

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT YOUR VISIT TO GRAND MANAN

by Greg and Nancy McHone of Stone2Gems, Grand Manan, New Brunswick, Canada

Q. Where can I get general information about the island?

A. If you have access to the internet, the GM Tourism Association has an informative website: <http://www.grandmanannb.com/> When you are on the island, stop by to get information and pick up brochures at the Visitors Information Center (VIC) in North Head, in the business center next to the old village hall and across from the Surfside Motel. The ferries, and some shops and restaurants also have brochures, and most local people are happy to help visitors.

Q. Where can I get internet access?

A. The business center in North Head, which has the VIC, may have wireless internet access (WiFi). Some inns and restaurants such as Island Arts Café and Sailor's Landing in North Head offer free wireless access. The village library at (inside) the community school in Grand Harbour now has free public wireless and several public computers. WiFi is on the ferries and waiting areas.

Q. Will I need a parking pass for any of the beaches or parks?

A. There are no meters, fees, or special passes for parking anywhere on Grand Manan. All of the public beaches, overlooks, playgrounds, and picnic areas are free. Some private and provincial campgrounds charge a small day-use fee. Please respect spaces reserved for handicapped drivers, and do not block access for fishermen and their dories at any of the boat launch ramps.

Q. Will my cell phone work on Grand Manan?

A. Some but not all cell phones have service, if they use the tower in Woodward's Cove. People tell me that Verizon and Bell Aliant phones work, but not Rogers. You might wish to check with your cell phone company for coverage information. The telephone in the cottage is only outgoing for local calls, but there is a pay phone near the old post office and another inside the Sailors Landing Restaurant.

Q. Do we need to bring our food and other things such as camping supplies?

A. Just about everything you need is available on the island. There is a modern supermarket in Woodward's Cove ("Save Easy") as well as several convenience stores ("Kwik Way"), a liquor store in Castalia, and a fine bakery in North Head. The large Home Hardware store in Grand Harbour has a good stock of travel items and camping gear. Also in Grand Harbour see the Dollar Store and Harbour Gifts, and ScotiaBank has two ABM (ATM) machines and can exchange currency. Modest selections of clothing can be found at Harbour Gifts in Grand Harbour, the drug store in North Head (it is also a general store), fisheries clothing in Woodward's Cove, and some seasonal shops for tourists such as Pettes Cove Arts in North Head. If you order ahead, you can pick up Sears catalog purchases at the Dollar Store in Grand Harbour. Be sure to visit the Saturday Farmers Market in North Head, where you will find a wide variety of arts, crafts, food, vegetables, baked goods, books, and many other items.

Q. Is there a farm stand or a place for fresh fruit and local vegetables?

A. Yes, try Tina's Market in the old Stanley's Store and Pop's Yarn Shop in North Head (near the hospital). Also stop at Roland's on Back Road for fresh dulse and other sea vegetables. Come early to the Farmer's Market in North Head on Saturdays, 10 to 12:30, for a selection fresh produce.

Q. Do I need Canadian money or are US dollars OK to use?

A. Many (not all) stores and sellers will cheerfully accept US money, but it can be a pain to calculate an exchange rate (not always the best one for you), and afterward they have to deposit it with a small loss at the bank. It is better to get Canadian cash at a bank (there is an ABM - ATM at ScotiaBank in Grand Harbour) and then pay for things in Canadian currency. Or use a credit card (but it may have a fee).

Q. Can I get gas and repairs for my car?

A. Diesel fuel and gasoline are available at the Save Easy store in Woodward's Cove. Cary's Tire in Woodward's Cove and Island Truck in Grand Harbour can handle most mechanical problems. Some parts and maintenance items are sold at Home Hardware in Grand Harbour.

Q. Where can I get books, videos, and art supplies?

A. The provincial library at the Community School in Grand Harbour has a good collection of books, magazines, and videos for loan (a library card is required). Videos can be rented at the supermarket and convenience stores. Books about art and nature are sold in Grand Harbour at the Grand Manan Museum and Harbour Gifts, and in North Head at the Whale Research Station. Magazines and newspapers are available at the drug store and supermarket. Art supplies are sold at the museum, Home Hardware, and the Dollar Store in Grand Harbour.

Q. Is everything more expensive on the island?

A. Most things cost the same or only little more than on the Canadian mainland. Gasoline is much more expensive in Canada than in the USA, so you might wish to fill up before crossing the border. Ticket rates for the ferry are subsidized and a lot lower than for ferries to many places such as Martha's Vineyard. Property prices, cottage rentals, and costs for personal services such as hair cuts and lawn care are also relatively low. Tourist attractions here are not extravagant and many places to visit are free.

Q. What languages are used?

A. Both the provincial and federal governments are officially bi-lingual in French and English, as you will see in government publications. However, most local businesses and residents use English, and as many of their ancestors came from New England, you might detect a "down east" accent. Actually, Grand Manan looks and sounds a lot like rural coastal Maine.

Q. Can I only travel to the island by my car and the ferry?

A. There are bus tours that come here through travel groups, but no regular bus service. People often leave their cars on the mainland and come on the ferry by foot, or with a bicycle. However, you must get yourself to the ferry dock as there is no public transit. Taxi service on the island is available by phone call. There is a well-maintained airport that handles small private planes, with a private air service that includes charter flights (no scheduled airlines). You can also come by private boat, but if you are not from Canada be sure to call the Canadian customs service upon arrival.

Q. Will I get sea sick on the ferry?

A. Wind and storms are more common in the winter, when it can be “bumpy” at times (rarely bad enough to bother most folks). But the crossing is usually smooth during summer months, and you can sit outside in the cool breeze if you wish. The two summer boats are large, sturdy, and safe, so you can relax and enjoy the cruise.

Q. Do I need a reservation to get a place on a particular ferry trip?

A. Reservations are encouraged via the ferry company website <http://www.coastaltransport.ca> or call (506) 662-3724, or visit the ticket office in North Head to make a reservation. Or if you arrive at least an hour before the boat leaves on the trip you want, you can usually get on as a stand-by. No ticket is used to come out, so just park in line at the ferry wharf and then drive on following signals from the crew.

Q. Do I need a passport and/or visa?

A. Travelers from other countries should have passports with them, although when you cross into Canada by car, you might not actually be asked to show it. A passport is also required to cross back into the USA (or you can use a passport card or for some states a special coded license). For small children it is a good idea to have birth certificates, and for pets up-to-date rabies certificates. Also, be sure your vehicle has a current registration and insurance. Of course, if you can prove you are a US citizen, you will not be prevented from returning to the USA, although you could undergo a lot of hassle without that passport. People from some countries might need a visa, but they will know that before getting this far.

Q. We have heard about long delays and hassles for crossing the border. Is that true?

A. There is a big new border station just west of St. Stephen and Calais, which handles both cars and commercial trucks. The new crossing bypasses the towns and connects directly to new Rte. 1 in New Brunswick. Two older border stations handle local traffic so long waits are almost eliminated. If you take care to follow the rules, and have your passport ready, the crossing is usually quick and painless.

Q. Are there any restrictions or problems for us folks "from away" about buying property and living part time on Grand Manan?

A. Hardly any. Unlike some places such as Prince Edward Island, many non-residents from Canada, the USA, and other countries own property here. Of course it can be difficult for foreigners to obtain local mortgages and credit, and if you sell property you might be required to immediately pay taxes on

capital gains. Property tax rates for non-resident houses are double that of primary residencies, but even so they might be lower than what you would pay at home. US citizens can stay up to 6 months per year without special permission, although people from certain countries might need visas. A common practice is to hire a local person to watch over your cottage while you are away, mow the lawn, prepare it for winter or summer, etc. See below about health care while living here part time.

Q. What kind of health care is available on the island?

A. A small but modern hospital in North Head provides routine care with three local doctors, and there is an emergency response team always on call. Serious cases are airlifted to regional hospitals in Saint John or Fredericton. New Brunswickers have free major medical care but visitors should check with their own insurance providers for coverage. There is a good full-time dentist in North Head. A veterinarian and a chiropractor from the mainland visit monthly, and an optometrist visits twice a year. The province sponsors a nursing home, and the Rotarians have an apartment complex for seniors. An exercise room with a variety of machines is open daily at the community center, for a modest fee, and exercise classes are available.

Q. Can I use my American insurance in Canada? What if I need a prescription filled or refilled?

A. Visitors not from New Brunswick may be asked to pay doctor and hospital charges by cash or credit card at the time of service, and get reimbursed through their own health provider. Emergency help is provided regardless. Despite what you might have heard, pharmacies in Canada cannot refill U.S. prescriptions, so be sure to bring enough medication for your stay on the island. A local doctor might prescribe medications for you after a personal check up, but you cannot bring them into the USA. The Grand Isle Rexall drug store in North Head carries most medications as well as general store items.

Q. Where can I get a refund of sales taxes?

A. If you are not from Canada, stop by a border customs office to get form GST176 Visitor Application for Refund (or get one on-line). You can get a refund for harmonized (combined provincial and federal) sales taxes on goods and accommodations (not food) with receipts greater than \$50 and total purchases above \$200. Fill out the form and send it with receipts to the following address:
Visitor Rebate Program, Revenue Canada, Summerside Tax Centre
Summerside, PE, C1N 6C6, CANADA

Q. Will I have to pay duty on my purchases when I go back across the border into the USA?

A. Personal items that you have bought for yourself or as gifts are usually exempt from duty. But beware of fresh food items, and prescription medications must be from the USA. Alcoholic beverages can be purchased at the duty free shop at the border. See <http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/>

Q. Why did I pay a sales tax on some of my island purchases but not others? Was that legal?

A. Individuals and small businesses with modest annual sales might not be required to charge a sales tax...it is perfectly legal, and your good luck!