

# The Best of the Atlantic Provinces

Planning a trip to Atlantic Canada shouldn't be hard, yet the number of small towns, quaint inns, and potential driving routes makes it a bit complex. I've scoured the four provinces here for the best destinations and experiences; here are some top choices.

---

## 1 THE BEST ACTIVE VACATIONS

---

- **Sea Kayaking in Nova Scotia:** The twisting, convoluted coastline of this province is custom-made for snooping around by sea kayak. Outfitters are scattered around the province. For expedition kayaking, contact outfitter **Coastal Adventures** ([www.coastaladventures.com](http://www.coastaladventures.com)) about a current schedule of trips. See chapter 5.
- **Biking the Cabot Trail** (Nova Scotia): The long, strenuous loop around Cape Breton Highlands National Park is tough on the legs, but serious cyclists will come away with a head full of indelible memories. See “Cape Breton Island” in chapter 5.
- **Exploring Fundy National Park and Vicinity** (New Brunswick): You'll find swimming, hiking, and kayaking at this coastal national park. And don't overlook biking in the hills east of the park, or the outdoors center at Cape Enrage. See “Fundy National Park” in chapter 6.
- **Cycling Prince Edward Island:** This province sometimes seems like it was created specifically for bike touring. Villages are reasonably spaced apart, hills are virtually nonexistent, the coastal roads are picturesque in the extreme, and an island-wide bike path offers detours through marshes and quiet woodlands. See “The Great Outdoors” in chapter 7.
- **Hiking Gros Morne National Park** (Newfoundland): Eastern Canada's best wilderness hiking is found in the rugged hills of Gros Morne. You can hike amazing coastal trails, marvel at scenic waterfalls, and stroll alongside landlocked fjords in this visually stunning park. See “The Great Outdoors” in chapter 8.

---

## 2 THE BEST SPOTS FOR OBSERVING NATURE

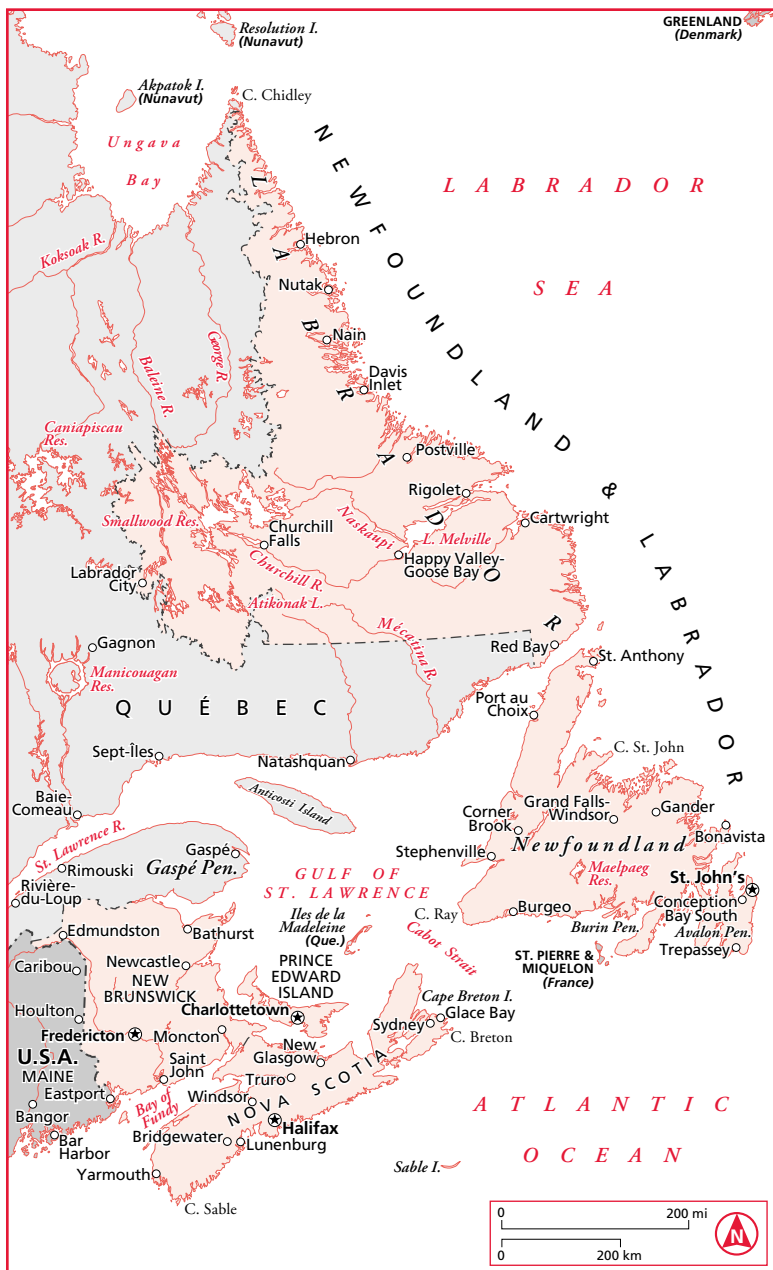
---

- **Digby Neck** (Nova Scotia): Choose from among the whale-watching outfitters located along this narrow peninsula of remote fishing villages. And simply getting to the tip of the peninsula is half the fun—it requires two ferries. See “Digby to Yarmouth” in chapter 5.
- **Cape Breton Highlands National Park** (Nova Scotia): The craggy geology on the west side of this headland is impressive enough, but don't let it overshadow the *rest* of the park, where you'll find bogs, moose, and plenty of quiet spots. See “Cape Breton Highlands National Park” in chapter 5.

## 2 Atlantic Canada

THE BEST OF THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES

1 THE BEST SPOTS FOR OBSERVING NATURE



- **Grand Manan Island** (New Brunswick): This big, geologically intriguing rock off the New Brunswick coast 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 6.
- **Hopewell Rocks** (New Brunswick): The force of Fundy’s tremendous tides is 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 6.
- **Avalon Peninsula** (Newfoundland): In a 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 Great Outdoors” in chapter 8.

---

### 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 5.
- **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 5.
- **Fundy Trail Parkway** (New Brunswick): East of Saint John, you’ll find this parkway winding along the contours of the coast. Get out and stretch your legs at any of the two dozen lookouts along the way for fantastic cliffside views. Or if the tides are out, clamber down to one of the stretches of sand nestled between the rocks. See p. 189.
- **Prince Edward Island National Park:** Much of the north-central shore of PEI is part of a national park. The quiet park road tracks along the henna-tinted cliffs and grass-covered dunes. The coastal road is interrupted by inlets in spots, but each segment is still worth a leisurely drive, with frequent stops to explore the beaches and walkways. See “Prince Edward Island National Park” in chapter 7.
- **Viking Trail** (Newfoundland): Travelers wishing to leave the crowds behind don’t need to look any farther than this beautiful drive to Newfoundland’s northern tip. It’s a wild and solitary ride, with views of bizarre geology, wind-raked coastline, and maybe even icebergs at the right time of year. Finally the road ends at one of North America’s great historic sites: L’Anse aux Meadows. See “The Great Northern Peninsula” in chapter 8.

---

### 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. Check out the Martello tower atop a wooded rise. See p. 111.

- **Cape Breton Highlands National Park** (Nova Scotia): There are certainly lots of quiet, contemplative walks on Cape Breton, but the best trails follow rugged cliffs along open ocean. The Skyline Trail is among the most dramatic walkways in Canada. See “Cape Breton Highlands National Park” in chapter 5.
- **Grand Manan Island** (New Brunswick): Grand Manan is laced with informal walking trails passing through forests 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 6.
- **The Confederation Trail** (Prince Edward Island): This pathway across the island is best for long-distance

cycling, but it’s superb for a quiet stroll in spots along the path. See “Kings County” in chapter 7.

- **Green Gardens Trail** (Newfoundland): This demanding hike at Gros Morne National Park takes hikers on a 10-mile loop, much of which follows coastal meadows atop fractured cliffs. It’s very demanding, for serious hikers only, but worth every step. See “Gros Morne National Park” in chapter 8.
- **North Head Trail** (Newfoundland): Where else can you hike from downtown shopping to cliffside whale-watching? In St. John’s, this trail progresses from downtown’s bustle, along the harbor, through a quirky neighborhood (the Battery), then up open bluffs overlooking the harbor narrows for views stretching out to the open ocean. See “St. John’s” in chapter 8.

---

## 5 THE BEST FAMILY ACTIVITIES

---

- **Upper Clements Park** (Nova Scotia): About 5 minutes south of Annapolis Royal, this old-fashioned amusement park is full of low-key attractions that delight 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 5.
- **Waterfront Walk** (Nova Scotia): Halifax’s waterfront walk is filled with fun distractions, from the province’s best museum to ships you can climb onto and explore. Also look for sweeping views of the bustling harbor. If you’re here in early August during the internationally famous Busker Festival, lend an ear. See “Halifax” in chapter 5.
- **Kings Landing** (New Brunswick): At this living history museum, young kids are introduced to life in early Canada between 1790 and 1910. Ask about the

week-long sessions designed to immerse kids in the past. See chapter 6.

- **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 lukewarm waters while admiring the pastoral island landscapes. There are great beaches both within the national park, and also on many points and coves outside it. See “The Great Outdoors” in chapter 7.
- **Terra Nova National Park** (Newfoundland): This is the less touted of Newfoundland’s two national parks, but staff go the extra mile to make it especially kid-friendly. There’s a marine interpretive center with activities for kids; boat tours; hikes just the right length for shorter legs; and planned activities at night at the main campground. See “Terra Nova National Park” in chapter 8.

---

## 6 THE BEST PLACES FOR HISTORY

---

- **Annapolis Royal** (Nova Scotia): The cradle of Canadian civilization can be 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 5.
- **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 right on Halifax’s waterfront. See chapter 5.
- **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 into ruin. In the 1960s, the Canadian government reconstructed much of it, and now it’s one of the best historic sites in the Maritimes. See “Cape Breton Island” in chapter 5.
- **Village Historique Acadien** (New Brunswick): This huge complex depicts life as it was lived in an Acadian settlement of New Brunswick between 1770 and 1890. You’ll learn all about the exodus and settlement of the Acadians from costumed guides, who also demonstrate skills ranging from letterpress printing to blacksmithing. See chapter 6.
- **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 seriously. Learn about what transpired at this Charlottetown edifice, which has been restored to appear as it did when history was made. See chapter 7.
- **Bonavista Peninsula** (Newfoundland): It may seem like the ends of the earth today, but in previous centuries Newfoundland was a crossroads of European culture, where 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 the cod was god. See “The Bonavista Peninsula” in chapter 8.
- **L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site** (Newfoundland): This dramatic site on Newfoundland’s northern tip celebrated its 1,000th “anniversary” in 2000. Yes, it’s been a full millennium since the Vikings are believed to have landed here and established a significant encampment. View the intriguing ruins, enter the re-created sod huts, and hear the interpreters discuss theories about why the colony failed. See chapter 8.

---

## 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 it boasts some of the most unique and quietly extravagant architecture in the Maritimes. Bring your walking shoes for the hills. See “South Shore” in chapter 5.
- **Victoria** (Prince Edward Island): This tiny village west of Charlottetown is surrounded by fields of grain and potatoes,

and hasn't changed all that much in the past, oh, 100 years or so. Try to time your visit to take in an evening show at the town's wonderfully old-fashioned playhouse. See "Prince County" in chapter 7.

- **Trinity** (Newfoundland): Three centuries ago, Trinity was among the most important ports in the New World, a place from which English merchants controlled the flow of goods into and out of the New World. This compact village has also been among the best in eastern Canada at preserving its past,

and the architecture and perfect scale of the village is unmatched in the region. See "The Bonavista Peninsula" in chapter 8.

- **Twillingate** (Newfoundland): This end-of-the-world village is located on and around the convoluted harbors and inlets of Newfoundland's north-central shore. At the mouth of Notre Dame bay, high headlands mark the way for incoming ships; walk out there and scan the horizon for whales and icebergs. See "Central Newfoundland" in chapter 8.

---

## 8 THE BEST INNS

---

- **Gowrie House Country Inn** (Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia; ☎ 800/372-1115 or 902/544-1050): The exquisitely decorated Gowrie House is at once resplendent and comfortable, historic and up-to-date. The smallest guest rooms are more spacious than larger rooms at many other inns. See p. 156.
- **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. The shingled manse is lavishly appointed, beautifully landscaped, and well situated for exploring charming St. Andrews. See p. 177.
- **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-size suites, and most of them have either a fireplace, a whirlpool bath, or both. See p. 245.

- **Inn at Bay Fortune** (Bay Fortune, PEI; ☎ 888/687-3745 or 902/687-3745): This exceptionally attractive shingled compound was most recently owned by actress Colleen Dewhurst, and current innkeeper David Wilmer pulled out all the stops during 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. 255.

---

## 9 THE BEST BED & BREAKFASTS

---

- **Shipwright Inn** (Charlottetown, PEI; ☎ 888/306-9966 or 902/368-1905): This right-in-town, nine-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. And the rooms are surprisingly modern, with phones, VCRs, DVD players, decks, and Jacuzzis. See p. 245.

- **Tickle Inn at Cape Onion** (Cape Onion, Newfoundland; ☎ 866/814-8567 or

709/452-4321): The 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 B&B all the same. 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. 289.

- **At Wit's Inn** (St. John's, Newfoundland; ☎ 877/739-7420): This centrally located B&B is bright, cheerful, and whimsical. 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. 321.