

Goin' Cruisin'

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My Top Ten Canadian Road Trips

1. The Cabot Trail, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia

The 300 km (186 mi) journey winding around the north shore of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, is one of the world's most outstanding marine drives. You can do it in a day, but it's worth two, especially if you enjoy hiking, picnics, and photo ops along the way. You can break your trip at Baddeck, where you will find good hotels and restaurants. There's the Alexander Graham Bell Museum in town which is worth a gander. You'll also find sea kayaking available and salmon fishing (on the Margaree River) nearby. Keep your cameras handy as you pass through the highlands of Cape Breton National Park. Binoculars can also be useful as whale-watching can be rewarded along the shore. This region of the country will introduce you to the three historic cultures of the region—Acadian, Scottish and Mi'kmaq. St. Ann's Gaelic College is renowned for its Gaelic arts.

2. The Icefields Parkway (Highway 93 between Banff and Jasper, Alberta)

This 220 km (137 miles) route takes you across the Continental Divide, and right past three massive glaciers. You'll need to purchase a national park pass, but it's well worth the price. Take your time. You won't only see some of the world's most dramatic scenery; expect to come close to wildlife as well, especially at dawn and dusk—deer and black bears, maybe even grizzlies, elk, moose, and caribou. The Icefields Parkway is the central route through Banff and Jasper National Parks. Of course you'll want to spend time at Banff and Lake Louise, but don't miss the Crowfoot Glacier, just two miles up the road. Then at Mile 23, you'll want to take in the arresting colour of Bow Lake flowing from Bow Glacier. Crowfoot Peak is on your left. And watch for signs to Peyto Lake and Athabasca Falls. If you want to stretch your legs, the two-mile round-trip Parker Ridge trail at Mile 73 leads you to the Saskatchewan Glacier overlook and the Columbia Icefield—North America's largest subpolar ice pack. Note: there may be temporary snow closures in winter.

3. Québec's Eastern Townships (Cantons de-l'Est)

The Appalachians may seem tame compared to the rugged Rockies, but for alpine scenery reminiscent of the European piedmont, the Eastern Townships are hard to beat. A lovely route through the region would take you in a rough circle linking the towns of Knowlton, Sutton, Glen Sutton, Mansonville and South Bolton. Keep your eyes peeled for Highways 104, 215, 139, 105 and 243. The area was settled by English and Scottish farmers at the time of the American Revolution (these "United Empire Loyalists" moved from the U.S. to Canada, wanting to remain under the British crown). Also Irish peasant farmers moved here in the mid 1800s, driven by famines in their homeland. You can see evidence of their influence in the architecture and postcard-perfect farms. If antiques are your fancy, visit the town of Sutton (25 km s. along Highways 104 and 215) and the village of Dunham (30 km w. along Highways 104 and 202). And be sure to enjoy the Townships' local cuisine—maple syrup, fruits and vegetables, locally raised beef and duck, and, if you dare, poutine (fries with curd cheese in gravy).

4. Nova Scotia's South Shore: Lighthouse Row

Nova Scotia is almost completely surrounded by the moderating waters of the Atlantic, but it's good, if you can, to pick a sunny day as you drive east along its southern shore. The route begins at the most southwesterly part of the province in Yarmouth, a historic seaport town with its popular lighthouse. To reach it, follow Route 304 to Cape Forchu. Leaving Yarmouth, Route 3 passes through French Acadian fishing villages on its way to Lunenburg, home to the Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic. In 1921 the world-famous Bluenose was built here; a replica, the Bluenose II, is available for tours when in port. From Lunenburg, Lighthouse Row continues to the towns of Mahone Bay and Chester, filled with beautiful architecture, art galleries, and eateries. There's plenty of golf, hiking, bicycling, sailing and kayaking available in the area, too. Plan a picnic at the beach on St. Margaret's Bay before concluding your journey in Halifax, a city well worth a few days sauntering around.

5. Sea to Sky on Highway 99, British Columbia

Anyone who travels the breathtaking Highway 99 understands where it got its name. Horseshoe Bay in North Vancouver is the southern terminus of Highway 99 at the edge of the Pacific. This route winds you up from coastal rain forest at Horseshoe Bay, through Squamish, Garibaldi Provincial Park, and the heights of the Coastal Range toward Whistler. The winding road crosses two historic routes, the Pemberton Trail and the Gold Rush Heritage Trail. Space being minimal

along steep-sided Howe Sound (North America's southernmost fjord), the road and railway parallel each other for much of the 45 km (28 mi) to Squamish at the head of the sound. Squamish, equidistant from Vancouver and Whistler, is the place for anglers, bikers, climbers, and picnickers. Arriving at the summit of the valley that contains Whistler, observe Alta Lake, the great divide in the Sea to Sky corridor. Water flowing from its south end reaches the Pacific, while water flowing from its north end reaches the ocean through the Harrison watershed and the Fraser River.

6. Dinosaur Country through the Drumheller Valley in Alberta

Called the dinosaur capitol of the world, Drumheller Valley, in southern Alberta, brings the earth's past into the present. We can only imagine the tremendous forces that shaped the dramatic Canadian Badlands. Since then, erosion has uncovered the bones of the once-abundant dinosaurs. Enjoy the spectacular scenery and interesting things to do, within easy driving distance of Banff, Calgary or Red Deer. Over 50 attractions are located within a 100 square kilometre (60 square mile) area. The World's Largest Dinosaur (86 feet tall) is the best place to start your tour of the Drumheller Valley. It's on North Dinosaur Trail (Hwy 838). The aerial view of the river valley from inside her smile is a definite must-see and the Drumheller Visitor Information Centre is located right beside her giant big toe. There you can pick up maps and get free travel information from the friendly staff. Then just 6 km west of the big dinosaur, you'll find the Royal Tyrrell Museum, which has more dinosaur skeletons to see than any other attraction in the world. This trip should be a big hit with the kids, whatever their age.

7. Routes des Saveurs (The Flavour Trail) in Charlevoix, Quebec

Located 120 km (72 mi) east of Quebec City, the Charlevoix region has 6,000 sq km (2317 sq mi) to explore. It is a rural area of quaint villages with red-roofed clapboard homes along the shores of the St. Lawrence River. But our interest is the Routes des Saveurs, a 143 km (89 mi.) journey that highlights regional dishes and agricultural products from the abundant fields. The Trail is the result of a cooperative effort between twenty-nine farm producers and restaurant chefs in the region. Signs showing a chef's hat logo, posted on restaurants and farms, mark the route. If you travel in August, you'll enjoy wild blueberry season. Visit Le Ferme Eboulemontaise, home to forty-five kinds of sunflowers. Another good stop is to see cheesemaking at the Laiterie Charlevoix. As well, the area includes fish farming (raising Yukon arctic char and speckled trout) and emu farming at the Centre de l'Emeu de Charlevoix. Les Serres Lacoste specializes in hothouse organic tomatoes and at the Fumoir Charlevoix, you'll find a smokehouse for salmon and other fish. How could you not enjoy a road trip like this?

8. The Niagara Peninsula Circle Route, Southern Ontario

Call me partial, because this is the area where I was raised. But the land between Lake Erie, Lake Ontario and the Niagara River has much more to offer than the world-famous Niagara Falls. Atop the Niagara Escarpment, at Decew, you can tour one of Ontario's oldest flour mills, Morningstar Mill. Then make a stop at the Canal Centre at Lock 3, where you'll get the best view of ships using the Welland Canal. And if you would rather bicycle than drive along the River Road, a well-designed parkland path runs the length of the river between Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Falls. See the giant whirlpool, botanical gardens, the hydro-electric power plant, and the floral clock. Stay in charming bed and breakfasts, especially in Niagara-on-the-Lake, home to Fort George and the Shaw Festival. And as you complete the circuit, travelling west on Lakeshore Road, be sure to enjoy St. Catharines' beautiful lakeside village, Port Dalhousie, where you can ride the antique hand-carved Looft Carousel for 5 cents (that's right!), located in Lakeside Park. With its flowering gardens and almost endless parks, its delightful orchards and verdant hills, no wonder the region has a thriving tourism industry.

9. The Sunshine Coast on Highway 101, British Columbia

Not far from Vancouver is this region of the southern mainland coast of BC, on the eastern shore of the Strait of Georgia. It can only be reached by land vehicles using a ferry because no access roads have been built from the rest of the province over the precipitous terrain. Highway 101 runs through small-port communities and cottage country. The area has been named correctly. Powell River, for example, registers almost 2,000 hours of annual sunshine. The upper half of the coast is connected with the lower half by a delightful 45-minute ferry ride from Horseshoe Bay. With more than 20 provincial parks, lakes, beaches, and mountains, it's a great escape from big city life. From Langdale to Lund, you'll pass through Gibsons (near the BC Ferries terminal), Roberts Creek, Sechelt, Halfmoon Bay, Secret Cove and Pender Harbour. At the north end, the ferry to Powell River docks at Earl's Cove, which is also near Skookumchuck Narrows, where the skookumchuk, the world's biggest tidal marine rapids, can be seen. The Sunshine Coast also offers some of the best diving on the Pacific Coast.

10. The Bridges of Kings County, New Brunswick

Kings County, in southern New Brunswick, is drained by both the Saint John and Kennebecasis rivers. This provides the opportunity for a network of bridges, on this case, an abundance of covered bridges—sixteen, to be exact. These relics of a bygone era were the best way to preserve wooden spans at that time (80 to 100 years vs. the 15 years if uncovered). You can see many of Kings County's bridges in just a two-hour drive. Sussex is an ideal base of operations. From here you can take day trips to Magnetic Hill, the Hopewell Rocks, and Fundy National Park . Sussex is just about one hour from Saint John, Moncton and Fredericton. Enjoy everything at your leisure from antique and craft shops to outdoor cafes and even the oldest livestock auction in Atlantic Canada. Visit the Agricultural Museum on Perry Street and the Sussex Museum, Gallery & Tea Room on Maple Avenue. And you won't want to miss the NB Antique Auto Giant Flea Market in August. These picturesque bridges also provide great photo ops.