



A Bite-Sized Taste of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

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With a cruise ship as home base, writer Sandy Bornstein checked out the foodie scene in Prince Edward Island, meeting some friendly business owners in the process.



In the autumn, several cruise lines offer a limited number of voyages up the New England Coast into Canada. These itineraries try to capitalize on the combined beauty of the vibrant fall colors set against a backdrop of pedestrian-friendly coastal towns. While I've grown accustomed to Colorado's golden aspen trees, I do remember the full spectrum of fall colors that were part of my suburban Chicago childhood. I could only hope that my timing would coincide with Mother Nature's unpredictability. Despite the fact that my [Celebrity Cruises](#) reservation didn't align with last fall's peak season, I had a memorable time exploring the sights, sounds and tastes of this coastal region.

Unlike many ports of call that are challenging to navigate, or are a distance away from the recommended places, Charlottetown's harbor provides easy access to the downtown area and almost all of its major attractions. One simply disembarks from the ship, walks through a covered terminal filled with shops, enters the Historic Charlottetown Waterfront, and then, a short distance later, can stroll easily in the small downtown area.



The view from the ship.

Those wishing to take scenic tours of the island or visit the [Anne of Green Gables Heritage Place](#) will need to arrange some form of transportation. Since I had already spent a couple of days jammed into a bus with dozens of others, I was content to explore Charlottetown by foot.

My theme for the day was food. Whenever possible, I taste regional or local foods and beverages and chat with shopkeepers and restaurant/bar owners who are invested in their community. I'd rather dine at a family-run business than a national or international chain. To simplify the process of picking my itinerary, I booked a half-day foodie tour that stopped at eight locations. Along the way, the knowledgeable tour guide from [Experience PEI](#) shared cultural and historical information while pointing out notable landmarks including the Colonial Building, the location of the 1864 Charlottetown Conference that led to the unification of all of the Canadian provinces.

Seafood at a Prince Edward Island coastal restaurant—[MacKinnon's Restaurant](#): Lobster on the Wharf

We walked a short distance to the first stop. It had a prime location, on the waterfront, next to the cruise dock. MacKinnon's Restaurant is a local landmark even though the original owners no longer own the property. It has both a seafood market and a sit down restaurant that offers unobstructed shoreline views. The market's daily prices for seafood are listed on an oversize blackboard. Fresh shellfish swim in bins submerged inside a large water tank. Tiny samples of mussels and oysters were our market treat.

In the restaurant, we were served a half portion of a modest-sized lobster roll. The chunks of freshly caught lobster meat were combined with mayonnaise and

celery. This mixture was served on a bun brushed with garlic-tarragon butter and garnished with lettuce. The only shortcoming was the size of the portion.



MacKinnon's Market

An Intro to Prince Edward Island Local Culture: **Brigh Music and Tea**

Looking in from the doorway, I thought that the narrow store looked like a music shop rather than a place to eat. Mary MacGillivray, one of the co-owners, heartily welcomed our small group and then sang a traditional song. She is earnestly trying to preserve her Scottish and Irish heritage that goes back multiple generations. Scottish and Irish emigrants came to PEI in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Mary graciously served freshly brewed elderberry, hibiscus and raisin tea along with oatcakes from **MacCaulay's**, a nearby bakery. The oatcakes resembled a round flat biscuit with a dense and dry consistency. After I left the store, I read that Scottish immigrants brought oatcakes to PEI and that the word Brigh is the Irish and Scottish word for soul. The store's name is definitely apropos.



Meet Mary MacGillvary at Brigh Music and Tea.

Beer at a Prince Edward Island microbrewery—Gahan House:** Brewers of Handcrafted Ales**

PEI has a long brewing industry history that includes the island's first premier, a Father of the Confederation, Charlottetown's first mayor, two first councilmen and several successful businessmen. According to what we were told, the brewing process is similar to what was done in earlier days, except now automation speeds up the production and some chemicals are added.

To taste one of Charlottetown's best beers, we visited Gahan House. The red brick building dates back to 1880. Since that time, the property has been used for many different purposes. Presently, a variety of beers are made in the basement and served upstairs.

I listened to the microbrewery's rep explain the different stages of the brewing process as he pointed to several interconnected large copper vessels. By the time the explanation was completed, I had a better understanding of the brewing basics. Since I'm not a beer maven, it's not possible to compare these techniques to other places, but I can say that the blueberry ale was the best beer that I tasted.



The microbrewery at Gahan House.

Food on the Go in Prince Edward Island—**The Chip Shack**

As we circled back
to the waterfront,
we approached a
tiny red wooden
shack with a black
roof and white trim.
Here we
overindulged in
hand cut island fries
that were fried in
canola oil and
sprinkled with
homemade salt.

Caron Prins, the fast
food chef and
owner, vibrantly
bounced from one
position to the next
inside her cubicle



while

simultaneously *Proprietor, Caron Prins at the Chip Shack.*
talking nonstop.

Using a specially designed metal contraption, she sliced a batch of local potatoes that were grown in the red, sandy local soil rich in iron, and then quickly started the frying process.

After living abroad, Caron returned to Charlottetown a few years ago to start her own food service business that showcases local products. Potatoes are at the top of the list since this product is worth over a billion dollars to the island's economy every year. PEI grows one-quarter of Canada's potatoes and is the lifeblood of PEI's economy.

While this stop focused on her fries, Caron serves other local products including PEI lobster and baked goods. Even though her menu includes a whole lot more, online articles refer to Caron as the "Queen of Fries."

Food tours run the gamut of diverse cuisines. This half-day culinary adventure focused on a bite-sized taste of Charlottetown's local foods while simultaneously introducing participants to the town's culture.

— Story by Sandy Bornstein, photos courtesy TheTravelingBornsteins.com.

Still hungry? Make these [PEI Potato Latkes](#) from this popular recipe we ran a few years back.



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