



Skyline Hike in  
Highlands National Park,  
Cape Breton, Nova Scotia

# YOU, ME & THE OPEN ROAD

We oft forget the vast expanse that is Canada. From coast to coast to coast, the landscape is as diverse as the people, and the people as warm as the winters are cold. Our writer thought she understood the breadth and depth of it, having road tripped through much of the country in her childhood and youth. But then she moved to the East Coast and her perspective continued to evolve. Here, she tells the story of her journey through the place she now calls home, as she discovered yet another side to this great country. BY **TIFFANY THORNTON**



Dusting off my old map, edges slightly furled from long-time use, I laid it out across the dining room table, each highlighted mark a reminder of past journeys. Certain marks inspired bittersweet memories, others blissful, and others still, tenuous. Skinny-dipping at Killbear Provincial Park while the sun set over the lake. A west coast road trip with a past boyfriend that went awry, leaving a friend to pick me up in the middle of nowhere.

My beloved grandmother and I walking through the forest near Collingwood, Ontario, sunlight dancing around us through the evergreens.

I have always loved road trips, especially those with my late mother. We would load up the car, and although

it was in a rather beat-up state, we were ready to roll – it was just us and the open road: two girls cruising along to Willie Nelson’s “On the Road Again” as we headed into the Canadian expanse. The windows down and my hair blowing in the wind, it was the ultimate feeling of freedom. Life belonged to these moments, where there were no boundaries and the world was ours to discover.

Many of these adventures took place across my home province of Ontario or on the west coast, where I would spend summers visiting family in Vancouver. Those experiences under my belt, I thought I knew so much about the Canadian landscape. Then a few years back I moved to the Maritimes, with its foreboding Atlantic waters, foggy days, and unmistakable East Coast charm. My notion of Canada quickly evolved; I began to see the tapestry of this country and its variance of culture in a whole new light. So last summer, my husband and I were inspired to take-on yet another road trip. This time, the plan was to have no plan at all and simply embrace Canada in a way we hadn’t before.

No set course, no agenda...just the open road ahead.



IT WAS ALMOST DUSK AND I COULD SEE someone down the dirt road heading toward us when we pulled into Bay Enterprises in Malagash, Nova Scotia. Soon enough, Charles Purdy, whose family has been cultivating oysters there since 1899, greeted us. True to East Coast kindness, he could not have been more affable considering this impromptu visit. Eager and adaptable, Charles whisked us away for a behind-the-scenes look at the sustainable oyster experience, while proudly sharing tales of his life as an oyster farmer. I learned that they grow to size naturally in the adjacent bay, and how each type of oyster can vary in flavour; it was an exclusive class in “oyster science.” His wife Nancy shucked us a few succulent beauties, and as we indulged, I wished we could have taken some with us as we left, but knowing they would not fare well on the road ahead, I savoured every slurp. ►

The Purdy Family, Malagash, Nova Scotia



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Hopewell Rock, New Brunswick

Though our plan for this road trip was lax, I ultimately wanted to hit three provinces in just over a week, familiarizing myself with the region that I now call home. So we soon moved-on to visit Cape Breton Island, where – with so much of its ancestral roots and history tied to Scotland – signs written in Gaelic welcomed us along the way. (The Island even houses a Gaelic college where visitors can learn the Celtic language that was spoken on the island hundreds of years ago.)

We made it to the Skyline Hike in Highlands National Park just before sunset. We trekked past bogs and boreal forest, as our guide filled us in on the various types of flora and fauna found on the island. She was quick to point out that since it was dusk, it was prime grazing time for moose. Our odds of seeing one were good!

Sure enough, somewhere along the 7.5-kilometer trail, we came across a group of people huddled together, still and quiet. And there he was – a colossal moose walking towards us, his imposing stature inarguably intimidating.

It's funny how small he made me feel, but as we eventually moved on and came to an open stretch at the end of the trail, I realized the moose had nothing on this,

as the ocean extended out in front of us toward infinity. The sun was bathed in a crimson tinge as it began to set. I had never, in all my travels, seen anything quite like this place before.



THAT FEELING OF INSIGNIFICANCE AND HUMILITY followed us into New Brunswick, where my husband and I stopped to see the immense Hopewell Rock formations. The 17 natural creations – with sprig-like trees nestled firmly atop the stunning cliffs – were etched by the ebb and flow of the mighty waters in the Bay of Fundy, which is home to the world's highest tides. We got there at a time when the tide allowed me to venture along the exposed ocean floor and feel its terracotta mud earth under my toes while I got caught up in the ocean's trance. ➤

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Produce market, Montreal, Québec



FROM THERE, IT WAS NORTHWARDS TO LA Belle Province. I could feel the air begin to shift in the car as the heat of a Montreal summer enveloped me. Naturally (I think), our first visit was to Jean Talon Market – a Montreal staple (having been there since 1933) and a true melting pot of culture. My senses in overdrive, the homemade crepes enticed me, the array of Québec cheese called out to my palate, and the smell of fresh baguettes permeated the air and had me asking in my nowhere-near-perfect French for half a dozen.

When all was said and done, I had successfully prepared an epic picnic lunch, and what more perfect place to indulge than Montreal's Old Port. I grabbed my backpack and a throw from the backseat of the car, which held the smell of sand and sea from our past few stops. We found a spot of lush green grass under the shade of a red maple tree and plunked ourselves down, spreading out our gourmand's dream.

After over a week of traversing Eastern Canada, my journey had taken me across three provinces – a venture in both discovering more of my country and myself. Oh Canada... ①

### When You Go

**WHAT TO SEE:** Set sail with **Captain Mark's Whale & Sea Cruise** on Cape Breton Island. You may not even need a pair of binoculars to spot whales, from Pilot to Finback, and perhaps even a Humpback Whale breaching in the cold Atlantic waters.

**WHERE TO EAT:** **Masstown Market** in Nova Scotia is the perfect pit stop on your way to Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. You can't miss spotting the roadside lighthouse, which serves-up "Catch of the Bay" fish (which is caught from the nearby Bay of Fundy) and chips on a stationary boat.

**WHERE TO STAY:** The newly renovated **Fairmont Queen Elizabeth Hotel** in Montreal is the place to be. This famous hotel is most notably known for John Lennon and Yoko Ono's 1969 "Bed-In," where they spent eight days in bed to promote world peace. If you book in advance, you may even be able to slumber in the "Lennon Suite," where original photos from the Bed-In line the walls.

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# HEY BC: YOUR BACKYARD IS SO WEIRD. AND AWESOME.

[GETTING LOST FOR A BIT. THEN FINDING SOME  
CRAZY HOODOOS AND AN INVERTED TREELINE]

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