



# A merry time in the Maritimes and Quebec

Enjoy the coast's traffic-free scenic route



DIANE BAIR, FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Cruising into Saguenay Fjord under a double rainbow.

**By Diane Bair and Pamela Wright** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS APRIL 27, 2016

---

It was the kind of dilemma only cruisers face: Should we pop into the lounge for a glass of bubbly, or venture on deck for the thrill of entering a new port? We opted for the latter, and that proved to be provident. While we assembled at the bow, resisting the impulse to do a Titanic-pose selfie, the Seabourn Quest glided into a silvery fjord flanked by towering pines. And then, as if on cue, a double rainbow emerged from the mist, rising before us like an iridescent archway.

Just another gorgeous, Instagram-worthy day in Eastern Canada!

Sure, you can drive to this part of the world, but it is far more fun to go by sea, exploring stunning fjords, tiny fishing villages, and exquisite places like Quebec City and Montreal. The scenery is magnificent, and ports like Halifax and Charlottetown are much more delightful when you're not dodging traffic. Plus, you can rely on the cruise folk to vet and arrange the coolest outdoor activities for you, like paddling the Saguenay Fjord and hiking the Gaspé Peninsula.

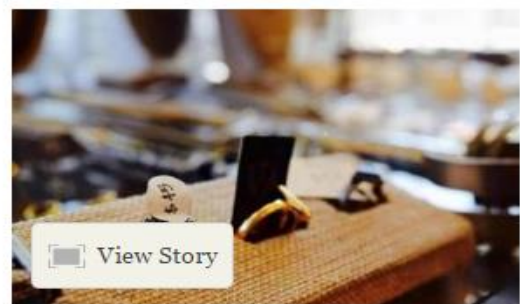
Even better, you can cruise right out of Boston, and then take an inexpensive flight back from Montreal.

Ships that sail this route, or a similar one, out of our own Black Falcon Pier include Holland America's Veendam, Norwegian Cruise Lines' Norwegian Dawn, and Royal Caribbean's Serenade of the Seas. Nothing against those big ships, but coming off a year that included sinus surgery and other miseries, we wanted a more indulgent experience. We wanted to be plied with champagne and luscious nibbles at every turn, without constantly doling out tips and feeling anxious about our mounting tab. With its 225 oceanview suites, luxurious boutique-y style, no-tipping, almost-everything's-included policy, the Seabourn Quest was an obvious choice.

Truth be told, we were more excited about being spoiled aboard the ship than we were about the itinerary. I mean, Canada? Not exactly at the top of the list of exotic, bucket-list locales. But we loved it. Somehow, it felt immense and rugged but friendly and intimate at the same time. And those "big glory views," as a fellow passenger described them, made the trip totally memorable. Here's a look.


### **Halifax, Nova Scotia**

There is something remarkable about falling asleep to the soft thrum of waves and waking up in another country. And were we hearing . . . bagpipes? Yep. In Halifax, the 78th Highlanders pipe band provided a musical hello as we arrived. Canadians sure know how to make you feel welcome — at every port, we were greeted heartily with music and food.



## **Canada is on sale, and you should go shopping**

Head to Toronto to shop while the US dollar is strong.

 **When in Canada, eat: A sampler of regional cuisine**

---



We were psyched to be someplace new, but we didn't have a plan for the day. Fellow cruisers were heading to Peggy's Cove, home of a famous, picturesque lighthouse, and the Fairview Lawn Cemetery, the final resting place for 121 passengers of the Titanic. These options didn't thrill us. But it was a pretty day, so we set out for a long walk and poking around. Turns out, Halifax is perfect for a day like this. The city has a worthy Harbourwalk with wharves, tall ships, and food stalls. Looming over the city is the Halifax Citadel, one of Canada's most-visited historic sites. It's worth the walk up Citadel Hill to check out the cannons (fired at noontime) and historic exhibits.



DIANE BAIR FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

A shop sign in Charlottetown on Prince Edward Island.

## Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

Canada's smallest province is famous for a certain stubborn redhead ("Anne of Green Gables" by Lucy Maud Montgomery) and it's fairly impossible to avoid her here: She has her likeness on raspberry cordial, a line of chocolates, almost anything imaginable. There's even "Anne of Green Gables — The Musical," now in its 51st season. And don't get us started on the Anne dolls. If you're really into this, sign up for a tour that includes the Anne of Green Gables Museum, the Anne of Green Gables National Historic Site, and the Montgomery's family farm. If this sounds like more Anne than you can handle, take a taxi to one of the island's beaches; PEI is known to have the warmest waters north of the Carolinas. And hit Cow's Creamery, on Queen Street, for chocolate-covered potato chips and irreverent T-shirts.



DIANE BAIR FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Percé Rock at the tip of Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula.

### Gaspé, Quebec

If you're fortunate, whales will follow your ship to Gaspé — one of National Geographic's "50 places of a lifetime" to visit. If not, you'll still be taken with the rugged coastline. The city, which is at the end of the peninsula and comprises 17 villages, is 87 miles long. Gaspésians are an outdoorsy bunch, and the prime way to get a feel for this area is to take an excursion. Best bets are Forillon National Park, a wonderland of rock formations, woodsy trails, and seascapes, and Percé, home of Percé Rock. We can never resist a blow hole, spouting horn, or other natural oddity, so we chose Percé. A twisting 60-mile road leads to the fishing village of Percé, where you board a ferry for the rock. You can see it from shore, since this monolith is made of 5 million tons of limestone. At 1,420 feet long and 288 feet at its highest point, Percé Rock is one of the largest natural arches in the world.



The ferry will also circumnavigate Bonaventure Island, a.k.a. Île-Bonaventure-et-du-Rocher-Percé National Park, the largest migratory bird refuge in North America. The little white specks that dot the island are North American Gannets, as many as 122,000 birds when nesting is at its peak, making this the largest colony of gannets in the world. “I had never heard of gannets before this [trip], but I’m finding this oddly exciting,” said one Aussie passenger, as we cruised closer to the island. Indeed.

## Saguenay, Quebec

Slipping through this magnificent fjord — the fourth largest fjord in the world — will surely be one of the highlights of your trip. At 60 miles long, with cliffs rising up to 1,150 feet tall and plunging to 900 feet at its deepest point, the Saguenay River Fjord is the only fjord in North America that is navigable by cruise ships. Saguenay is a collection of seven districts linked with nearby Lac St-Jean, encompassing an outdoor playground for urbanites from Quebec City, 110 miles south. Of course, you’ll want to explore it, so arrange a car rental before your cruise (since they can sell out) or sign up for a shore excursion that takes in Saguenay Fjord National Park. With parklands on both sides of the St. Lawrence River, there’s plenty to see. A 100km network of hiking trails offers gorgeous views, and reveals glacier-carved marine terraces called dunes. If you haven’t caught sight of beluga whales yet, plan a stop at Baie Sainte-Marguerite.

All of this was behind us, and we still had three days of cruising to some of the most charming ports in Quebec, Quebec City, and Montreal. Time to take off the hiking boots and put on some (stylish) walking shoes to hit the chic streets of these cosmopolitan Canadian outposts.

And after all the exquisite food on our cruise, we were jonesing for a gooey pile of poutine.

*Diane Bair and Pamela Wright can be reached at [bairwright@globe.com](mailto:bairwright@globe.com).*

**Get Today's Headlines from the Globe in your inbox:**

**SIGN UP**

[Privacy Policy](#)