

The Best of the Atlantic Provinces

Planning a trip to Atlantic Canada can present a bewildering array of choices. I've searched Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and Labrador for the best places and experiences. Here are some of my personal and opinionated top choices.

1 The Best Active Vacations

- **Sea Kayaking** (Nova Scotia): The twisting, convoluted coastline of this province is custom-made for snooping around by sea kayak. Outfitters are scattered all around the peninsula. For expedition kayaking, contact Coastal Adventures (☎ 877/404-2774 or 902/772-2774; www.coastaladventures.com), which leads trips throughout Nova Scotia and beyond. See chapter 4.
- **Biking the Cabot Trail** (Nova Scotia): This long and strenuous loop around Cape Breton Highlands National Park is tough on the legs, but you'll come away with a head full of indelible memories. See "Cape Breton Island," in chapter 4.
- **Exploring Fundy National Park & Vicinity** (New Brunswick): You'll find swimming, hiking, and kayaking at this lovely national park. And don't overlook biking in the hills east of the park, or rappelling and rock climbing at Cape Enrage. See "Fundy National Park," in chapter 5.
- **Bicycling Prince Edward Island:** This island province sometimes seems like it was created specifically for bike touring. Villages are reasonably spaced, the hills virtually nonexistent, coastal roads picturesque in the extreme, and a new island-wide bike path offers detours through marshes and quiet woodlands. See "The Great Outdoors," in chapter 6.
- **Hiking Gros Morne National Park** (Newfoundland): Atlantic Canada's best hiking is found in these rugged hills. You can hike amazing coastal trails, marvel at scenic waterfalls, and stroll alongside landlocked fjords at this exceptional park. See "The Great Outdoors," in chapter 7.

2 The Best Spots for Observing Nature

- **Digby Neck** (Nova Scotia): Choose from a dozen whale-watching outfitters located along this narrow peninsula of remote fishing villages. Getting to the tip of the peninsula is half the fun—it requires two ferries. See "Digby to Yarmouth," in chapter 4.
- **Cape Breton Highlands National Park** (Nova Scotia): The craggy geology of the west coast is impressive, but don't let that overshadow the rest

Atlantic Canada



of the park, where you'll find bogs and moose in abundance. See "Cape Breton Highlands National Park," in chapter 4.

- **Grand Manan Island** (New Brunswick): This big, geologically intriguing rock off the New Brunswick coast in the western Bay of Fundy is a great base for learning about coastal ecology. Whale tour operators search out the endangered right whale, and dozens of birds roost and pass through. Boat tours from the island will also take you out to see puffins. See "Grand Manan Island," in chapter 5.

- **Hopewell Rocks** (New Brunswick): The force of Fundy's tremendous tides is the most impressive at Hopewell Rocks, where great rock "sculptures" created by the winds and tides rise from the ocean floor at low tide. See "Fundy National Park," in chapter 5.

- **Avalon Peninsula** (Newfoundland): In 1 busy day you can view a herd of caribou, the largest puffin colony in North America, and an extraordinary gannet colony visible from the mainland cliffs. See "The Southern Avalon Peninsula," in chapter 7.

3 The Best Scenic Drives

- **Cape Breton's Cabot Trail** (Nova Scotia): This 300km (185-mile) loop through the uplands of Cape Breton Highlands National Park is one of the world's great excursions. You'll see Acadian fishing ports, pristine valleys, and some of the most picturesque coastline anywhere. See "Cape Breton Island," in chapter 4.
- **Along Cobequid Bay** (Nova Scotia): When it comes to scenery, Cobequid Bay (near Truro) is one of the region's better-kept secrets. The bay is flanked by two roads: Route 2 runs from Parrsboro to Truro; Route 215 from South Maitland to Brooklyn. Take the time to savor the rocky cliffs, muddy flats, and rust-colored bays. See "Minas Basin & Cobequid Bay," in chapter 4.
- **Fundy Trail Parkway** (New Brunswick): East of Saint John, you'll find this 11km (7-mile) parkway winding along the contours of the coast. Get out and stretch your legs at any of the 22 lookouts along the way

for fantastic cliff-side views. Or if the tides are out, clamber down to one of the stretches of sand nestled between the rocks. See p. 165.

- **Prince Edward Island National Park**: Much of the north-central shore of PEI is part of the national park, and a quiet park road tracks along the henna-tinted cliffs and grass-covered dunes. There's no single road, but several shorter segments; all are worth a leisurely drive, with frequent stops to explore the beaches and walkways. See "Prince Edward Island National Park," in chapter 6.
- **Viking Trail** (Newfoundland): Travelers looking to leave the crowds behind needn't look any further. This beautiful drive to Newfoundland's northern tip is wild and solitary, with views of bizarre geology and a wind-raked coast. And you'll end up at one of the world's great historic sites—L'Anse aux Meadows. See "The Great Northern Peninsula," in chapter 7.

4 The Best Hikes & Rambles

- **Point Pleasant Park** (Nova Scotia): Overlooking the entrance to Halifax's harbor, Point Pleasant Park is a wonderful urban oasis, with wide trails

for strolling along the water. You can also crest a wooded rise and visit a stout Martello Tower. See p. 94.

- **Cape Breton Highlands National Park** (Nova Scotia): You'll find bog and woodland walks aplenty at Cape Breton, but the best trails follow rugged cliffs along the open ocean. The Skyline Trail is among the most dramatic pathways in the province. See "Cape Breton Highlands National Park," in chapter 4.
- **Grand Manan Island** (New Brunswick): Grand Manan is laced with informal walking trails, through the forest and along the ocean's edge. This is a place for exploring; ask around locally for suggestions on the best hikes. See "Grand Manan Island," in chapter 5.
- **The Confederation Trail** (Prince Edward Island): This 350km (215-mile) pathway across the island is still being pieced together. But you can already explore 225km (140 miles) along the old rail line that once stitched the province together. It's

best for long-distance biking but superb for a quiet stroll. See "Kings County," in chapter 6.

- **Green Gardens Trail** (Gros Morne, Newfoundland): This demanding hike at Gros Morne National Park takes hikers on a 16km (9.5-mile) loop, much of which follows coastal meadows atop fractured cliffs. Demanding, but worth every step of the way. See "Gros Morne National Park," in chapter 7.
- **North Head Trail** (St. John's, Newfoundland): You can walk from downtown St. John's along the harbor, pass through the picturesque Battery neighborhood, and then climb the open bluffs overlooking the Narrows with views out to the open ocean beyond. And where else can you hike from downtown shopping to cliff-side whale-watching? See "St. John's," in chapter 7.

5 The Best Family Activities

- **Fossil and Mineral Prospecting** (Nova Scotia): On the Bay of Fundy, Parrsboro is a fossil- and mineral-collector's mecca. You needn't be an expert—a fine, accessible museum and helpful local guides will get you started. The terrain and scenery are the real draw; any finds are icing on the cake. See "Minas Basin & Cobequid Bay," in chapter 4.
- **Upper Clements Park** (Nova Scotia): About 5 minutes south of Annapolis Royal, this wonderfully old-fashioned amusement park is full of low-key amusements and attractions that will especially delight younger kids. Highlights include a flume ride (originally built for Expo '86 in Vancouver) and a wooden roller coaster that twists and winds through trees left standing during the

coaster's construction. See "Annapolis Royal," in chapter 4.

- **Waterfront Walk** (Nova Scotia): Halifax's waterfront walk is filled with wonderful distractions, from the province's finest museum to ships for exploring. Look also for buskers, delightful junk food, and sweeping views of the bustling harbor. If you're here in early August for the Busker Festival, it's all your kids will talk about for years. See "Halifax," in chapter 4.
- **Kings Landing** (New Brunswick). History comes alive at this living history museum, where young kids are fascinated by life in early Canada between 1790 and 1910. Ask about the weeklong sessions designed to immerse kids in the past. See p. 171.
- **Prince Edward Island's Beaches:** The red-sand beaches will turn white

swim trunks a bit pinkish, but it's hard to beat a day or three splashing around these tepid waters while admiring pastoral island landscapes. See "The Great Outdoors," in chapter 6.

- **Terra Nova National Park** (Newfoundland): This is the less noted of Newfoundland's two national parks,

but the staff has gone the extra mile to make it kid friendly. There's a marine interpretive center with activities for kids, boat tours, hikes just the right length for shorter legs, and campground activities at night. See "Terra Nova National Park," in chapter 7.

6 The Best Places for History

- **Annapolis Royal** (Nova Scotia): The cradle of Canadian civilization is found in this broad green valley, where early French settlers first put down roots. Visit Fort Anne and Port Royal, and walk some of the first streets on the continent. See "Annapolis Royal," in chapter 4.
- **Maritime Museum of the Atlantic** (Nova Scotia): Nova Scotia's history is the history of the sea, and no place better depicts that vibrant tradition than this sprawling museum on Halifax's waterfront. See p. 90.
- **Louisbourg** (Nova Scotia): This early-18th-century fort and village was part of an elaborate French effort to establish a foothold in the New World. It failed, and the village ultimately fell to ruin. In the 1960s, the Canadian government reconstructed much of it, and now it's one of the most impressive historic sites in the nation. See "Cape Breton Island," in chapter 4.
- **Village Historique Acadien** (New Brunswick): Around 45 buildings—with the number growing—depict life as it was lived in an Acadian settlement between 1770 and 1890. You'll learn all about the exodus and settlement of the Acadians from costumed guides, who are also adept at skills ranging from letterpress printing to blacksmithing. See p. 189.
- **Province House National Historic Site** (Prince Edward Island): Canadian history took shape in Charlottetown

in 1864, when the idea of joining Britain's North American colonies into an independent confederation was first discussed. Learn about what transpired at this imposing Charlottetown edifice, which has been restored to appear as it did when history was made. See p. 215.

- **Bonavista Peninsula** (Newfoundland): Newfoundland might seem like the edge of the earth today, but in past centuries it was the crossroads of European culture as nations scrapped over fishing rights and settlements. You can learn a lot about how the old world viewed the new during a few days exploring this intriguing peninsula. Base yourself in the perfectly preserved village of Trinity, and spend at least a day exploring up to the town of Bonavista, where you can visit the Ryan's Premises National Historic Site and learn why cod was god. See "The Bonavista Peninsula," in chapter 7.
- **L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site** (Newfoundland): This dramatic site on Newfoundland's northern tip celebrated its 1,000th anniversary in 2000—it's been a millennium since the Vikings first landed here and established an encampment. View the intriguing ruins, enter the re-created sod huts, and hear knowledgeable interpreters' theories about why the colony failed. See p. 252.

7 The Most Picturesque Villages

- **Lunenburg** (Nova Scotia): Settled by German, Swiss, and French colonists, this tidy town is superbly situated on a hill flanked by two harbors and boasts some of the most unique and quietly extravagant architecture in the Maritimes. See “South Shore,” in chapter 4.
- **Victoria** (Prince Edward Island): This wee village west of Charlottetown is surrounded by fields of grain and potatoes, and hasn’t changed much in the last 100 years. Try to time your visit to take in an evening show at the town’s wonderfully old-fashioned theater. See “Prince County,” in chapter 6.
- **Trinity** (Newfoundland): Three centuries ago, Trinity was among the most important ports in the New

World, when English merchants controlled the flow of goods in and out of the New World. This compact village has also been among the most aggressive in preserving its past, and the architecture and perfect scale of the village is unmatched in Atlantic Canada. See “The Bonavista Peninsula,” in chapter 7.

- **Twillingate** (Newfoundland): This end-of-the-world village on Newfoundland’s north-central shore is located on and around the convoluted harbors and inlets. At the mouth of the harbor, high headlands mark the way for incoming ships; walk out here and scan the watery horizon for whales and icebergs. See “Central Newfoundland,” in chapter 7.

8 The Best Inns

- **Gowrie House** (Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia; ☎ 800/372-1115 or 902/544-1050): The exquisitely decorated Gowrie House is at once resplendent and comfortable, historic and very up-to-date. The smallest guest rooms are more spacious than larger rooms at many other inns. See p. 134.
- **Kingsbrae Arms** (St. Andrews, New Brunswick; ☎ 506/529-1897): This five-star inn manages the trick of being opulent and comfortable at the same time. This shingled manse is lavishly appointed, beautifully landscaped, and well situated for exploring charming St. Andrews. See p. 152.
- **The Great George** (Charlottetown, PEI; ☎ 800/361-1118 or 902/892-0606): This connected series of restored town houses is historic,

central, welcoming, and quite comfortable. Continental breakfast is served in the open-concept lobby, where you can watch the comings and goings without getting in the way; rooms range from spacious doubles to huge, family-sized suites, and most of them have either a fireplace, a whirlpool bath, or both. See p. 216.

- **Inn at Bay Fortune** (Bay Fortune, PEI; ☎ 902/687-3745, or 860/296-1348 off season): This exceptionally attractive shingled compound was most recently owned by actress Colleen Dewhurst, and current innkeeper David Wilmer pulled out all the stops for his renovations. But the real draw here is the dining room, which is noted for the farm-fresh ingredients grown in the extensive gardens on the property. See p. 225.

9 The Best Bed & Breakfasts

- **Duffus House Inn** (Baddeck, Nova Scotia; ☎ 902/295-2172): A visit to the Duffus House is like a visit to the grandmother's house everyone wished they had. The inn's two adjacent buildings (constructed in 1820 and 1885) overlook Baddeck's channel and are cozy and tastefully furnished with a well-chosen mix of antiques. See p. 129.
- **The Manse at Mahone Bay Country Inn** (Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia; ☎ 902/624-1121): You won't find a bad room in this four-guest room establishment, built in 1870 and situated on a low hill in the picturesque village of Mahone Bay. Spend the day browsing local shops, and retreat in the evening to the casual luxury of this top-rate lodge. See p. 83.
- **Shipwright Inn** (Charlottetown, PEI; ☎ 888/306-9966 or 902/368-1905): This in-town, seven-room B&B is within easy walking distance of all the city's attractions yet has a settled and pastoral feel. It's informed by a Victorian sensibility without being over-the-top about it. See p. 217.
- **Tickle Inn at Cape Onion** (Cape Onion, Newfoundland; ☎ 709/452-4321 June–Sept, or 709/739-5503 Oct–May): Tickle Inn serves a family-style dinner each night so technically it isn't a B&B at all, but this tiny and remote home has the cordial bonhomie of a well-run bed-and-breakfast. Set on a distant cove at the end of a road near Newfoundland's northernmost point (you can see Labrador across the straits), the Tickle Inn offers a perfect base for visiting L'Anse aux Meadows and walking on the lonesome, windy hills. See p. 254.
- **At Wit's Inn** (St. John's, Newfoundland; ☎ 877/739-7420 or 709/739-7420): This centrally located B&B is bright, cheerful, and whimsical. Opened in 1999 by a restaurateur from Toronto, the inn has managed to preserve the best of the historical elements in this century-old home while graciously updating it for modern tastes. See p. 283.

10 The Best Local Dining

- **Digby Scallops** (Nova Scotia): The productive scallop fleet based in Digby, on Nova Scotia's Bay of Fundy coast, hauls back some of the choicest, most succulent scallops in the world. Sample the fare at local restaurants, or cook up a batch on your own. Simple is better: A light sauté in butter brings out their rich flavor. See "Digby to Yarmouth," in chapter 4.
- **Rappie Pie** (Nova Scotia): When traveling between Digby and Yarmouth, watch for shops selling rappie pie—a local Acadian treat made from potatoes plus meat or seafood. See "Digby to Yarmouth," in chapter 4.
- **Fresh Lobster** (Nova Scotia and New Brunswick): Wherever you see the wooden lobster traps piled on a wharf, you'll know a fresh lobster meal isn't far away. Among the most productive lobster fisheries are around Shediac, New Brunswick, and all along Nova Scotia's Atlantic coast. Sunny days are ideal for cracking open a crustacean while sitting at a wharf-side picnic table, preferably with a locally brewed beer close at hand. See chapters 4 and 5.
- **Prince Edward Island Mussels**: PEI has long been known for its wonderful potatoes, but the farmed mussels do more to thrill the taste buds. You'll

see the lines of mussel buoys in inlets and harbors. Order up a mess at an island restaurant to share with your whole table. See chapter 6.

- **Newfoundland Berries:** The unforgivingly rocky and boggy soil of this blustery island resists most crops, but produces some of the most delicious

berries you can imagine. Look for roadside stands in midsummer, or pick your own blueberries, strawberries, partridgeberries, or bakeapples. Many restaurants serve berries (on cheesecake, in custard) when they're in season. See chapter 7.