

PEI's Point Prim lighthouse is a beautiful spot to spend a day, or more, exploring.



Peaceful **Point Prim**

The oldest lighthouse on PEI, and many other delights await you

Story and photography by Janet Wallace

It's a perfect place for a peaceful getaway. At low tide, we wander from sandbar to sandbar at PEI's Point Prim. In between each little island of soft sand, the water seems as warm as bathwater. I collect a few shells as I stroll, feeling more relaxed with every moment that passes.

Point Prim is off the beaten track. Although very close to Charlottetown as the crow flies, and not too far by road (3/4 of an hour's drive from the city), the area is quiet and non-commercial. The long, thin finger of land extends into the Northumberland Strait between Charlottetown and Wood Islands (where the ferry from NS docks). It takes only about ten minutes to drive from the base of Point Prim, near Belfast, to the tip. But you could spend a day, or a week, in the area exploring the shoreline, seeing the lighthouse and just taking it easy.

The Point Prim lighthouse stands tall at the very tip of the point. The base is just barely above sea level but the structure itself is 60 feet tall, the height of a six-storey building. Standing at the base of the round tower and gazing up at the windows so far overhead, I can't help but think of Rapunzel.

Built in 1845, Point Prim is the oldest lighthouse in the province. It's also one of only three brick circular lighthouses in Canada. PEI's red clay may add beauty to the province but it certainly doesn't create durable bricks. After just two years of exposure to salt-laden sea breezes, sleet and snow, the lighthouse was shingled in 1847 to protect the bricks.

We visit the lighthouse on a sunny, calm day, and it's a delightful place for a picnic. We return at sunset when the white shingles are blushed pink with the setting sun. The wind has come up. With waves crashing against the breakwater, I see how vital the lighthouse would be

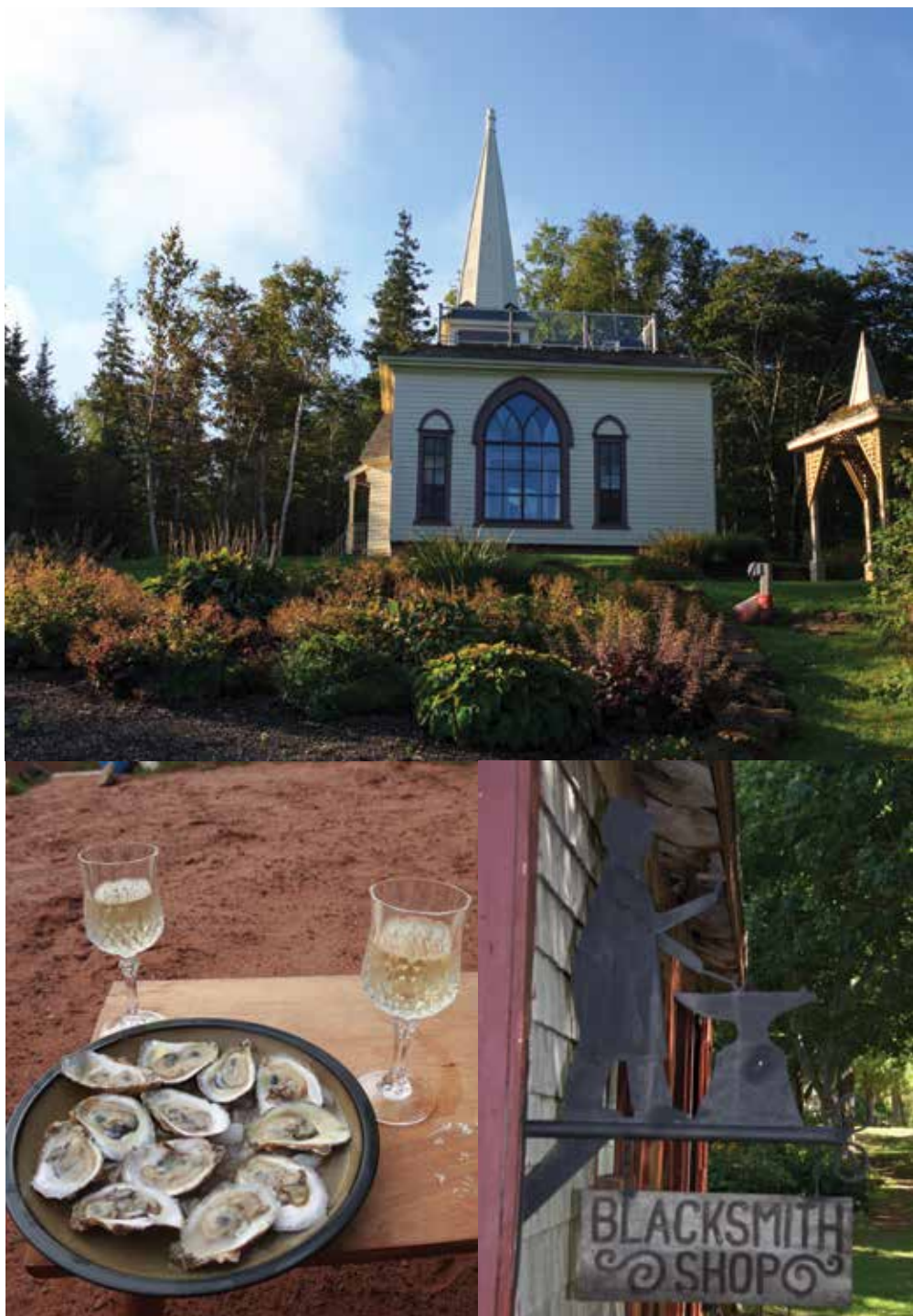


in years past, when trade and travel were by sea and navigation done by compass and starlight. Visitors can climb to the top of the lighthouse and appreciate a panoramic view of the coastlines of PEI, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Almost directly across the strait lies Tatamagouche, NS.

Islands often attract interesting, sometimes eccentric people, and a peninsula extending from an island attracts even more. For example, Gar Gillis has created a “bottle village” off Point Prim Road. He makes small buildings with walls made of bottles and cement, similar to ‘stackwood’ houses. From the outside, you see a honeycomb-like design with the colourful bottom of each bottle, (sourced from a nearby restaurant) surrounded by grey cement. So far, he’s made a schoolhouse, tearoom, sports centre and lighthouse. Just a short walk on a red soil road from the lighthouse is the Prim Point Chowder House & Oyster Bar. You can sit on the patio overlooking the water and slurp back oysters on the half shell while enjoying a mojito featuring PEI moonshine. The small restaurant has a staggering selection of seafood including oysters, clams (soft-shell, bar and quahog), mussels, and scallops, as well as crab, cured salmon, smoked haddock, smoked mackerel and shrimp. True to the restaurant’s name, they serve three (!) types of seafood chowder.

On the way to the chowder house, we pass lawns decked out in nautical style. One large tree is festooned with lobster buoys. Nearby, a front lawn is home to an old dory inhabited by a mannequin in oilskins holding oyster tongs.

An amazing find is The Steeple Cottage. Off a bumpy, muddy road, the secluded cabin perches on a hill facing the Northumberland Strait. Several years ago, Melody Ellis had heard about the imminent demolition of a church built in 1896. She arranged to buy the steeple. When workers were dismantling the building, they asked if she wanted the gothic-style windows. She couldn’t let these go to waste, so she decided to save them too. And



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Clockwise from top left: The secluded Steeple Cottage overlooks the Northumberland Strait; Point Prim Chowder House & Oyster Bar; colourful buoys make unique outdoor decorations; the view from Steeple Cottage; take a day trip from Point Prim to visit Orwell Corner Historic Village, complete with a working blacksmith; at the base of Point Prim, if your timing is right, you can buy oysters from the harvesters as they bring in their catch—heavenly!

so what was going to be a tiny outbuilding became a large, gorgeous cottage.

The building is full of whimsical touches, like a hand-painted mural over and around the bed with images of sky above and neighbouring shoreline and lighthouses at eye-level. Outside the cottage, a clawfoot bathtub has a bit of privacy with latticework walls but I could feel the breeze and hear the crickets while I bathed. (There's an indoor shower for cold days and self-conscious people.) Perhaps the best part is the belfry on the roof. We eat oysters and clams while sitting in the belfry and watching the stars come out.


We had dug those clams earlier that day. Whether you are staying on the peninsula or nearby Lord Selkirk Campground, you're not far from clam-digging grounds. Razor and bar clams are most common but if you're at the right place and the right time (and tide), you can get quahogs and soft-shell clams too.

If you want guidance, John and Jackie Gillis offer the Happy Clammers experience. John has worked on the water all his life. The soft-spoken fisherman can tell you about shellfish of all sorts—his face often breaking into a huge grin. He teaches people how to dig clams on the shorelines of Point Prim. Afterwards, Jackie cooks up the clams at their home overlooking the Pinette River.

For a day trip, we explored Orwell Corner Historic Village, a ten-minute drive from the base of the peninsula. The village contains furnished houses, a schoolhouse, church and general store and other buildings from the 1890s. One of the alluring charms and beauties of historical villages is the diversity of offerings. I spent ages patting and watching the sheep, pigs and draft horses, while my partner talked with the blacksmith. In one house, I discussed weaving with a woman who was threading a loom, while my partner learned about potato farming.

Near Belfast, by the peninsula's base, Fleece & Harmony is a farm business run by two sisters. They raise sheep and alpacas, and sell hand-dyed yarn from local wool. On Point Prim, Kro In The Skye Art Studio features beautiful paintings, stained glass, mosaics and sea glass jewelry produced by the multi-talented Cathy Murchison Krolikowski. If sea glass and driftwood are your passion, you can find art made from these sea gifts at Seaside Arts & Crafts.

Point Prim's shoreline changes from rocky cliffs in places along the west coast and slopes gently down to the water on the eastern side, but no matter where you go, you're not far from salt water. The peninsula is a place for strolling, cycling and just letting the sea breezes carry your stress away. 🌊



A Community by the Sea

- PEI's second largest Canada Day event – July 1st
- Join us for free activities in Seawalk Park including spoon playing lessons and weekly live concerts
- Hop on board one of our local deep sea fishing and tuna charter boats
- Stroll on our boardwalk overlooking Rustico Bay
- Shop at our many island artisan boutiques and shops
- Attend a world class theatre performance
- Indulge in freshly caught shellfish and seafood at one of our local restaurants
- Relax on our red, sandy beaches
- We're also the gateway to the National Park





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