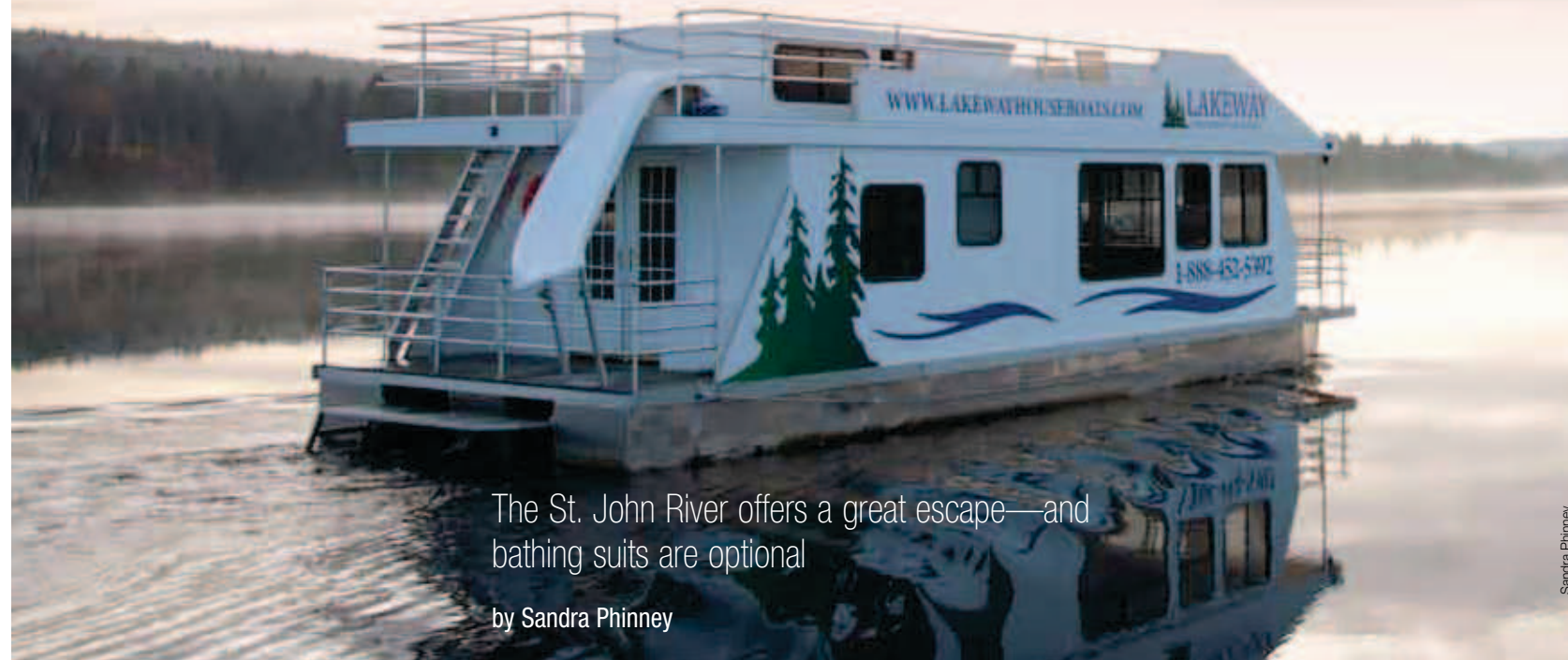


HEAVEN on a houseboat



The St. John River offers a great escape—and bathing suits are optional

by Sandra Phinney



Sandra Phinney



Lakeway Houseboat Vacations

Cottage on the water: this rental houseboat (opposite) features a fireplace, a barbecue, a waterslide, and an upper-deck hot tub. Below, from left: approaching Fredericton by canoe; houseboats dock at this Mactaquac marina on the St. John River.

Lakeway Houseboat Vacations

Last year, I decided to plan a getaway for Thanksgiving. It had to be affordable and within driving distance of our home in Yarmouth, NS. It also had to be something my husband, Barrie, and I had never done. Before long, and after just a little research, I had a mini-vacation planned that turned out to be quite wonderful.

For starters, I booked a rental with Lakeway Houseboat Vacations (lakewayhouseboats.com). It is located on the St. John River, at Mactaquac, about a 10 minute drive from Fredericton. When you imagine one of these houseboats, think “cottage on the water,” replete with fireplace, barbecue, bathroom, kitchen, waterslide and a hot tub on the top deck.

If you can drive a car, you can drive one of these houseboats. The owner, Larry Jewett, gave us a 30-minute course on navigating the *Pokiok* (one of three houseboats available, and there are more in the making), then we were off.

It didn't take long to discover some gorgeous secluded coves—so secluded that we didn't worry about wearing our “birthday suits” in the hot tub. As we enjoyed watching the dancing stars and rising moon, my husband sighed, “It doesn't get much better than this.”

Mind you, as we were warming the water in the hot tub on the first night, the generator kicked in and wouldn't shut off, in spite of the fact that Barrie turned the switch to the “off” position. By the time we were ready to go to bed, it was quite late. Barrie wasn't keen on calling Larry; I wasn't keen on having the generator run all night. I dialled Larry's number and handed the phone to my other half. Turns out it was an easy fix. Barrie thanked Larry, adding, “You just saved our marriage.”

Back to the river. Another beauty of this water system is that it provides access to several communities and attractions. You can

motor on the water to TreeGO aerial adventure course and pretend you're Tarzan (treegomactaquac.ca) or stop in for a round of golf at the Mactaquac Golf Course (mactaquacgolf.com).

Our favourite stop was Kings Landing. We parked the houseboat at the Prince William Ice Cream Parlour and paid the entrance fee there. Since it was Thanksgiving, there were all kinds of activities taking place on the property, from cider-making and pumpkin-carving to an old fashioned dance and an auction where everything from pastries to pigs went to the highest bidder. And, of course, we had a traditional Thanksgiving Dinner at The King's Head Inn. Delicious—and filling! Perhaps we should have had the seniors' portion.

Another day, we signed up for an afternoon canoe paddle with Beth Johnston. She's an adventure guide who provides customized outings including hikes, kayaking and canoe trips. Someday we'll join her on a wilderness paddle, but for this weekend we were happy to do a leisurely canoe run from Mactaquac downstream to Fredericton. With the wind at our backs, it took only three hours (including time for a snack stop on an island). The weather was balmy and the colours were gorgeous. After we arrived in Fredericton, Beth took us back to Mactaquac and someone else took care of the canoes. To arrange a hike or paddle with Beth, call (506) 457-2012 or e-mail bethjohnston6@yahoo.ca.

My only regret with this getaway is that we only had three days on the houseboat. Next time we might come in spring or summer—in keeping with “something we've never done”—and rent one for a week. Maybe we'll even invite our offspring and their mates. Then again, we'd probably have to wear our bathing suits. ☺

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