they still carried pills and potions. I picked up a small vial of red pills labelled Sargon, which stated the following: *Dose – one or two pills at bedtime, the number regulated by the results. Contains 1-6 grain Ext. of Belladonna and 1-100 grain Strychnine per maximum dose.* Marsha said, "There's enough poison here to kill the entire town."

Eventually, we ended up inside their home where each room is loaded with bottles: everything from "onion" or "pirate"

bottles to "torpedos," and "cucumber" bottles. Thousands of them! Asking about their favourites, Marsha reached for a family-sized *Four Crowns Soda Water*. MA Nickerson, Clark's Harbour, NS embossed in the glass, and Darren chose a *Royal Italian Bitters, A.N.F Cianelli Genova*. Holding his up to the light, the dark brown glass turned a translucent pink. You won't find people like the Newells in the Nova Scotia *Doers & Dreamers* guide, but I've discovered that residents of rural communities are approachable and love to share their stories.

Speaking of stories, we had a fascinating visit with Meghan Pond in Clam Point. Pond and her husband, Steve Fairweather, created a new business called Cape Island Apiaries. They've placed around 30 beehives in the region and have eight on site, which includes a unique campground. "We love to teach people how to care for bees," Pond says, "and about the health benefits they provide."

One section of the campground is wheelchair accessible. (You wheel up onto a ramp to a large deck and can drive right into a tent with a comfy bed. The cooking paraphernalia is within sitting reach, and a wheel-in washroom is mere feet away.) Regular tent pads are tucked away in the woods and tents are provided. Educational and fun workshops related to bees are always in the works.

While in Clam Point, look for a road called Crutches Creek, which leads to a small wharf. Park in the field close

by where you'll find a picturesque coastal trail that leads to a secluded beach. A local told me about this hidden gem.

Cape Island also has four stunning and easily accessible beaches: Stoney Island, Northeast Point, Daniel's Head, and The Hawk. The latter also has an interesting feature known as the drowned forest – hundreds of stumps that are only visible at low tide. Tip: when you walk onto beach, veer right and go around the bend. *Voilà!*

The talk of the town is the newly opened Salt Banker





Chef Nichole Hopkins

restaurant in Clark’s Harbour. When the Royal Bank closed this past spring, the owners of Clark’s Harbour Seafood Ltd. and Atlantic ChiCan Seafood stepped in with a plan to open a restaurant. Because the former bank was located by the sea, they called it the Salt Banker.

Opening a new restaurant in a community with a population of 758 people is no mean feat. It requires someone who has a way with food and the know-how to put a restaurant on the map. Meet Chef Nichole Hopkins – a real-life whirling dervish. In 2013, Hopkins opened *The Lobster Shack* in Barrington. Her partner, Tony Ross, stepped into the scene and before long they were appearing on television food shows and winning prestigious awards. Hopkins sold the restaurant in 2016, and for the past few years she’s done extensive catering and prepared some “wow” meals for the staff and workers at Sea Star Seafoods in Clark’s Harbour.

I’ve eaten many dishes that she has prepared, and I can say with certainty that she’ll pull this off in spades. Already she’s making waves serving Italian-inspired pasta dishes such as Lobster Alfredo, Shrimp Scampi, and Scallop Carbonara. When her boss said he wanted to bring ice cream back to the island and become famous for it, she rolled her eyes. But, within 24 hours she wrapped her head around the notion and decided to do just that. She’s come up with some inventive recipes. Let me suggest you try Nichole’s Chocolate Fudge Marshmallow ice cream, and decide for yourself.

Before or after you eat, stroll across the road to the Stone Church. Although the front door is often locked, the bottom side door on the left facing the church is always open. Designed by famous architect S.P. Dumaresq, this church took 10 years to build. I especially love the tongue and groove wood inside and the stained-glass windows. Purchased in Toronto in 1927, the windows were paid for by individuals and families who wanted to honour their loved ones.

Already I’m running out of ink, and I haven’t mentioned Lion, a handsome dude made of cement and clay that resides in a lovely park behind the Clark’s Harbour Town Hall and Library; the fact that this region is a Canadian Important Bird Area; or the 101-foot Cape Sable Lighthouse on Cape Island. The latter is the location for “Cape Days,” when boat rides to the island are held one day in August, allowing everyone to explore this magical place. But don’t worry, you can call John Nickerson anytime (902-635-4466) and for a modest fee he’ll take you over and come back to fetch you whenever you wish. Although it was foggy



A few more gems and glimpses of “Cape Island”



when he brought Barrie and me to the island, it didn't matter a bit. We'll do this again, only we'll bring a picnic and stay longer the next time.

Speaking of meeting fascinating people, we stayed smack in the middle of Clark's Harbour at Mama's By The Sea B&B with Kimberlee (Kim) Atkinson. She knows the region inside out along with the best place to find beach glass. She'll also provide you with a lobster boil for \$30! Although you'd never guess, she's also a comedian. In the winter Atkinson creates videos in the character Mrs. Brown that are available on YouTube.

Travel writer Bill Bryson once said, "The greatest reward of travel is to experience everyday things as if for the first time, to be in a position in which almost nothing is so familiar it is taken for granted."

I second that.



Mossing: Harvesting seaweed is a major occupation for many local residents. You are likely to meet folks, like Ralph d'Eon, who follow the tides and harvest a variety of seaweeds from the shores including fucus, rockweed, and Irish moss. The seaweed is harvested using a rake, and hauled into a boat. Each load can exceed 2,000 pounds.

Artists, artisans, and writers: Many gifted artists live on Cape Island, but they do not sell their work from home. For example, Cal Kimola Brown writes and illustrates children's books, and creates gift cards and paintings. Brown's work is for sale at the **Cape Island Museum and Gift Shop** in Barrington Passage. While you are at the museum, check out the "Winds and Seas" mittens made by Cape Islander, Stephanie Isles.



Archelaus Smith Museum: This two-storey Second Empire-style building holds a delightful mishmash of stuff. Constructed in 1896 by the Sons of Temperance, the museum was named after one of the earliest New England Planter settlers. There's

a dramatic painting created many years ago by Gerald Smith about The Hungarian – a ship that went down in 1860 on the ledge at Cape Sable Island. Ask the staff for the writeup about this painting. And be sure to go upstairs to see an old and impressive canvas mural that spans the entire back wall.

Seaside Heritage Centre: This is where you can learn about the origin of the "Cape Islander" fishing boat here. First built by Ephraim Atkinson at Clark's Harbour in 1907, these boats still ply inshore waters and are known for their stability and efficiency on the ocean. Check out the interesting displays including Albert the Barber's, an old-time island kitchen, and lots of baseball memorabilia. Big ball fans here!



Fish Plant Road: Drive south of Clark's Harbour and turn onto Hawk Point Road. Within a short distance you'll find Fish Plant Road on your right and ample space to park when you reach the end. You'll also find the impressive Hawk Veterans Memorial, as well as a fun-loving lobster that's perfect for a photo op. On a clear day, you'll have a view of Cape Sable Lighthouse in the distance. This is also where you'll meet John Nickerson (mentioned earlier) and board his boat to go over to the island.

Drinking Brook Park (Stoney Island Road): Before the causeway was constructed in the late 1940s, residents living in this region had to walk to North East Point to catch the ferry to the mainland. They often stopped here to rest and to have a drink of fresh water from the brook. This is a lovely quiet spot to have a picnic. You can also take a walk along the shore or read a book in the gazebo that overlooks Barrington Bay. Remember Cape Sable Island Apiaries? Meghan Pond's campground and this park are mere feet from each other.