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BY LISA MULLENNEAUX

"Dear old world, you are very lovely, and I am glad to be alive in you," says Anne of Green Gables in Lucy Maud Montgomery's famous novel. That loveliness includes a quilt-like pattern of red roads crisscrossing green potato fields, lobster fishermen hauling their traps at sunset, and draft horses raking Irish moss along the north shore. Surprisingly, this rural Canadian province of Prince Edward Island also has more than 20 elegant Victorian inns, built originally as homes for the island's captains of industry.

You can bike to them, hike to them, or glide in by kayak. "Our guests often arrive with their bikes on a rack," says Kimberly Olivieri, who runs the Matthew House Inn, overlooking Souris harbor. "We have bike rentals all over the island because visitors know our gently rolling hills and untrafficked roads are perfect for cycling." She and her husband, Franco, will also host kayakers for the first time this summer as part of a three-day Outside Expeditions tour.

A short drive south from the Matthew House, the Inn at Bay Fortune enjoys the same coastal views, but has a different history. It was built as a summer retreat in 1910 by Broadway playwright Elmer Harris, who wrote "Johnny Belinda." After his death, the house was occupied by a colony of artists until the late actress Colleen Dewhurst bought it. When she sold the house to summer resident David Wilmer in 1988, it was near collapse.

Dewhurst would be proud to see her former home today, not only because of Wilmer's careful restoration, but because both lodgings and restaurant are highly touted by food and travel critics. All 11 guest rooms feature views of the bay and private baths, and eight have fireplaces to take the chill off cool maritime evenings.

What is it that makes people "from away" adopt PEI? Serenity, for one thing. It persuaded Carol and Jay MacDonald to move from Ithaca, N.Y., in 1974 because the island seemed like the ideal place to raise a family. Today, the MacDonalds and their

two children share the Elmwood Heritage Inn with visitors.

The MacDonalds' home is impressive, even by Charlottetown's high standards. A Victorian manor house designed and built by architect W.C. Harris in 1889, it features 28 rooms with eight working fireplaces, two-footed soaking tubs, quilts made by Carol, and three suites with kitchens and living rooms.

A short walk from Elmwood on West Street is one of Charlottetown's few remaining examples of Queen Anne Revival style with its turret, gables, and broad veranda. Shayne and Sherri Popwell completed restoration of the 1897 house once owned by James Eden, a prosperous wine merchant, in just six months, and EdenHurst opened its doors to the public June 1.

Certainly the promise of a simpler lifestyle was the magnet that drew Steve Stratos and Colleen Bogdon to the tranquil shores of Malpeque Bay from the noise of Toronto. "Here we hear only the birds and an occasional tractor," Stratos said. "I tell myself that I've exchanged the thrills of the city for the love of the country. In fact, when Colleen and I were shown this property in 1992, I felt that I had lived here before."

Today, guests at Keir's Shore Inn enjoy a gracious home with oriental rugs, antique furnishings, and queen-size four-poster beds. But when the Bogdons bought the 1790 home, walls and floors were painted brown and little of the period furniture remained.

Also on the north shore in PEI's national park is Dalvay-by-the-Sea or, as it is known to Anne fans who have seen "The Road to Avonlea," The White Sands Hotel. At midday when I visited Dalvay, traffic was at a standstill on the Gulf Shore Parkway while a Canada goose marched her brood of five goslings across the highway. Oblivious to the 20th century and the motorists cooling their wheels, she is the independent spirit I associate with this changeless island and the eternal appeal of its red-haired, freckled-faced poster girl.

#### GETTING THERE:

Air Canada and Air Nova connect Charlottetown with Toronto via

Ottawa and with Montreal and Newark via Halifax. Call (800) 776-3000 or your travel agent.

Ferry Service connects Caribou, Nova Scotia, to Wood Islands, Prince Edward Island - a 75-minute crossing. Call (902) 566-3838.

The Confederation Bridge brings cars from Cape Tormentine, New Brunswick, to Borden, PEI, in about 12 minutes.

#### INN DETAILS:

\* Matthew House Inn, P.O. Box 151, Souris, PEI COA 2B0; (902) 687-3461.

\* Inn at Bay Fortune, Route 310, Souris, RR4, PEI COA 2B0; (902) 687-3745, fax (902) 687-3540.

\* Elmwood Heritage Inn, P.O. Box 3128, Charlottetown, PEI COA 7N8; (902) 368-3310, fax (902) 628-8457.

\* Hillhurst Inn, 181 Fitroy St., Charlottetown, PEI C1A 1S3; (902) 894-8004, fax (902) 892-7679.

\* Keir's Shore Inn, P.O. Box 7615, Malpeque, PEI COB 1M0; (902) 836-3938.

\* Dalvay-by-the-Sea, Box 8, Little York, PEI COA 1P0; (902) 672-2048.

For a brochure of historic inns, write: Prince Edward Island Inns of Distinction, P.O. Box 1812, Olde Charlottetown, PEI, C1A 7N5; (800) 463-4734 (ask for inns); Web site is [www3.sympatico.ca/peinns](http://www3.sympatico.ca/peinns).