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life + leisure

far off the
beaten path in
**ÎLES DE LA
MADELEINE**

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**a sensory feast in
MOROCCO**

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inside: CONTINUING DENTAL EDUCATION CALENDAR

where will you meet? WINNIPEG / ST. AUGUSTINE / KENYA / OTTAWA / SEATTLE >>



From CAVES +
kite-surfing to
cheese + BEER...
there's a **taste** for
ADVENTURE
in the
**Îles de la
Madeleine**

STORY BY LUCAS AYKROYD

It's all about water and wind on the Îles de la Madeleine...here, kayaks navigate the reddish cliffs of the coastline.

MICHEL BONATO



IF YOU GO
Cross the Îles de la Madeleine off your Canadian bucket list this summer. For more info on these magical isles go to tourismeilesdelamadeleine.com and quebecmaritime.ca. And for more on Québec's charms, whether the Îles or beyond, visit bonjourquebec.com.

Cave swimming, Îles de la Madeleine style.

Relaxing on Plage Pte Loup.

Must-sample lobster.

Colourful kites and houses.

Fromagerie Pied-de-Vent.

Tasty brew: À l'abri de la Tempête.

Walking the beach at Dune du Sud.

I'm exhilarated, laughing, and completely soaked. I've gone swimming in caves before in Cancun, Mexico, but doing it in the Îles de la Madeleine is a completely different experience. This isn't about paddling slowly underground with a guide offering laid-back commentary about ancient limestone formations. Instead, on this late summer day, I'm sporting a helmet, wet suit, and life vest as massive waves in the Gulf of St. Lawrence slam me into reddish-brown cliffs on the coastline of Grand Entry Island. Amazingly, I simply slide down the sandstone, unharmed. Where else could you do this? "Stay mellow," guide Sandrine Papageorges urges me and my buddy Robin in a charming Québécois accent. Lithe and fit, the 20-year-old island native seems as comfortable in these rough waters as the harp seals who return here by the thousands to give birth to their pups in February. Small wonder: she leads three tours a day. Our seven-cave route sometimes challenges my mellowness. One cave is called

"Antichambre," where I hold my breath underwater as I slip through a tight tunnel. Another is dubbed "Grotte de l'incertain" (The Grotto of Uncertainty), where green-lit waters give way to intimidating darkness as I go deeper. Sandrine beckons us onward. Supervised by a second guide following us in a kayak, Robin and I gain confidence, doing the backstroke, climbing on seaweed-laden boulders, and leaping wildly into the surf. We survive with smiling faces. It's an hour and 15 minutes of adrenaline I'll never forget. Visiting the Îles de la Madeleine for a taste of adventure is a rare treat. The archipelago, also known to English speakers as the Magdalen Islands, comprises seven inhabited islands, six of which are connected by the main road, Route 199. Windswept year-round, this 205-square-kilometre area is magnificently varied. It encompasses 300 kilometres of sandy beaches, wetlands burgeoning with blueberries and cranberries, and picturesque, weather-beaten wooden houses and churches. Only 15,000 people inhabit this isolated Québec region, and 95% of them are French-speaking. Acadian settlers first

arrived here in the mid-1700's. Many island residents are also descended from survivors of the 400-plus shipwrecks on these shores. After my swimming adventure, I enjoy a delicious marine-themed lunch with fresh clams, scallops, and lobster in a creamy béchamel sauce at my 26-room inn, the Auberge La Salicorne. (The inn also organizes the swimming tours.) It's like staying in an old country house, with quaint wooden furniture and cabinets supplemented by flatscreen TVs and modern bathrooms. My room is named after Adeleine Chiasson, a local woman who bore nine children and imported the Îles de la Madeleine's first haymaking machine. Hopping aboard a comfortable minibus operated by Autobus Les Sillons, Robin and I ride to Le Fumoir d'Antan, which specializes in smoked herring. The traditional-style smokehouse on House Harbour Island was founded in the mid-1990's when herring stocks rebounded after years of overfishing. After learning about the process of pickling, hanging, and smoking, I buy a jar of the pungent, salty delicacy for \$4.95. Other products include smoked mackerel and seal sausage.

©LA SALICORNE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MICHEL BONATO (2); LE QUÉBEC MARITIME / SEBASTIEN LAPROSE; MICHEL BONATO; ©ALABRIDELATEMPÊTE; LUCAS AYKROYD

The culinary adventure continues at Fromagerie Pied-de-Vent, where artisan cheeses tantalize my taste buds. While the titular raw-milk cheese is the signature offering at this cheerful yellow-walled establishment, La Tomme des Demoiselles—a sharp, tangy cheese aged for more than six months—is even tastier. Robin and I both wish we had more time to sample what the cheese manufacturer's cast of Canadian cows yields. Is there any better way to cap off a long day than with a cold beer? *Non!* Accordingly, our minibus heads to À l'abri de la Tempête, one of Québec's smallest microbreweries. It opened in 2004 in a converted fish factory on the shore of Grindstone Island, and now brews 100,000 litres of beer a year. "We always try to make the beer taste like the island," explains our bartender. No kidding. Herbs, spices, and seaweed add zest to these daring creations from master brewer Jean-Sebastien Bernier. My favourite is the more traditional Palabre du Couché de Soleil, a Belgian blonde ale with fruity notes. Homey and laidback, À l'abri de la Tempête attracts a diverse crowd. Visitors

who've quaffed a pint have ranged from New Democratic Party leader Thomas Mulcair to longtime Montréal Canadiens defenceman Francis Bouillon. Our next day blends artistry and adrenaline. We start at the 1983-designated historic site of La Grave in the island of Havre-Aubert, the original settlement for these islands. Adjacent to a natural harbour, more than 20 vintage buildings house unique shops and art galleries like Artisans de Sable, featuring whimsical works made with local sand. I'm captivated by a \$295 chess set, and a \$125 hourglass reminds me of Dorothy's clash with the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. While thankfully no tornado has ever blown my house away, I get a wonderful wind-driven experience at Aérosport Carrefour d'Aventures. It was founded in 1998 as Canada's first kite sport school. "The Îles de la Madeleine are a mecca for kite-surfing and kite-buggying," says co-owner Tania Berthelot. "People come from all over the world. Normally we get 15 to 20 knots of steady wind here." Instructor Steve Mantha takes us to the

nearby La Martinique beach with hard-packed sand dotted with seashells. The eight-year Aérosport veteran hooks up a 3.5-square-metre kite to a 23-metre rope attached to a tandem buggy, and invites me to hop in the back. As we zoom up and down the beach, Steve masterfully controls the huge kite, which dives hawk-like toward the sand and then rises again. I hear the kite whistling as the salty wind whips my hair. Again, I only wish I had more time to master this sport myself. It's pure excitement. Dining that night at La Tables Des Roy, arguably the archipelago's best restaurant, I savour my veal carpaccio and bouillabaisse gourmande soup with mussels, halibut, and lobster. I flew to the Îles de la Madeleine from Montréal, but in the morning, I'll depart by ferry for Prince Edward Island. I'm already planning my next visit. Maybe a summer cruise out of Montréal with CTMA Cruises? They offer different themes, from whale-watching to history to gourmet cuisine for \$1,000 per person/week. In any case, I'll be back for another taste of adventure. ●