



The sun sets over the village of Alma, not long after lobster fishers arrived at the wharf with their day's catch. PHOTO: SUBMITTED/CATHY DONALDSON PHOTO

For a trip close to home, try a Parkway Getaway



Staycation N.B.

Dine, shop and take in the sights along New Brunswick's iconic Fundy Trail

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FOR THE TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Just minutes from the city limits, my hunched shoulders began to loosen. A few hours along the highway, my ribs

ached from laughing so hard.

A week after the trip, my refreshed spirit is still bubbly.

What journey brought on this much-needed transformation and pandemic reprieve?

I call it the 'Parkway Getaway', a recent New Brunswick adventure I had with four gal pals. The three-day, two-night odyssey saw us motor from Moncton to St. Martins for Sleepover Night One, then along the fabulous Fundy Trail Parkway to Alma for Sleepover Night Two, before returning home.

The trip was months in the making, which may seem odd for a quick excursion. In the 'old days' (pre-2020), our girls' group made regular getaways at a moment's notice. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, travel hesitancy, and/or a family member contracting the virus, we kept pushing back our departure date.

Last month, with vaccinations and boosters completed (and families healthy), our gal gaggle was finally ready



After a full day of exploring the Fundy Trail Parkway, the group spent a night at the Parkland Village Inn, Alma.

PHOTO: SUBMITTED/CATHY DONALDSON

to hit the road.

Some may wonder why a bunch of women would want or need a getaway when they connected regularly on social media and sporadically in person during the pandemic. Some may already

know that research shows hanging out with those whose company you enjoy decreases stress and improves quality of life. I consider mingling with my girlfriends a pillar of good mental health. When I combine gal time with travel, my soul is enriched that much more.

Like many, I've felt robbed these past few years, with both experiences limited. And so it was with great joy, considerable luggage and plenty of caffeine that we left Moncton — yours truly at the helm of the minivan — on a sunny May morning, arriving less than two hours later in the pretty village of St. Martins, along the world-renowned Bay of Fundy. The three days that followed were a celebration of friendship, warm spring weather, great food and freedom!

Here are some suggestions for planning a similar getaway:

Day 1: Explore St. Martins
Begin your stay at the lovely Beach

PLEASE SEE → TRAVEL, B2

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TRAVEL → B1

Street Inn. Last year, Paul and Beth White reopened the historic St. Martins property and, after extensive renovations, have created a heavenly experience for visitors. From its grand front porch with welcoming rocking chairs to its gorgeous wood interiors, beautifully decorated rooms, and special touches, like top-quality linens and locally sourced spring water, this small boutique hotel just makes you feel spoiled. The views of the bay, just down the street, are stunning and provided an inspiring backdrop as our group recharged and reconnected.

Take a drive on Main Street to Big Salmon River Road. At low tide, stop and stroll the ocean floor and check out the village's famed sea caves. The powerful Bay of Fundy tides carved out the sandstone hollows, which are among the '50 Amazing Places' in UNESCO's Fundy Biosphere Region. (Incidentally, that region includes an area of more than 442,000 hectares of the province's upper Bay of Fundy coast, from St. Martins to the Tantramar Marsh near Sackville and inland to Moncton.) Not low tide during your visit to the caves? Consider exploring them on water by renting a kayak at nearby Red Rock Adventure in St. Martins.

Need a snack and/or want to scratch your shopping itch? We enjoyed stops for lobster rolls at the Seaside Restaurant, hot drinks and yummy blueberry scones at the Shipyard Café, and bought some cool art, goat's milk soap and pretty gift cards at Sandpiper's. (We'd hoped for a cone at Octopus Ice Cream hut, sadly, it was closed the day of our visit. Next trip!)

That evening, we dined at the Beach Street Inn's restaurant, Periwinkles. It was excellent, with fresh, colourful choices, including gluten-free and dairy-free options. My bacon-wrapped scallops were among the best I've ever had and topped off a wonderful day. (Well, the night wasn't quite over: Late-evening giggles were on tap back in my room as the entourage gathered for games, chatting and a nightcap or two.)

Day 2: Check out the Parkway

After your stay in St. Martins, drive east along Big Salmon River Road to the



Author Cathy Donaldson attempts to wrangle her selfie stick for a group shot near the sea caves in St. Martins. PHOTO: DONALDSON/STYLING: DONALDSON

entrance of the Fundy Trail Parkway. The Fundy Trail itself is a 2,559-hectare park that features the 30-kilometre paved Fundy Trail Parkway, which hugs the southern coast of New Brunswick, offering spectacular cliffside views of the Bay of Fundy.

Construction of the Parkway began in 1995 and its first 10-kilometre stretch opened in 1998. Phase 2 began in 2007. In 2020, a 13-kilometre section to the Sussex area was finished, with the final section — to Alma — now open, making the Parkway accessible from both ends.

Like Cape Breton's winding Cabot Trail, visitors can pull off the Parkway at various lookouts for a better view or to explore trails that connect to paths or stairways leading to magnificent beaches, waterfalls and other vistas. (For planning, visit <https://fundytrailparkway.com/experience/>. You can also pick up a map when you pay entrance fees at the Parkway kiosk. Adults: \$11 per person.)

We pulled over at numerous points and did a variety of little hikes, including a fun walk across an 84-metre suspension footbridge above Big Salmon River, near the Fundy Trail Parkway Interpretative Centre. Another highlight was a trek to the observation deck at Walton Glen Gorge, nicknamed the 'Grand Canyon of New Brunswick'. The deck is perched

(securely!) on the edge of a cliff, about 40 metres above the gorge. The views are breathtaking and made for awesome group photos.

Other special memories of our Parkway tour included a picnic at Long Beach and a waterside wander. (Book lunch ahead and pick up en route at the Cookhouse near the Interpretative Centre. Info: <https://fundytrailparkway.com/cookhouse/booking/booking-lumberjack-picnic/>.)

Once you've had your fill of Parkway fun, take the Alma Connector Road (now open and fully chip-sealed) to the entrance of Fundy National Park. We stopped for some photo ops in the park before continuing to the cute village of Alma for the night. While only an hour from home, we were glad to drop anchor at Alma's Parkland Village Inn after a full day of Fundy exploring.

We ditched our hiking gear upon check-in, spiffed up a bit and took a sunset saunter along the neighbouring wharf to watch fishing boats arrive with their day's catch. Ready to refuel, we grabbed a table at Parkland's Tides Restaurant for seafood delights ranging from a Scallop Blueberry Salad to a full lobster dinner with all the trimmings (I happily devoured the latter but was willing to share my dessert.)

Throughout our meal, the service was exceptional as was the entertainment — cheery hummingbirds darting to and from feeders attached to the restaurant's windows. Our hearts and tummies were happy. There was more joy thanks to some craft-beer taste-testing down the street at a former church, now home of the Buddha Bear Coffee Roaster and Holy Whale Brewing Company. Cheers!

Day 3: Discover Alma and environs

The next morning, we ventured along Alma's Main Street again, this time for an all-important visit to Kelly's Bake Shop, home of the famed sticky buns. We bought some of the cinnamon treats and later heard that the shop (along with the famous bun recipe) is up for sale. This led to a (half-joking) discussion about a group purchase, but the gals and I feared too much product would be consumed before it hit the shelves.

Meanwhile, there were more purchases at The Artisan's Shoppe, which contains a bounty of hand-made wools by Maritime craftspeople. The business is in the former carriage house of Judson Cleveland, who owned the lumber mill on the Upper Salmon River in the early 1900s. Sharp owner Jane Chrystosom was a wealth of information about the property and local history, which definitely added to the experience. With some seasonal businesses yet to open, we continued from Alma towards Hopewell Rocks Provincial Park in Hopewell Cape. We agreed that visitors to the region and locals who have yet to see it should take advantage of this world-class attraction, a first-hand look at how the massive Bay of Fundy tides have sculpted the land. Since the tides weren't ideal for a walk on the ocean floor when we reached the area, we opted to return another day — or night, now that Baymount Outdoor Adventures is offering 'Kayak the Rocks after Dark'. Instead, we motored on towards Moncton, closing out our trip in Hillsborough with divine soups and salads at Cinnamon Soul Café, and planning for another adventure in the not-too-distant future.

Cathy Donaldson is a Moncton-based travel writer. She was a guest of Tourism New Brunswick, which neither reviewed nor approved this article.