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by Shelley Cameron-
Carron

July 26th, 2010



The Fairmont Algonquin (Photo: Shelley Cameron-McCarron)

Canada's first seaside resort town, St. Andrews by-the-Sea, NB, has many claims to fame: it's by the ocean; it blends historic with modern; there's a lot to do, especially if you love the outdoors; and its grand dame hotel lets you slow down and enjoy life.

Don't be like me. Don't come to the sprawling, swank, gracious old Fairmont Algonquin without a firm spa reservation in hand.

Trust me—if ever there was a place for pampering, this is it. Towering over an original Loyalist town 25 minutes from the Canada-US border, the grande dame hotel simply oozes grandeur.

You will gasp as you drive up to the turreted, Tudor-style castle, past lush gardens and colourful Adirondack chairs strategically positioned by fire pits, perfect for evening cocktails and complimentary marshmallow roasts.

You will exhale as you step across the wide, elegant verandah, greeting handsome, kilted young bellhops, en route to the lobby. You will want at hour in the Spa at the Fairmont Algonquin. For history's sake, if nothing else.

When the **Fairmont Algonquin** opened in 1889, the hotel quickly became a haven for rejuvenation. One of the most popular features was the "cure-all" saltwater baths—drawn from nearby Passamaquoddy Bay.

Guests would take to the waters in specially equipped bathtubs with four taps—two for fresh water and two for saltwater. While the saltwater taps are long gone, the promise of rest and relaxation are very much in evidence.

And it's Family Friendly



Ideal as it is for a romantic rendezvous, the Algonquin also makes children feel like rock stars. Just ask my three.

Smudge, a former seeing-eye-dog-turned-uber-popular-lobby-dog is a magnet for young fry, who get their own special check-in (and gift). Staff practically gushed as my kids walked down the halls, offering high-five, hand-slapping love.

It must be something in the water. Even hotel guests in the elevators were giving cheery "bye-byes."

For 121 years, the likes of Sir John A. and Lady Macdonald, as well as horror guru Stephen King (some say he based *The Shining's* grand hotel after the Algonquin), have come to refresh and recharge.

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Today's amenities include a heated outdoor pool, the spa, several restaurants and a pub, mini-putt, supervised beach, the seaside Algonquin Golf Course and Academy, and perhaps the biggest crowd-pleaser of them all, Smudge.

While on duty, the canine ambassador (hey, she has her own business cards) is happy to tool hotel guests around the property. Just book a time with front desk staff.

As idyllic and beautiful as the Fairmont Algonquin is, the nearby spots of St. Andrews and surrounding areas are far too cool to skip. Here are my favourites:

Explore and Discover

Absolutely fascinating is the best way to describe nearby **Ministers Island**—even in the rain, the tidal island enchants. We drove across the ocean floor at low tide by taking the Bar Road to see the circular, quarried beach stone bathhouse and the rest of Covenhoven, the lavish 50-room “cottage” of railway legend Sir William Van Horne.

Van Horne's legacy rests here. This is the only place to tangibly gain insight into his genius, and decadence. Employing 40 people at the property's peak, his gardeners grew the largest peaches in the east, and his cows and creamery were award-winning.

But truly the key attraction is the beauty of the 500-acre island. Visitors can picnic, hike and bike 12 kms of trail and take guided estate tours. For the first time in 50 years, farm animals are back on the island. The island is also undertaking a racehorse rescue program.

Visiting Ministers Island costs \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors and students, while children under seven are free.



Eat Local



Fiddlehead soup shooters, anyone? If you're in the mood to treat yourself to creative, outstanding fare, you'd do well to reserve at the [Rossmount Inn](#), a popular country inn.

The ever-changing menu is culled from fresh seasonal and local ingredients with pickings from the inn's organic kitchen garden and wild harvested foods.

Unleash Your Inner Artist



Feel like dabbling in print-making or pottery? **Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre** offers art and nature courses for children and adults using the awesome natural environment of the Passamaquoddy Bay region as inspiration.

After you've got the creative juices flowing, explore the stunning town murals. Artists of oceanfront **Jarea Art Studio and Gallery** have been painting the town bright.

Get Wet



Any visit to St. Andrews would be remiss without whale watching or sea kayaking. Experience the Bay of Fundy with operators such as [Seascape Kayak Tours](#) and [Quoddy Link Marine](#).

Also worth a stop is the [Huntsman Marine Science Centre](#), an aquarium that's been operating since 1972. This smaller, temporary aquarium is in place as work is completed on the 1858 sq.-metre Bay of Fundy Discovery Centre Aquarium that's set to open in 2011.

Stop to Smell the Flowers



Kids. What do they know? Mine did not want to go to **Kingsbrae Gardens**. At all. But once they got there, they were so enchanted with the 27-acre site complete with ponds, birds, butterflies, trails, cedar maze and amazing selection of theme gardens, they did not want to leave.

Bonus feature? The Coffee in the Garden Café in a turn-of-the-century manor house designed by Edward Maxwell, who with brother William designed many of the town's stately summer homes.

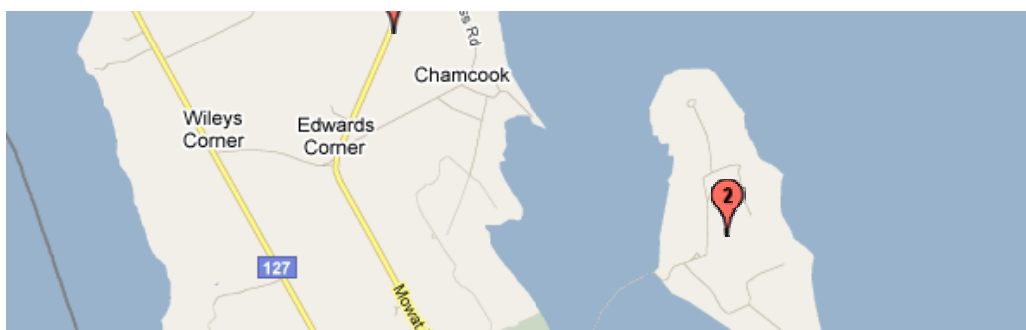
One final note—for the record? The Algonquin spa accommodated this Johnny-come-lately. Ah. Bliss.

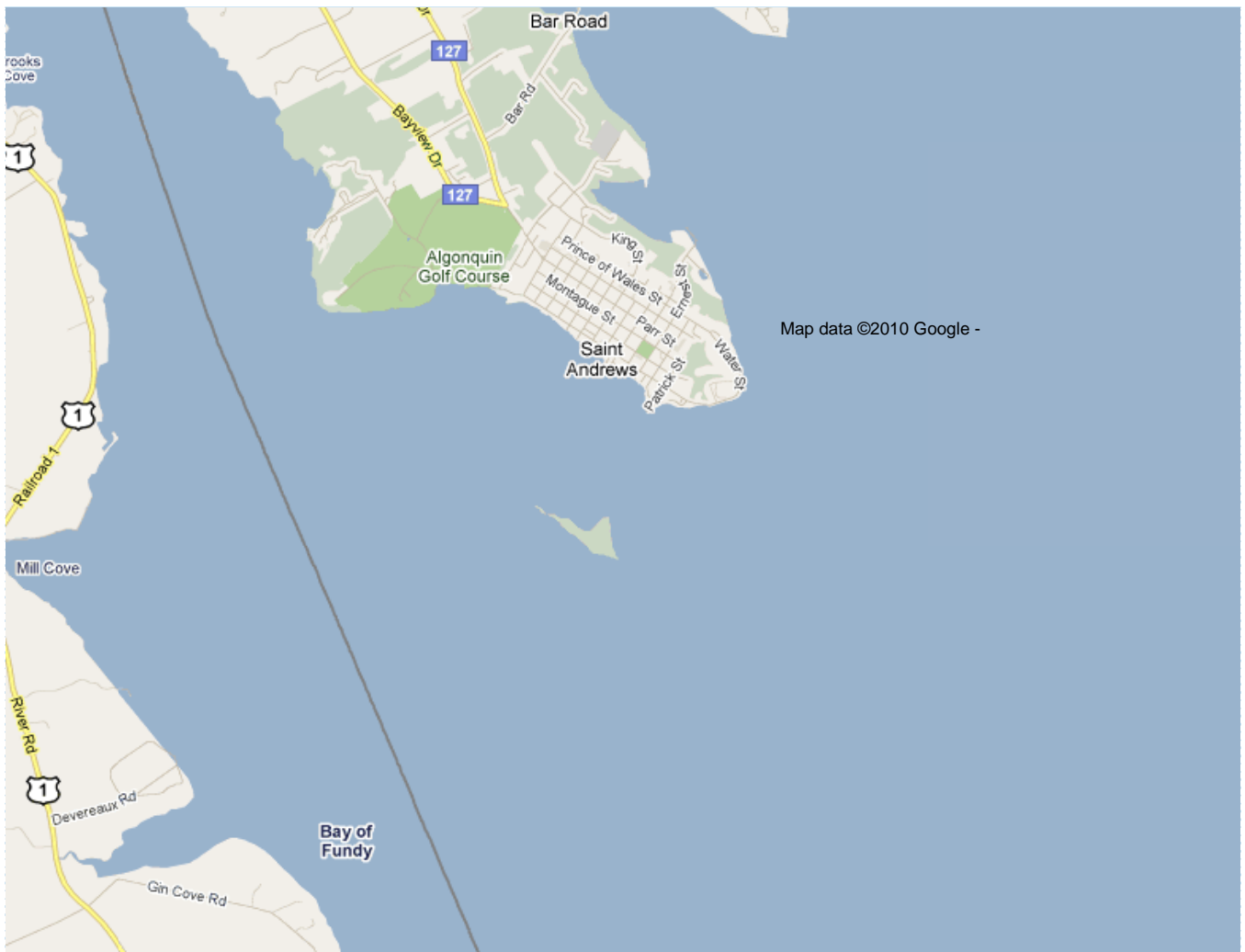
How to Get Here

St. Andrews is about an hour and an half drive from the Saint John airport. Take Hwy 111 to Hwy 1 West.

Follow it through Saint John and down the coast to the St. Andrews exit. Take Hwy 127 into town.

MAP





506-529-1200
<http://www.huntsmanmarine.ca>

CONTRIBUTORS

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Shelley Cameron-McCarron is a travel writing mama based in coastal Nova Scotia who writes extensively for regional, national and international publications. In March 2010, Shelley was thrilled to win the Travel Media Association of Canada's Best Food and Wine Feature for 2009.

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