

Nova Scotia is a "dream destination"

By DIAHANN NADEAU
Herald Special

Nova Scotia is a dream destination, with beautiful beaches, lovely landscapes, great cities, and a long and fascinating history. This is the last, but not the least, of my three-part series on the Maritimes. Although I love New Brunswick and enjoyed P.E.I., Nova Scotia is the place I could visit every year for the rest of my life and still find something new and wonderful to do and look at. It is my favorite Maritime province, and has been since I was a kid.

Halifax is a natural starting point for any visitor to the province. It is a city of first, from being the first English settlement in Canada (1749), to boasting the first postal service in North America (1752 - it was probably faster than too), the first Sunday School for blacks (1813), the first Government House in Canada (1807), and the list goes on.

It's history alone would make Halifax worth a long visit, but it is also a beautiful city, with the second largest natural harbour in the world, (Sydney, Oz, being the first), delightful architecture, and lots of hills and gorgeous views to linger over. There are many museums and shops to wander through, and the restored waterfront area should not be missed. The Citadel fortress, at the top of the hill, is Canada's most visited historic site.

A particularly unique and marvelous way to see Halifax is to take a cruise on the White Heather, a superb 102 ft. yacht docked at the base of the Sheraton Hotel. An impressive tall ship, the White Heather is the dream of Halifax orthodontist Gene Jensen, who has spent millions restoring this 1953 Lloyd's 100 A-1 Class (the highest classification) to its former glory and beyond.

Offering everything from honeymoon cruises (complete with jacuzzi in your cabin), to business conventions, to two-hour harbour cruises for the casual visitor, the White Heather is your chance to sample sea-going luxury of a quality that has generally disappeared this century. I cannot recommend a cruise of this stunning ship too highly - it is a must-do on a visit to Halifax.

Leaving the city we headed out on one of the prettiest routes in Nova Scotia, the Lighthouse route, on the South-West side of the peninsula. Blessed with exquisite ocean views, beaches, and lighthouses, these small roads lead us to one of Nova Scotia's most famous sites, Peggy's Cove.

The village is every bit as pretty as all the postcards indicate, and boast the only lighthouse post office in the country. It is touristy however, and there is a tendency for bus loads of senior citizens to disembark every half hour. Despite the crowds, the village is certainly worth a stop, and don't forget to mail something to yourself from the lighthouse - you'll get the lighthouse cancelling stamp on your card. The route goes on to Chester and Mahone Bay, some of the prettiest towns and scenery you'll ever find in this country.

We eventually made our way to Lunenburg, another picturesque place and home of the world-famous Bluenose. Built on hilly



The village of Blue Rocks, in Nova Scotia, is quaint and scenic and offers all the best features of Peggy's Cove without the crowds or the shops. The village is so-named because of the blue hue the rocks take on. (Herald photo by Diahann Nadeau)

streets overlooking the water, the town was founded in 1753 by German protestants, in a Crown effort to counteract the French-Catholic presence in Nova Scotia. It is a supremely pretty town, with lots to look at, including the Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic, which gives one an interesting overview of this all-important industry.

A walking tour of the town is a pleasant way to view all the sites, and gives one the chance to fully appreciate the seaside architecture. A few miles away is the quaint, scenic village of Blue Rocks, a fishing village that has all the best features of Peggy's Cove without the crowds or the shops. It is so pretty and very quiet, a perfect place to take a long walk along the sea.

There are so many things to see in Nova Scotia, that any itinerary must be arbitrary - you can't see or do everything in one visit, unless you have a few months to spare. Given our ridiculously short three-day stay, we had to choose our priorities carefully.

For me, the one place I could not miss was Grand Pre, the site of the deportation of the Acadians back in 1755. Given the fact that both families on my mother's side are Acadian, this tragic bit of history is of significance and importance to me.

Disturbed by the neutral French presence of the Acadians, the British Crown demanded an oath of allegiance which the farmers would not give. All they wanted was to be left alone to farm lands and raise families as they had been doing for the past century, during which time the French Crown had all but ignored them. Independent, hard-working, these people did not want to be part of the world-wide showdown between the French and the English.

On October 13, 1755, several thousand people were expelled

from Grand Pre, taking with them only clothes and money, leaving behind houses, animals, fertile farms. They were driven down the New England coast, where they found hostile hosts and unfriendly welcoming committees. 'Broke down along the coast, oh, but what hurt the most, was when the people there said better keep moving on...' (Robbie Robertson, Acadian Driftwood).

Many of the emigrants landed in Louisiana, where they were ostensibly welcome, but found the hot climate and bayou country a strange and frightening place: 'This ain't my home, this ain't my season, can't think of one good reason to remain... Point my compass north, I got winter in my blood.' (Acadian Driftwood).

Many did return, but the English had already taken over their farms and settlements, and new land had to be found, a new existence carved out all over again. I always view these people as a valiant group and I will always be proud to call them my ancestors.

Heading west along the Evangeline trail takes us to Annapolis Royal. The first non-Spanish settlement in North America was at Port Royal, near Digby, where Samuel de Champlain founded the first social club in North America, the 'Order of Good Cheer.'

The settlement lasted from 1605 to 1613, when it was destroyed by an English force from Jamestown, Virginia. The settlement was later reinstated five miles away by the English as Annapolis Royal. The 'Habitation' has been restored and makes an interesting stop, evoking memories of long forgotten grade school history of Canada.

province.

A great way to get back home (not that you want to, but the time has to come) is to take the Scotia Prince, a large ferry that takes about 11 hours to cross the Bay of Fundy to Maine. It cuts out a lot of driving time, although you cannot make it from Portland to Ontario without an overnight stop.

The ferry boasts a casino, slot machines, various lounges and restaurants, and comfortable cabins to rest in. It's a very relaxing way to start your trip home, and gives you a little time to adjust to the idea of leaving the Maritimes behind. You can, of course, enter the Maritimes this way, doing it overnight and giving yourself a chance to rest.

Where to stay: In Halifax-Dartmouth we stayed at the lovely Stern's Mansion, which is in Dartmouth, but only minutes away from the bridge and ferries. The Mansion is a B and B offering luxurious rooms, including the tremendously romantic honeymoon suite, complete with a huge jacuzzi in your bathroom and complimentary champagne. Large thick towels, homemade muffins, fine coffee and a warm welcome make this one of the nicest places I've ever stayed.

In Lunenburg, the beautiful Boscawen Inn provides large and comfortable rooms, decorated with antiques, with some wonderful views onto the town and sea. The dining room is really nice, with excellent cuisine, and it's listed on the Taste of Nova Scotia program. Again, the welcome is warm and friendly, and I would heartily recommend the Boscawen Inn to anyone.

Near Digby we stayed at the Mountain Gap Inn in Smith's Cove. It offers a large resort facility, with a shoreline and magnificent views. The emphasis is on rustic, and it is more of a family oriented destination than the other places I've mentioned. The Inn is celebrating its 50th year in business.

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