

A photograph of four hikers walking away from the camera on a wide, sandy beach. They are dressed in outdoor gear, including jackets and backpacks. The ocean is visible in the distance under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The foreground is filled with numerous footprints in the sand.

The Island Walk

**Guide to the 700 km Camino de la
Isla In Prince Edward Island,
Canada (third edition)**

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(Third Edition)

Introduction

In 2016, my partner and I spent five weeks walking the 800 km Camino Frances from France to Spain. It was our first experience in long distance walking, but it was not our last.

In April 2019, we returned to Europe and walked the Rota Vicentina in Portugal. We were especially taken with the 230 km Historical Way (*Camino Historico*) which passes through many small towns and villages not unlike the small towns where we live in Prince Edward Island (PEI), Canada. We decided to create a similar path in PEI which would pass through the Island's beautiful rural landscape, while adding many spectacular vistas of the sea.

We returned to Canada in May, and I set to work mapping a route for a Walk Around the Island (*now called The Island Walk*). The route wouldn't include every harbour and bay – that would have stretched to more than 1,200 km. Instead, we focused on an abbreviated path using secondary roads, red dirt roads and a great deal of the 450 km Confederation Trail (an abandoned rail bed). The route would cover 700 km and would take a month to complete.

Editor's Note: Four years later The Island Walk has become an international travel media sensation. We've been in BBC Travel, the National Geographic, Travel + Leisure magazine and the New York Times. In Canada, we've been featured in Canadian Geographic, the Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star and other national publications.

Many improvements have been made to the Island Walk route and to food, transportation and lodging options since we created the walk in 2019. This third edition of our guidebook focuses on these changes.

We look forward to welcoming you to this wonderful new walking (and cycling) adventure on PEI!

Getting Started

Statistics Canada tells us there has been a steady increase in participation in active leisure in this country since the early 1990's. This increase has been mirrored in the USA and Europe, where participation in walking and hiking has seen the largest % increase of all outdoor activities over the past 10 years. In the USA, 33 million Americans listed hiking as a

regular activity in 2009. This had increased to 44.9 million by 2017, a 36% increase.

Long-distance walking has enjoyed especially robust growth, with the Camino de Santiago being the most compelling example. In 1986, 2,500 pilgrims walked the Camino and received their Compostela (Certificate of Completion). That number grew to 350,000 in 2019 and is headed to 500,000 in 2024.

Pilgrims only need to complete the last 100 km of the Camino to receive their Compostela. Yet, a remarkable number (30,000) walk the entire 800 km Camino Frances. The Camino Frances starts in Saint Jean Pied de Port, France and crosses the French Pyrenees into Spain. This is the route that is the subject of the movie “The Way” starring Martin Sheen. It’s a remarkable number of people and illustrates the international interest in walking and the dedication of those who complete the entire Camino Frances journey.

The 700 km Island Walk is less ambitious than the 800 km Camino Frances, but it is still a major undertaking. We liked the idea of walking in our own backyard and sharing the experience with our hiking friends. We also thought many others would enjoy the beauty

of Canada's smallest province and the roads, trails and beaches that make it unique.

An island is especially attractive for a long-distance walk. Walking around an island means you return to your starting place. This eliminates the logistical challenges of most long-distance walks – you don't have to ship your belongings hundreds of kilometers from where you started. If you're flying, you also don't have to make travel arrangements in and out of two cities. To do the Island Walk, you just need to get to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island – it's an airport that's serviced by Air Canada, West Jet and several other airlines.

A less obvious advantage of The Island Walk is internal logistics. The distance from Charlottetown to North Cape is 154 km – one hour and thirty minutes by car. From Charlottetown to East Point is 104 km – one hour by car. This means you're never far from motorized transportation if you need it. The Island also has a new Rural Bus service provided by T3 transit. The fare is \$2 anywhere on the Island – very affordable by any standard!

Planning the Route

Prince Edward Island is Canada's smallest province, with a population of 180,000. Although the Island is small, it has more kilometers of roads per capita than any other province. These roads vary from four lane, limited access paved highways to small dirt tracks that are only passible in the summer months. In addition, the Island has the jewel of the 29,000 km Trans Canada Trail – the Confederation Trail.

The Confederation Trail was the first major section of the Trans Canada Trail that was fully connected. The Tignish to Elmira section was completed in 2000. The section from Charlottetown to Iona was subsequently opened in 2014 to celebrate Prince Edward Island's 150th birthday. The trail, which was built on an abandoned railbed, now extends more than 450 km to all parts of the Island. It is a non-motorized greenway (except in the winter months, when it's used by snowmobiles) and it's maintained by provincial government work crews. That means it's always in tip-top condition for walking or cycling – and it's a pleasure to walk, especially in the late spring and early fall.

I started sorting out accommodations for The Island Walk in August 2019. PEI is a small province, but it's a popular destination in the summer. With more than 1.5 million visitor visits each year, and more than a million overnight stays, vacancies in July and August are hard to find. Added to that, September has also been a great tourist month as the fall stays warmer than it used to. Even early October can be busy.

I started planning for an October 1 start, knowing that vacancy rates increase in the fall. At the same time, some restaurants and B&B's close by the end of October. Then, as I was calling places and sorting out accommodations, something magical started to happen – Islanders started asking us if we wanted to stay with them! Our walk was capturing the imagination of Island residents, and people wanted to become a part of this new adventure.

To take advantage of the offers of accommodation, we needed to recruit a few “trail angels” to transport us from our daily stopping places to places where we would be spending the night.

The transportation issues were most challenging in the extreme ends of the Island – up west and down east. We found two volunteers – Dave Gamble and Sara Deveau – to help us out in the west (O’Leary) and the east (Souris). In the other places, we were able to get the people who were hosting us to provide transportation back to their homes.

Editor’s Note: With more than 1000 people walking the route since 2021, it’s no longer possible for walkers and cyclists to rely solely on friendly Islanders to put them up for the night. However, this guidebook (and our website) will tell you where you can stay and help you sort out other important details. can For more details, cut and past this link.

<https://theislandwalk.ca>

If don’t want to bother with the details, you can also use one of our trip planning partners. Here’s the link.

<https://theislandwalk.ca/plan/trip-planners/>

“I lost track of the number of Islanders that stopped their cars to ask me if I needed anything.” Bernie Brunino, Newmarket, Ontario. 2021.

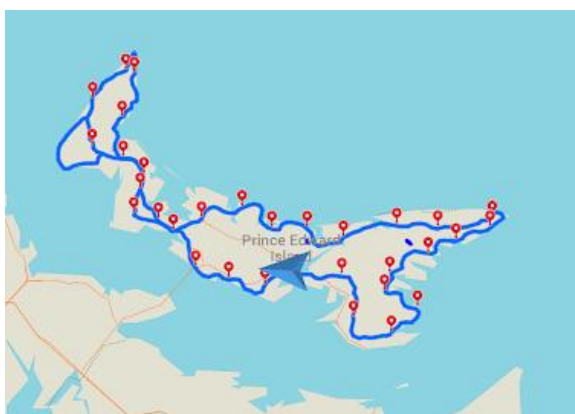


Figure 1 The Island Walk route, with nightly stopping places marked by red balloons.

As the route started to take shape, we were able to plan nightly stopping places that would have us walking from 20 to 25 km each day.

Waypoints and Distances

Waypoint	Place Name	Distance (Km)
1	Dunedin	20
2	Victoria	23
3	Carleton	19
4	Summerside	27
5	Wellington	21
6	McNeills Mills	23
7	O'Leary	23
8	Miminegash	22
9	Christopher Cross	21
10	Anglo Tignish	19
11	Alberton	24
12	Portage	25
13	Northam	20
14	Miscouche	21
15	Kensington	22
16	Bayview	24
17	Cymbria	27
18	Dalvay	21
19	Mt. Stewart	23
20	St. Peters	27
21	New Zealand	22
22	Elmira	21
23	Bothwell	22
24	Souris	20
25	Howe Bay	20
26	Cardigan	24
27	Montague	12

28	Gaspereaux	21
29	Murray River	20
30	Surrey	26
31	Lake Verde	25
32	Charlottetown	22
Total		707

The distances were based on a walking pace of 5 km/h, knowing that we wanted to be finished every day by 3:00 pm. That would give us ample time to check into our accommodations, get cleaned up for dinner, and spend some quality time chatting with our hosts before we started to get ready for the day ahead.

The 3:00 pm ending time each day was also established knowing that we would want to be in bed by 9:00 pm every night – no staying up to midnight for this group of walkers!

To see a more detailed map of our route with nightly stopping places, follow this link:

<https://theislandwalk.ca/island-walk-map/>

You may want to keep this map handy as you read this guide.

What did we pack?

Everyone who packs for a long-distance walk has a different opinion about what they should take on their journey. This is the third walk my partner and I have done, and these are the things I believe are essential.

I decided to go with my smallest pack – a 25-liter backpack from Mountain Equipment Coop. It's basic and very light – you can't overpack because there isn't enough room. My full pack weighed 7 lbs (before adding a water bottle and lunch).

I wore trail runners instead of hiking boots. I get blisters in hiking boots and seem to mostly avoid them with trail runners. I wore Solomon trail runners (non-waterproof). Given the wet weather we encountered, I would recommend waterproof trail runners – a size bigger than your normal shoe size.

Here's what else I took in my backpack:

- Four pairs of socks, including two pairs of "WrightSocks" from the Running Room, a pair of superlight triathlon socks, and a heavier pair of Darn Tough socks for wearing in the evening.

- A long-sleeved poly undershirt (for cool and wet days) and two poly tee shirts.
- Underwear (2 pairs) and one pair of light hiking pants, with zip-off legs.
- A warm sweater (I used a thermal underwear top) and long underwear bottoms for the coolest days and evenings. I also slept in my long johns.
- A ball cap with a brim, and a skull cap for the coolest mornings.
- A light, waterproof jacket and pants. Mine leaked when it rained hard – a cheap, plastic poncho is a good backup. I wore my light Gore-Tex jacket on all but the hottest days – the pants only when it was raining or very windy.
- Toiletries (just enough soap and toothpaste to last the journey).
- Blister cushions for the bottoms of your feet. A safety pin to break blisters if they develop, and antiseptic ointment.
- A cell phone (my map was on my phone) and a phone charger.

I didn't need insect repellent in October, but it's a good precautionary measure if you're bothered by mosquitos. (*DEET is*

highly recommended if you're walking in July, August or early September).

Trail logistics

I did the initial walk with our friend Nora Wotton and her two friends Marian and Dan Grant. That was a blessing as it made the trip a more social experience.

I booked two single rooms for Nora and me. Marian and Dan made their own arrangements for accommodations.

Nora and I did the whole journey as if it were the Camino. We walked every day and stopped every night as close to our walking path as possible. Sometimes this worked out very well, and sometimes our stopping places were not very close to where we were staying.

Editor's Note: Now that we've had more than 1000 "pilgrims" walk or cycle the route, transportation is much easier to arrange. Many B&Bs will provide transportation to and from the trail each day. In addition, several transportation companies provide Inn to Inn transfers and other services. Check this link for details.

<https://theislandwalk.ca/plan/luggage-transfer-service/>

Marian and Dan took a different approach – they drove two cars every day, leaving one at the starting place and one at the ending point. Each morning, they would leapfrog their cars ahead to the next stopping place.

Both approaches worked well. Nora and I had to rely more on local transportation, as we did not have a car with us. Marian and Dan had to do the daily car shuffle, but this gave them the option of driving home at night.

“We went to the pier as a lobster boat was returning with their catch and the fisherman passed me a lobster, then proceeded to tell us about his day.” Pauline Suppa, Wasaga Beach, Ontario. August 2021.

Day 1. Charlottetown to Dunedin, 21 km

We were very happy to have 13 walkers join us on our first day. We started in Charlottetown at the Trans Canada Trail kiosk in Joe Ghiz Park and headed north on the Confederation Trail. At 3.8 km, we turned west (left) off the trail