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Arrive in the Canadian Maritimes in a High-Speed Ferry from Maine: Cameron on Transportation

Author : David Gurliacci

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There is perhaps no more beautiful part of the East Coast than the Canadian Maritimes: the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

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The problem is that getting there is a hassle. You have to take either an expensive flight with a change of planes or a two-day drive. But there is a third option: “[The Cat](#),” a high-speed car and passenger ferry that <https://darienite.com> Maine to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia.

But it may soon move farther away.

“The Cat” is a 1,646-ton, high-speed catamaran owned by the U.S. Navy and leased to Bay Ferries, the Canadian operator of the vessel (staffed with a U.S. crew). Launched in 2007, it used to run between the Hawaiian islands of Oahu and Maui.

The 349-foot long vessel can cross the Gulf of Maine’s 213-mile span in about five and a half hours at a top speed of 35 knots (40 mph), carrying 866 passengers and 282 cars.

It sails each morning from Nova Scotia at 8:30 a.m., arriving in Portland at about 1 p.m. The return voyage leaves at 2:30 p.m., arriving in Yarmouth around 9 p.m. Passengers can enjoy two bars, free movies, comfy first-class airline seating and a variety of food and shopping options.

Ferry service between Portland and Nova Scotia has run since 1970, but the older vessels required an overnight crossing, allowing passengers to enjoy cabins (if they weren’t spending the night gambling in the on-board casino). Locals in Maine still wax nostalgic about the “Scotia Prince,” the last slow-speed ferry to make the overnight crossing.

But the fast-ferry has found a new clientele, drawing customers from Boston, Providence, R.I. and as far away as New York City. According to its market research, its passengers have higher incomes and 75 percent of them live in the U.S.

“The Cat” isn’t cheap. A car with two passengers costs more than \$400 one way in peak season, though discounts are available for seniors and at off-peak times. Nova Scotia residents get a \$100 discount, since the province subsidizes Bay Ferries to the tune of \$7.5 million (U.S. dollars) per year.

The province likely gets its money’s worth, since Bay Ferries says the average customer spends 11 days driving through the Maritimes, staying in hotels and enjoying the great seafood. With the exchange rate giving the U.S. dollar a 30 percent premium, that can still add up to a lot of lobster.

But now Bay Ferries is threatening to pull out of Portland [and depart instead from Bar Harbor, Maine](#), another three hours up the coast. The company says it would cut the crossing time to three hours and save 40 percent on its fuel.

“The Cat” used to run on weekdays from Bar Harbor and weekends from Portland, but the company prefers one departure point and a less confusing schedule. Company officials also say they are not concerned about losing customers, noting that 3.5 million people visit Acadia National Park in Bar Harbor each year.

Locals in Bar Harbor seem less enthusiastic about the ferry as the small town already sees as many as three cruise ships each day. The small town is so crowded it looks like St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, but with pine trees.

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The last sailing of “The Cat” for this season from Portland will be Monday. As for next year — stay tuned.

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Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for more than 25 years. He is the founder of the Commuter Action Group, sits on the Merritt Parkway Conservancy board and also serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. The opinions expressed in this column, republished with permission of Hearst CT Media, are only his own. You can reach him at CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com.