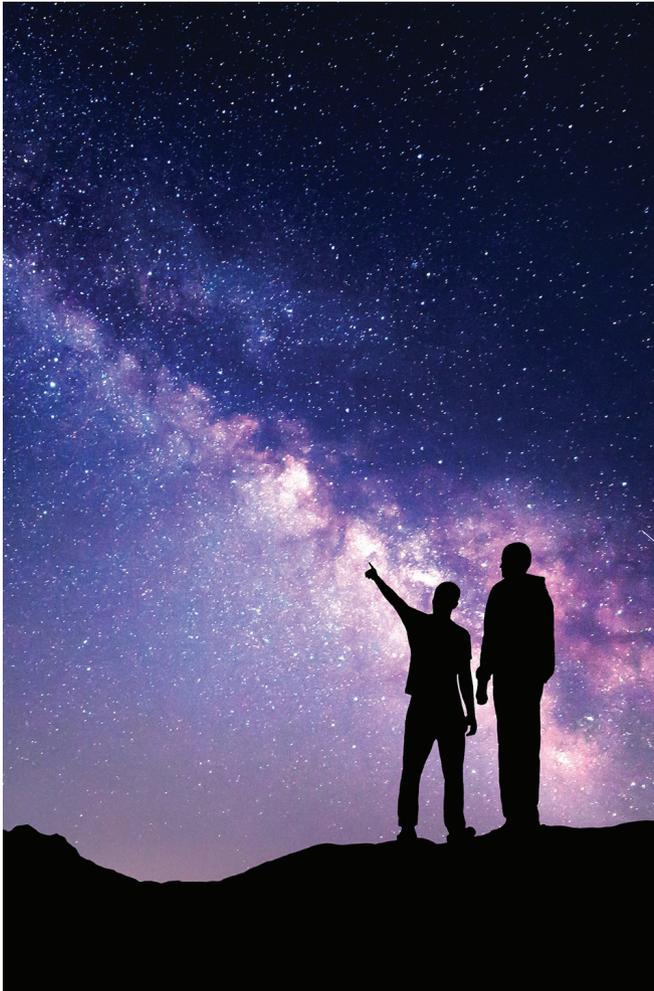


The Water Cooler

Smart and provocative stuff to rule the break room



WHY THE WORLD COMES CALLING

Ever wonder how Atlantic Canada, with only 2.3 million people, annually draws almost three times that number of tourists (about 6 million in 2017)? Surveys say it's because this place offers an ideal mix of nature, culture and hospitality. Here, then, are the region's top 10 attractions in no particular order

BY ALEC BRUCE

Gros Morne National Park (N.L.)

A world heritage site on the west coast where the Earth's mantle is visible, this is as close as it gets to a fjord-strewn coastline outside Norway. Visitors hike, boat and stare at the park's namesake mountain (which literally means "great sombre").

Charlottetown environs (P.E.I.)

This charming waterfront city is home to Confederation Centre of the Arts (Canada's official memorial to its founding fathers) and Province House National Historic Site. Tourists flock to restaurants, shops and events like "Anne of Green Gables: The Musical" (rumour says there's also a book).

Acadian Skies & Mi'kmaq lands Starlight Reserve (N.S.)

Located in the southwest of the province, this is one of only four places in the world to receive both Reserve and Destination designations supported by UNESCO. It's a Mecca for dark-skies lovers everywhere (bring a flashlight).

The Bay of Fundy (N.B.)

The world's highest tides touch Fundy National Park, Hopewell Rocks and Cape Enrage. St. Andrews-by-the-Sea offers 27 acres of horticultural footpaths collectively called Kingsbrea Garden. You can also see whales here (though not from the hydrangeas).

L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site (N.L.)

This is the only authenticated Viking site in North America. Things to do include: blacksmithing and listening to sagas about Thor and Loki (before they became residents of the "Marvel Comics Universe").

Halifax environs (N.S.)

This urban area hosts Citadel Hill, the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic and a vibrant nightlife. Just down the highway is Peggy's Cove, named for its proximity to St. Margaret's Bay (or, says the lore, for the sole survivor of an old ship wreck).

Prince Edward Island National Park (P.E.I.)

Located on the north shore, this 50-km stretch of coastline features seven beaches, trails and easy access to Green Gables Heritage Place, where visitors risk undergoing a 19th-century farmhand conversion (churning your own butter will do that).

St. John's environs (N.L.)

The municipal region boasts Signal Hill, Cabot Tower, The Rooms, and Cape Spear Lighthouse National Historic Site. Tourists come here for the food, drink, cheer, culture, and the odd iceberg (the real thing, not the vodka).

Cape Breton Highlands National Park (N.S.)

Home of the Cabot Trail, waterfalls, beaches, 26 hiking paths, and 24 head-spinning look-off points, this wild land has been called "North America's #1 drive". Visitors can also play golf (if the view doesn't give them vertigo).

The Acadian Peninsula (N.B.)

Comprising the northeast shore, this historic region hosts Village Historique Acadien, the New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre and the Miscou Island Lighthouse. Tourists arrive for the language and storytelling (also, the face-painting).

Sources: Destination Canada; Tourism Nova Scotia; Tourism New Brunswick; Tourism PEI; Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism; and, PlanetWare.