

Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive

Reflections on the beautiful Bras d'Or

Finest Sailing in the World



WELCOME TO CAPE BRETON'S rolling heartland, where the highlands meet the lowlands along the shores of the island's beautiful inland sea—the Bras d'Or Lakes. The Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive circles the lake along shoreline roads that offer an ever-changing panorama of woodlands, farms and villages, and are ideal for walking, biking and bird-watching. The region is a major nesting area for bald eagles, and these impressive birds can often be seen soaring aloft or perched on shoreline trees.

There's something new around every corner along this route. Experience the daily life of the early Scottish settlers at the Nova Scotia Highland Village Museum. At Marble Mountain Museum you can learn about marble quarrying in the late 1800s, and the Orangedale Railway Station Museum offers a special look at late 19th-century trains and train travel.

Known for its gentle, fog-free waters, beautiful anchorages, and hundreds of coves and islands, the lakes are an international cruising destination, attracting hundreds of boating enthusiasts every year. Visitors who want to get out on the water will find numerous boat tours available, from seabird tours and ecological sailing tours to elegant cruises.

The Bras d'Or Lakes' unique tidal waters create a rich ecosystem that supports a dazzling array of wildlife. Hundreds of pairs of bald eagles nest along the lake shore and in the surrounding countryside. White-tailed deer, osprey, foxes, and raccoons are also frequently seen.

Visitor Information Centres

Baddeck E15, 295-1911

Little Narrows, 756-2413

Louisbourg E17, 733-2720

Margaree Forks D14, 248-2803

North Sydney D16, 794-7719

 **Port Hastings F13, 625-4201**

Port Hood E13, 787-2521

St. Peter's F14, 535-2185

Sydney River E16, 539-9876

Most Visitor Information Centres are open mid-May to mid-October. Call the above numbers or 1-800-565-0000.

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Just drop in for a cuppa, dear . . .

The Bras d'Or Lakes are a traditional home of Nova Scotia's native Mi'kmaq, and the Mi'kmaq language and culture are still evident today in the four reserves along its shores: Waycobah, Eskasoni (the largest reserve in the province), Wagmatcook, and Chapel Island in St. Peter's Inlet. Wagmatcook First Nation has a Mi'kmaq cultural and heritage centre, with a museum, exhibits, craft shop and restaurant (see p. 236).

A circular route, the Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive can be started and ended at a variety of points. This tour begins at one of the region's busiest communities, **Whycocomagh**, which is centrally located with easy access to all of the Cape Breton travelways. The name originates from the Mi'kmaq word for "head of the waters". Nearby Whycocomagh Provincial Park features a picnic area and campground with exceptional views of St. Patrick's Channel.



From Whycocomagh, head west on Highway 105 briefly, turning left at **Iron Mines** to **Orangedale**, an attractive lakeside community where the Orangedale Railway Station Museum, a classic station built in 1886, displays memorabilia and railway cars from that era. The living quarters of the stationmaster and his family, on the upper floor of the station, have been restored as at the turn of the century (see p. 236). The train that originated from this station inspired the song *The Orangedale Whistle* by the well-known Cape Breton group The Rankins.

From Orangedale, take the Marble Mountain road. The shoreline along this route is marked by numerous bays and quiet coves that are an important habitat for herons, ospreys, bald eagles and many varieties of ducks and other waterfowl. Sea kayaking among the islands and beautiful inlets of this region is a popular activity (see Outdoors section).

At **Valley Mills**, a left turn leads to **Malagawatch** and **Marble Mountain** along paved and well-maintained gravel roads. Marble Mountain is a small picturesque village that perches high above Clark Cove on the Bras d'Or Lakes, offering splendid views of the southern end of the lake and the many islands that lie just offshore. A museum details the fascinating history of the village and the nearby marble quarry (see p. 236), and there is a unique marble-chip beach.

Approaching **Dundee**, the road offers sweeping views of the coastline and the island-dotted waters of the lake, passing a small marina nestled in a picturesque cove, then crossing a one-lane bridge. Beyond the bridge are resorts and one of Cape Breton's finest 18-hole golf courses.

The Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive continues along the picturesque south shore of the lake, to **2** St. Peter's.

Known as the "Gateway to the Bras d'Or Lakes," **St. Peter's** is a full-service community situated on a narrow

strip of land separating the Atlantic Ocean and the Bras d'Or Lakes. The St. Peter's Canal, a National Historic Site, connects these two great bodies of water. It is flanked on both sides by grassy picnic areas that offer a great place to sit and watch the parade of colourful boats travelling to and from the popular cruising waters of the Bras d'Or Lakes. On the east side of the canal, walking trails to the St. Peter's Lighthouse offer excellent views along the coast. On the west side of the canal, the Nicolas Denys Museum highlights the region's history and tells the story of the adventurous pioneer who established the first trading post in the region here, in 1650 (see p. 236).

St. Peter's is also the birthplace of photographer Wallace MacAskill, whose photographs of sailing ships and coastal life of Nova Scotia garnered him international recognition. His childhood home (c. 1880) on the main street has been restored and converted to a summer museum that displays many of his original hand-tinted prints (see p. 236).



Just past St. Peter's is **Chapel Island First Nations Reserve**, one of the oldest Mi'kmaq settlements in the province. The route continues along the lake shore, passing through a patchwork quilt of rolling green farmlands and small communities.

Continuing past **Irish Cove**, the Bras d'Or Lookoff and Picnic Park is a good spot to stop and enjoy spectacular views of the lakes and surrounding hills.

Further along, **Big Pond** is best known as the home of Rita MacNeil, acclaimed singer, songwriter and recording artist. Rita's Tea Room offers tea and light dining, and contains a heart-warming collection of awards, photographs and memorabilia from the singer's distinguished career (see p. 236).

At **Ben Eoin**, there is an attractive provincial picnic park with a short trail to a lookoff that offers sweeping views of the lake. The route continues to the charming community of **East Bay**, nestled into the hillside at the tip of the bay that shares its name. Near the lovely St. Mary's Church, built in 1837, a 1.5-km (1-mi.) long road crosses the bay on the narrow East Bay Sandbar, which is an excellent place for swimming, walking and birdwatching.

The Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive continues around the head of East Bay to **Northside East Bay** and **Eskasoni**, Nova Scotia's largest Mi'kmaq reserve. The name Eskasoni is derived from a Mi'kmaq word meaning "still water". From Eskasoni, the road follows the coastline to a small warm-water beach at Banacadie Pond, then turns inland to **Grand Narrows**, where you will find accommodations, services, a farmers' market, a boat charter and a full-service marina. A bridge crosses the Barra Strait to the Washabuck Peninsula.

Almost entirely surrounded by water, the Washabuck Peninsula's high rolling hills and quiet coastal roads offer some of the most captivating scenery to be found anywhere along the Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive.

After crossing the Barra Strait Bridge, a left turn leads to **Iona** and the Highland Village Museum, a living museum that recreates the 200-year history of Scottish settlement in Cape Breton. Inside the 43-acre village, ten restored historic buildings reflect various periods of the history of Scottish settlers and communities (see p. 236). Set high on a hillside, the village also provides panoramic views of the Bras d'Or lakes and surrounding countryside.

Turn left back through Iona to MacCormack Provincial Picnic Park, which offers walking trails and a relaxing place to enjoy the beautiful surroundings. The road winds



Pow wows keep traditions alive in Cape Breton.



Over 200 nesting pair of Bald Eagles call the Bras d'Or Lake area home.

Cape Breton is famous for its fine golf courses, like this one at Dundee.



Don't Miss!

Big Pond Festival

Burn the soles off your shoes at this popular Cape Breton ceilidh!

St. Peter's Canal

Witness the manoeuvres of the tidal locks at the lovely "gateway to the Bras d'Or."

Sailing

Cruise amid ideal conditions and unrivalled scenic beauty.

Nova Scotia Highland Village Museum

Experience the lifestyle of the Highland Scots in Cape Breton.

Eagles

Watch for bald eagles in flight or at rest perched in shoreline trees on the Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive.





The Tapestry of Acadie

The Bras d'Or Lakes. Breathtaking and serene. This “golden arm” of the Atlantic Ocean (930 km²) indents deeply into the scenic interior of Cape Breton Island. The Bras d'Or is in fact one large, saltwater lake—an international cruising destination that has drawn a potpourri of cultures to its secluded shores over centuries.

This interior was a crucial safe refuge for Acadians from Isle Madame fleeing persecution after the fall of the French Fortress Louisbourg in 1760. Assisted by native Mi'kmaq peoples, they averted deportation at the hands of the British and stayed hidden here about five years before returning to Isle Madame in 1763.

A storied past and exceedingly beautiful natural surroundings make the Bras d'Or Lakes area a remarkable touring experience. Yours to explore, experience and enjoy.



along the eastern shore of the peninsula, with ever-changing views of the rolling, emerald-green highlands and the island-dotted waters of the lakes.

The geology of Washabuck Peninsula is unique. In places, chalk-white coastal bluffs have been sculpted by wind and tide into pleasing rounded shapes. These are outcroppings of high-grade gypsum. Near Little Narrows is a mine that produces over 1 million tonnes of the soft white mineral every year.

OFF TRAIL ▶ In **Little Narrows**, a 24-hour car ferry (\$5, STC) crosses the St. Patrick's Channel to Highway 105, which leads east to Baddeck or west to the Canso Causeway.

223 Near **Jamesville**, a turnoff leads to Highland Hill Forest Management and Recreation Area where 9 km (5.5 mi.) of moderately challenging hiking trails lead through 1400 acres of privately owned upland forest.

The Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive re-crosses the bridge at **Grand Narrows** and heads east on Route 223. The road follows the scenic shore of St. Andrew's Channel. The small community of **Christmas Island** is a centre for Gaelic culture, with festivals, classes, milling frolics, and concerts. At **Barrachois Harbour**, visitors can pause to enjoy the view at the provincial picnic park. Continuing along the shore leads to **George's River** and through **Little Bras d'Or** to Highway 105.



At Highway 105 the Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive turns left across a bridge.

OFF TRAIL ▶ After crossing the bridge on Highway 105, the Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive turns left again to **Groves Point**, where there is a small beach at the provincial picnic park. From the waterfront there are great views of a small marina and, across the water, the beautiful twin steeples of St. Joseph's Parish Church, built in 1912. The Groves Point road circles the shore of **Boularderie Island**, following the lake shore and passing through deep green forests and pastoral farmlands that overlook the water. Near the end of the island, the paved road turns and crosses the island, and then heads back along the northern shore to Highway 105. Turn left to continue on the Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive.

OFF TRAIL ▶ A right turn on Highway 105 to Exit 14 leads to **Big Bras d'Or**, where boat tours take visitors to the dramatically beautiful Bird Islands. These islands, rising like rocky pillars from the sea, are the nesting grounds of thousands of **oddslot**, including razorbills, kittiwakes, and over 300 pairs of Atlantic puffins. Tours bring visitors up close to the island's craggy seacliffs where hundreds of seabirds nest and soar (see Outdoors section).

Also in Big Bras d'Or is Dalem Lake Provincial Park (turn right from the church), on the shore of a small, almost perfectly round lake with a hiking trail around it, a picnic area, and a small sandy beach.



Back on Highway 105, the Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive continues, crossing the beautiful Seal Island Bridge. Spanning the chasm of Great Bras d'Or Channel, the bridge is 761 m (2,475 ft.) long with a clearance of 37 m (120 ft.) above sea level.

The road then climbs steeply up the side of Kelly's Mountain, where several lookoffs provide breathtaking views of the Great Bras d'Or Channel, the Seal Island Bridge and St. Ann's Bay.

OFF TRAIL ▶ At the sharp turn at the beginning of the drive up Kelly's Mountain, a broad, well-graded gravel road follows the water's edge to **New Campbellton**. At the end of the road, a popular but challenging hiking trail leads to Cape Dauphin and a sea cave known as the Fairy Hole.



The Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive continues west along Highway 105 toward Baddeck, joining the Cabot Trail at Exit 11. A right turn at this intersection will follow the Cabot Trail north to St. Ann's, Ingonish and the Cape Breton Highlands.

Continuing west on Highway 105, take a left turn at Exit 10 and follow the road into **Baddeck**, a picturesque village at the edge of the Bras d'Or Lakes. Baddeck and its attractions are described in the Cabot Trail section of this guide.

The Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive continues on Highway 105 along the edge of the lake through **Wagmatcook** and **Bucklaw** to **Whycocomagh**, which completes the Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive.