

# Grand Manan

*A grand adventure just north of the border*

by Naiden Stoyanov

**T**his place doesn't have much. There are a few beaches, but nothing like the Bermudas. There are a few hiking trails, but nothing like Vermont or New Hampshire. There are a couple of restaurants, but don't expect a luxurious experience. There are some hotels, but no five star affairs anywhere in sight.

Yet, it's a place which is likely to have you come back time and time again. John James Audubon himself was one of the people captivated by it. There is something about this place that makes you feel at home. Even though it's in another country. Barely.

Grand Manan Island is situated right off the coast the Easternmost point of continental United States off of Lubec, Maine, and it is actually closer to our shores than Canada's, but it is nonetheless over the border. In fact, up until the beginning of the 19th Century both countries had a claim on the island until the U.S. conceded it to the Loyalists in exchange for some more territory on the mainland. However, even today, the closeby Machias Seal Island and

North Rock are claimed by both countries.

While the local economy is still strongly dependent on the fishing industry, in the summer months Grand Manan Island is also a tourist destination for many Canadians, Americans and the occasional adventurer from overseas.

The allure of the island comes from its mystique, borne by its remote, yet accessible location, maritime charm and laid back pace.

Among the many famous people that have recognized the island's allure are author Willa Cather and the aforementioned John James Audubon.

Getting there takes time, but it's easy and, if you like road trips, an amazingly beautiful drive. By car it takes about 8.5 hours to Blacks Harbour, New Brunswick, where you would take the ferry to the island. The boat trip is paid only when you leave Grand Manan and it costs only about \$35 for the car, without the driver, and about \$11 per per-

*Above: Grand Manan Island's Swallowtail Lighthouse as seen from the arriving ferry. To the right of the lighthouse on top of the cliffs is the Hole-in-the-Wall campground*

*Fishing weirs to catch sardines are frequently seen in the waters around Grand Manan Island. The sardine industry is a staple for the local economy of the island and New Brunswick.*



son (\$5.40 for children 5-12 years of age and children under 5 are free). The trip is 1.5 hours, but the boat is large, has a nice cafeteria and the ride is a relaxing part of the road trip experience. Be on the lookout for whales during the crossing. Once on the island, no destination is more than 25-30 minutes away driving.

Make sure that you have your passports ready. Alternatively, Canada still accepts your American birth certificate along with a valid state ID at the border, but regulations have been changed from time to time so make sure you check on Immigration Canada's website.

For pilots and plane owners, Grand Manan has its own airport (CCN2) with a 3,000 ft runway.

Of course, the island is accessible by private boat, although mariners should use extreme caution in the area as frequent fog, powerful tidal flows and many navigational hazards in the area are known to have caused many wrecks.

Accommodations on the island are provided by small

houses-hotels or cabins that you can rent by the week. Alternatively, you can choose to camp on one of the two fairly large campgrounds. One is part of the Anchorage Provincial Park and the other is a private campground located less than a mile from the ferry landing – the Hole-in-the-Wall Campground.

The Anchorage campground is by the ocean and is mostly flat and very family friendly. The field-like areas are great for large groups and children. The amenities include toilets, showers, kitchen area and other niceties that one would expect from the well-run provincial park campgrounds of New Brunswick.

But if you have an ap-

#### **GETTING THERE**

**By car:** Take I-95 to Maine and then choose from a few options (highway, scenic, etc.) to Blacks Harbour, NB. There, take the ferry to Grand Manan. Distance from Fairfield County: about 570 miles  
Travel time: about 8.5 hrs to Blacks Harbour, then 1.5 hrs on the ferry to Grand Manan.

**By plane:** There is no commercial service to the island, but if you are fortunate to have a plane handy, plot a course to CCN2.

**By boat:** about 500 nautical miles from lower Fairfield County, but with many opportunities for exciting stopovers along the beautiful New England coast.



*A feature carved out by the sea through many years gives the name of the Hole-in-the-Wall campground on Grand Manan*

petite for a tad bit more adventurous stay, the Hole-in-the-Wall Campground might be the place for you.

Named after a cliff feature carved by the sea, this is surely one of the more spectacular campgrounds in North America. Many of the sites are perched right at the edge of a 200+ foot cliff, not for the faint of heart, but not too dizzying either, while opening up breath-taking vistas of the Bay of Fundy. No safety barrier here! (That's why the owner would not allow you to stay in those "cliff edge sites" if you are traveling with small children, due to the danger of a curious child making the wrong step. Sites a little further away from the cliff would be offered instead.)

The campground is on the grounds of the old Grand Manan airport, which is still owned by the same family that operates the site today.

Hole-in-the-Wall has a number of hiking trails, which are also available to non-campers for a small fee. There are restrooms and showers around the office, which is at the entrance of the campground, where there is also a free wi-fi lane if you are one of us who must use the Internet while on vacation.

Like any other modern-day community, Grand Manan Island has a couple of supermarkets and a few restaurants, but don't expect much of a choice here.

A must-see is the local bakery, which has very nice locally baked sweets as well as, of course, freshly made bread. Like most other small town establishments of this type, seating is extremely limited, so you might want to take your breakfast to go and enjoy it by the ocean.

The island offers unlimited opportunities for the avid photographer or nature painter. The often passing fog adds to the mystique of this place while the dramatic cliffs and picturesque scenery are just a small sampling of the opportunities for the outdoor artist. No wonder this was one of Mr. Audubon's favorite places.

*The Anchorage Provincial Park campground's open space is great for RVs, families and larger groups*



*The view from one of Hole-in-the-Wall's cliffside camp spots (tent only)*





Full moon bathes the Swallowtail Lighthouse as seen from one of Hole-in-the-Wall's cliffside camp spots

And while there don't forget to try the dulce – a local Atlantic Canada delicacy, which is essentially sun dried sea weed. Surely an acquired taste, but very rich on vitamins and minerals.

There are a number of activities that are available for the island vacationer. From whale watching, to birdwatching, golfing, kayaking and much more. A good resource for ideas and more information is [www.grandmananb.com](http://www.grandmananb.com).

If you are looking for a crowded “happening” place with all the amenities to spend your vacation, Grand Manan Island is not for you. If you are looking for tranquility, peace, quiet, the feeling of remoteness and a cooler summer experience then you should probably strongly consider it for your next destination. And then come back to it time and time again. ■

## Travel Tip

Make it a "two nation vacation" by stopping over in Maine before heading over to New Brunswick. Visit [www.two-nation-vacation.com](http://www.two-nation-vacation.com) for ideas and suggestions.

A good stopover is Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park in Maine. While there, make sure to try the lobster ice cream available at Ben and Bill's Chocolate Emporium on Main Street in Bar Harbor. Surely a taste for the adventurous eater.

From Bar Harbor you can take Route 1 to Calais, ME and cross the border there, in which case it would be just an hour of a diversion from Whiting, ME to West Quoddy Head Lighthouse which marks the Easternmost spot of the contiguous continental United States. In other words, this is the place where our country greets the sun first every morning!

If you are up for an even bigger adventure, consider taking another detour to Roosevelt Campobello International Park or even to Deer Island, NB from



where you can see the "Old Sow" whirlpool, billed as the largest tidal whirlpool in the Western Hemisphere!

Very important: the Deer Island option involves a ferry, so make sure you plan ahead and know the departure times before you head out. And remember that New Brunswick is in the Atlantic Time Zone, which is one hour ahead of our Eastern Time Zone.

Another thing to consider: some GPSs automatically factor in the different time zone at the destination, so your estimated time of arrival might or might not be already adjusted. Check your GPS's manual to be sure.



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1. A lighthouse along the way of the Grand Manan ferry.  
2. Grand Manan V, one of the two boats serving the Blacks Harbour - Grand Manan line, operated by Coastal Transport Limited.  
3. A harbor seal is visible from the island. 4. Southwest Head Light on Grand Manan enveloped by fog.