Nova Scotia

At first glance, Nova Scotia appears sweet as a storybook: lupin-studded fields meet gentle rolling hills; in summer there's golf, in winter ice-skating; living history museums are ubiquitous. Words like 'cute' and 'quaint' roll off the tongue at every bend in the road. The gingerbread-like houses, picture-perfect lighthouses and lightly lapping waves on sandy shores make you want to wrap it all up and give it to a cuddly kid as a Christmas gift.

Then, the antithesis creeps up on you: the Canada of fishermen braving icy seas, laboring coal miners, moose, horseflies, hockey – it's all here despite the sugar coating. It gets terrifically cold during the winter and you have to be of sturdy stock to live the life of a fisherman, miner or mill worker. Add to this that industry is down; the coal mines and mills have all but shut, the fishing is low. Despite their hardships, these robust Maritime people remain some of the warmest and down-to-earth folk you'll ever meet.

Nova Scotia has scarcely scratched the surface of its potential as a destination for kayaking, biking and hiking. While the season is short for these activities you'll find plenty of tour operators eager to get you on the trip of your dreams. When you're tired of roughing it, head to chic, cosmopolitan Halifax for some world-class dining and a rocking music scene.

HIGHLIGHTS

- People-watch along the waterfront, stroll aimlessly through the chic downtown and take in a world-class meal in **Halifax** (opposite)
- Hop a seaworthy vessel (and pop a seasickness pill) on **Briar Island** (p98) to look for the world's largest and rarest whales
- Hike the steep hill at **Meat Cove** (p127) to watch whales pass below while bald eagles soar above or get your adrenalin fix by smashing through the tidal bore waves at **Maitland** (p108)
- Spend a day visiting artists' studios along **St Ann's Loop** (p128)
- Wander through the lantern-lit graveyard of **Annapolis Royal** (p100) and learn the town's history through tales of the deceased
- Sit back with a beer and a hearty slice of Acadian meat pie while listening to live Celtic music at the Red Shoe Pub in **Mabou** (p120)
- Explore the white sand beaches and rocky outcrops of **Kejimkujic Seaside Adjunct** (p89)
- Sample French soldiers' rations c 1744 at **Louisbourg National Historic Site** (p131)
- Voyage under the ocean floor of **Glace Bay** (p131) to the damp coal-mines while listening to the yarns of a retired miner

Meat Cove ★
Glace Bay ★
St Ann's Loop ★
Mabou ★
Louisbourg National Historic Site ★
★ Maitland
Annapolis Royal ★
Halifax ★
★ Briar Island
★ Kejimkujic Seaside Adjunct

- AREA: 55,491 SQ KM
- POPULATION: 937,000
- CAPITAL: HALIFAX

HALIFAX

Halifax (population 360,000) is a hotbed for everything that is young, hip and culturally diverse in the Maritimes. The hilly agglomeration of heritage buildings, arty shops and cosmopolitan eateries slope down to the second-largest harbor in the world and its majestic views. Several universities keep the population young and the bars and nightclubs full. It's estimated that 36 different ethnic groups make up this lively population; you can get fish-and-chips, curry or sushi all within the same few blocks. Sea breezes keep the air clean, parks and trees grace the central areas. This is the kind of town that people flock to, not so much for the opportunities, but for the quality of life it has to offer.

HISTORY

Pirates, Indians, warring colonialists, exploding ships and sinking ships makes Halifax history read like an adventure story. The Mi'kmaq called present-day Halifax Che-book-took, meaning 'great long harbor,' and the British eagerly took advantage of its potential as a port. From 1749, when Edward Cornwallis founded Halifax along what is today Barrington St, the settlement expanded and flourished. The complete destruction of the French fortress at Louisbourg in 1760 increased British dominance and sealed Halifax as Nova Scotia's most important city.

In the early 1800s the growing port town became home to St Mary's University, followed shortly after by Dalhousie University. Despite being a seat of higher education, Halifax was still a rough-and-ready sailor's nest that, during the War of 1812, became a center for privateer black market trade. As piracy lost its government endorsement, Halifax sailed smoothly into a mercantile era, the city streets (particularly Market and Brunswick Sts) became home to countless taverns and brothels.

On April 14, 1912 three Halifax ships were sent in response to a distress call; the *Titanic*, hailed as unsinkable, had hit an iceberg. More than 1500 people were killed in the tragedy and many were buried at Fairview Cemetery.

During WWI and WWII, hundreds of ships massed in the extensive Bedford Basin before traveling in convoys across the North Atlantic. In 1917 the *Mont Blanc*, a French munitions ship carrying TNT and highly flammable benzol, collided with another ship. The 'Halifax Explosion,' the world's biggest manmade explosion prior to A-bombs being dropped on Japan in 1945, ripped through the city. More than 1900 people were killed and 9000 injured. Almost the entire northern end of Halifax was leveled and many buildings and homes that were not destroyed by the explosion burned to the ground when winter stockpiles of coal in the cellars caught fire.

Halifax faced its most natural disaster in September 2003 when the 185km per hour winds of Hurricane Juan ripped out thousands of trees, severely damaged buildings and scarred Halifax forever. Despite the violence of the storm only eight people were killed.

ORIENTATION

The downtown area, three universities and older residential neighborhoods are contained on a compact peninsula that juts out from the mainland area of Halifax West. Almost all sights of interest to visitors are concentrated in this area, making walking the best way to get around.

Two bridges span the harbor, connecting Halifax to Dartmouth and leading to highways north (for the airport) and east. The MacDonald Bridge at the eastern end of North St is closest to downtown. The airport is 40km northwest of town on Hwy 102.

INFORMATION
Bookstores

Book Room (☎ 902-423-8271; 1546 Barrington St; 🕑 9am-7:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat Jul-Sep, to 5:30pm Mon & Tue Oct-Jun) Founded in 1839, Canada's oldest bookshop specializes in Nova Scotian and Canadian books.
Bookmark (☎ 902-423-0419; 5686 Spring Garden Rd; 🕑 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 11am-6pm Sun) Good selection of maps and travel guides.
Mountain Equipment Co-op (☎ 902-421-2667; 1550 Granville St; 🕑 10am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-7pm Mon-Wed, 10am-9pm Thu & Fri, 9am-6pm Sat Sep-Jun) Topographical maps and guides to hiking, kayaking and biking in Nova Scotia.

Internet Access

Many B&Bs, hotels and hostels have wi-fi and computer terminals for guests' use.
Blowers St Paper Chase (☎ 902-423-0750; 5228 Blowers St; per hr $8; 🕑 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-8pm Sun) This cool café charges by the minute or the hour; wireless is free.