Moose at Sunrise, Whales at Sunset

A self-drive loop around Cape Breton Island's Cabot Trail, from a boardwalk headland walk to a whale-watching cruise off Pleasant Bay.

DURATION
4 Days

BEST TIME TO GO
June – October
for the fullest run of open trails and tour operators; late September into early October adds fall foliage across the highlands (summer highs run 68–77°F / 20–25°C, with cool evenings even in midsummer)

FROM
$650 USD / person
for 2 people

Four days is enough to drive the full loop of the Cabot Trail, one of the most scenic coastal drives in North America — a boardwalk hike out to a cliff-top overlook where moose sightings are routine, a whale-watching cruise off the Acadian coast at Pleasant Bay, and nights in Cape Breton's classic road-trip towns, all self-drive with a rental car out of Halifax — with real lodges, tour operators, and 2026 prices for every stop.

Day 1 Arrive in Halifax — Pickup & Drive to Baddeck

Land in Halifax, pick up a rental car, and drive the length of mainland Nova Scotia onto Cape Breton Island to Baddeck, the classic gateway to the Cabot Trail.

Rental Car Pickup — Halifax Stanfield International Airport

~15 minutes · From $75 CAD / ~$55 USD per day

Enterprise and the other major agencies run counters right in the arrivals hall — book an intermediate sedan or small SUV in advance, since Cabot Trail season (June–October) sells out standard sizes early.

Enterprise Rent-A-Car · https://www.enterprise.com

Drive — Halifax to Baddeck

~4 hours, 274 km · Trans-Canada Highway (Route 105)

A straightforward highway run up the length of mainland Nova Scotia and across the Canso Causeway onto Cape Breton Island, with Baddeck's harbor waiting at the end.

Check-In: Inverary Resort

From $160 CAD / ~$115 USD / night, for 2 people

A lakefront resort on Bras d'Or Lake just outside Baddeck village, with cottages, a private dock, and water views from most rooms — a relaxed first night before the Cabot Trail loop begins.

Inverary Resort · https://inveraryresort.com

Dinner in Baddeck Village

~1.5 hours · $25–$40 CAD / person

Baddeck's short main street has a handful of seafood-forward restaurants overlooking the harbor — an easy, unhurried welcome to Cape Breton before the driving starts in earnest.

Day 2 Baddeck to Chéticamp — the Acadian Coast & Skyline Trail

The loop begins in earnest with a drive to the Acadian fishing village of Chéticamp, then into Cape Breton Highlands National Park for the trail with the trip's most famous sunset view.

Drive — Baddeck to Chéticamp

~2 hours, 130 km · Cabot Trail (Route 19/30)

The road climbs through the Margaree Valley's salmon rivers and maple hills before dropping into Chéticamp, a French-speaking Acadian fishing town at the park's western gate.

Chéticamp Village & Waterfront

~1 hour, self-guided · Free

A working harbor lined with fishing boats and hooked-rug galleries — Chéticamp's Acadian culture and cuisine set it apart from the rest of the trail, with lobster boats still working the wharf.

Skyline Trail, Cape Breton Highlands National Park

~2.5 hours, 7.5 km loop · $10.50 CAD / ~$8 USD per person, day pass

A boardwalk trail juts out to a headland 300 meters above the Gulf of St. Lawrence — moose sightings are routine along the way, and the boardwalk overlook is one of the best sunset spots on the entire trail.

Parks Canada · https://parks.canada.ca/pn-np/ns/cbreton

Check-In: Laurie's Inn

From $140 CAD / ~$100 USD / night, for 2 people

A long-running family motel in the heart of Chéticamp village, walking distance to the harbor and the park entrance — a Cabot Trail fixture since the 1960s.

Laurie's Inn · https://www.lauries.com

Day 3 Pleasant Bay Whales & the Wild North Coast

The trail's wildest stretch runs north from Chéticamp over two mountain passes to Pleasant Bay for a whale-watching cruise, then on to Ingonish for the night.

Whale & Seal Watching Cruise, Pleasant Bay

~2.5 hours · $65 CAD / ~$47 USD per person

Zodiacs and larger boats head out from the Pleasant Bay wharf into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where pilot whales, minke whales, and gray seals are sighted on the large majority of summer trips.

Capt. Mark's Whale & Seal Cruise · https://www.whaleandsealcruise.com

Drive — Pleasant Bay to Ingonish over North Mountain

~1.5 hours, 80 km · Cabot Trail

The road switchbacks over North Mountain and Cape North, with pull-offs at White Point and the Cabot's Landing memorial before dropping to the beach town of Ingonish.

Middle Head Trail, Ingonish

~1.5 hours, 6.5 km round trip · Free with park day pass

A peninsula trail splits Ingonish's two beaches, ending on a headland between the open Atlantic and the calmer bay — a easy late-afternoon walk after a full day of driving.

Check-In: Keltic Lodge Resort and Spa

From $260 CAD / ~$190 USD / night, for 2 people

A 1940s clifftop resort on the Middle Head peninsula, built by the same family behind the Fairmont hotels and still the trail's signature stay, with the Highland Links golf course spread out below.

Keltic Lodge Resort and Spa · https://kelticresort.com

Day 4 Baddeck — Alexander Graham Bell & Departure

The loop closes with a return to Baddeck for a museum built around Cape Breton's most famous adopted son, then the drive back to Halifax for departure.

Drive — Ingonish to Baddeck

~1.5 hours, 100 km · Cabot Trail / Trans-Canada Highway

The final stretch of the loop cuts back across the highlands to Baddeck, closing the circle on the full Cabot Trail drive.

Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site

~1.5 hours · $9 CAD / ~$7 USD per person

A museum built on the hillside where Bell spent his last 35 summers, with his original kite and hydrofoil experiments alongside exhibits on the telephone and early aviation.

Parks Canada · https://parks.canada.ca/lhn-nhs/ns/grahambell

Bras d'Or Lake Sailing Cruise

~2 hours · $55 CAD / ~$40 USD per person

A sailboat cruise out of Baddeck onto Bras d'Or Lake, the inland saltwater sea at the heart of Cape Breton, with a good chance of eagles overhead along the shoreline.

Cape Breton Sailing Charters · https://www.capebretonsailing.com

Drive to Halifax & Departure

~4 hours, 274 km · plus rental car return

The same Trans-Canada run back down the mainland to Halifax Stanfield International Airport — build in time for rental car return and check international carriers' recommended arrival windows before booking a flight.