

When the tide is your guide
there is an ocean of possibilities.

NOVA SCOTIA

porter

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Nova Scotia Travel: Colourful characters make for memorable holidays

From a terrific distillery in Lunenburg to lovely shops in Wolfville, there's no shortage of great locals to meet on a trip to Nova Scotia.

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JOSEPHINE MATYAS

For Beverly McClare, it was a love of cooking, herbs and gardening that set her on the path to establishing Tangled Garden. Her property has three acres of gardens, an 80-year-old pear tree and a century-old quince tree that she picks from for her products.

By: **Josephine Matyas** Freelance Travel writer, Published on Tue Mar 19 2013

WOLFVILLE, NOVA SCOTIA—It's easy to lose yourself on the roads less travelled of Nova Scotia. The East Coast province is renowned for a kind of laidback beauty tangled with a casual, friendly kind of welcome.

The salt water-tinged air, sheltered coves, lighthouses and fishing villages create a certain ocean-playground quality. But just past the famous landmark (think Peggy's Cove and the Bluenose, the ship on the Canadian dime) are the people of Nova Scotia.

It's true that until you have several generations pushing up daisies in the local cemetery, you'll be labelled as one who has "come from away." But it's merely a descriptor, not a judgement call. If anything, doors swing open wide and locals pull you into the fold.

Windbag Company

Pauline Dickson was looking for a career change and found one when a windstorm blew her boat cover into a tree.

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"I have a weird and wonderful little business model," smiles the energetic Maritimer. "Now, when someone brings me a blown-out sail, we make a trade. I make them a bag from their sail as a memento, and from the rest I have a team of seamstresses that clean the fabric and make all sorts of bags. Every bag has a label that tells the story of the boat the sail came from."

Dickison's "upcycling" venture has diverted several hundred thousand kilograms of sailcloth from landfill sites. She's a regular at the Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market and at her Lunenburg shop.

Encompassing Designs

The fact that Christine Little kissed her first boy in the building that is now her rug hooking shop may have been a good omen. Decades later, she bought the century-old building on the main street of artsy Mahone Bay and indulged her passion for rug hooking.

"Rug hooking is the best addiction ever. Twice a month we have a group called the Main Street Hookers who meet and work on their own projects. It allows people who say they have no artistic talent to create something very artistic."

Little designs kits for sale, teaches classes and workshops and dyes wools right on site.

Have a Yarn

A few steps down Mahone Bay's main street, Heather Tunnah's shop is crammed full of women sitting on folding chairs. There are just two sounds: the guest speaker explaining natural fibres, and the constant clacking of knitting needles. Who knew that knitting was undergoing such a renaissance?

"There are a lot of knitters," explains Tunnah. "In the wintertime it's the locals and in the summer the tourists and seasonal residents."

Many of her clients come for local products like hand-dyed yarns or artisan wools that are hand processed.

"I love knitting. I love people. And the rest of it seems like a good match."

Ironworks Distillery

For Lynne MacKay and Pierre Guevremont, a step away from careers in film and photography and into the world of craft distilleries was . . . well, it was actually a step into the unknown.

The couple learned the basics, apprenticed with a master distiller in the Okanagan, renovated their 1890s marine blacksmith shop on the Lunenburg waterfront, and then dove right into business.

They imported a 210-litre pot still from Bavaria – a double boiler with a wood fire – perfect for making fruit schnapps. "She passes these two tests," says MacKay. "She's not only beautiful, she is useful."

From beginning to end, the products they create are pure Atlantic Canada: dark rum using Crosby's molasses from New Brunswick; fruit-infused liqueurs featuring raspberries, blueberries and cranberries, all locally picked; and small batch vodka using Annapolis Valley apples.

Foxhill Cheese

Jeanita and Richard Rand's family farm may have roots stretching back seven generations, but that hardly means that the farming couple have been standing still. Quite the opposite.

"In 2002, an elderly woman knocked on our door and asked if we wanted to make cheese," explains Jeanita. "That was the beginning of our journey."

Within a week, the Rands met with a cheesemaker and started diversifying from what had been strictly a milk-producing Holstein herd.

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"We're in a niche market. We wanted to have a really good product and to educate our customers. We've built our business on that philosophy."

Over the last decade, the Foxhill product line has expanded to include yogurt, gelato and non-homogenized milk packaged in traditional glass bottles. It's sold at the farmer's markets in Wolfville and in Halifax, at small delis and directly from the shop at the family farm outside Wolfville.

"We make everything here," says Jeanita. "These cows are munching hay at six o'clock and the yogurt is ready the following morning."

Luckett Vineyards

It's the traditional red English telephone box (yes, it works) in the middle of the vineyard that first catches people's attention. Then, it's the stunning view from the top of Grand Pré Road.

"Pete Luckett is from England," says winemaker Mike Mainguy, explaining his boss's attachment to the telephone booth. "He's a bit of a local celebrity who made his mark with a chain of high end grocery stores in the area."

It turns out the grocer always harboured a wish to have his own winery, so in 2011 he opened the doors of Luckett Vineyards.

"Because of the proximity to the moderating basin of water, we can grow these grape varieties," explains Mainguy. "Mostly French-American hybrids with 20 acres under vine."

Luckett is one of seven wineries within a 30-minute drive, part of a blossoming wine industry in the province.

"We've become a bit of a one-stop shop," says Mainguy. "A tasting bar, gift shop, outdoor eating area . . . and that pretty view."

Tangled Garden

For Beverly McClare, it started with a film (The Secret Garden), was fuelled by a magazine article on making jellies and eventually grew into a full-blown business that feeds her entrepreneurial gene and an addiction to gardening.

Along the scenic Evangeline Route (Highway 1, near Grand Pré) are three acres of herb gardens, a beautiful home and a small shop where staff create small batches of herb jellies, vinegars and fruit liqueurs, using herbs and berries fresh-picked from their own gardens.

A stint in the restaurant business first introduced McClare to herb vinegars. But it was creating the colourful jellies that she yearned to master.

"People were familiar with mint jelly only, so we really had to educate the public. Now we make around 65 kinds, including flavours like orange chive, lemon rosemary and ginger lime thyme.

"Gardening is my bliss," says McClare. "And I'm lucky enough to have a staff who help make this dream a reality."

Josephine Matyas is a Kingston Ont. based freelance writer whose trip was subsidized by Nova Scotia Tourism. She can be found online at www.writerwithoutborders.com and on Twitter @writertravels.

JUST THE FACTS

ARRIVING If you want to adopt the laidback Maritime pace from the get-go, hop aboard The Ocean, VIA Rail's overnight train linking Montreal and Halifax. viarail.ca. If you're on a tighter schedule, Air Canada, WestJet and Porter are airline options.

SLEEPING Along the South Shore, the historic White Point resort has oceanfront cabins, many with wood burning fireplaces. The resort also partners with Bay Ferries (connecting Digby and New Brunswick) offering seasonal specials. whitepoint.com and bayferries.com. In the Annapolis Valley, the Blomidon Inn at Wolfville is a restored mansion built during the 1800s by an entrepreneur who made his fortune building

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