

# The tidal draw of -· NOVA SCOTIA ·-

HOME TO SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST EXTREME TIDES,  
NOVA SCOTIA IS AWASH WITH LOBSTERS, OYSTERS,  
WINE AND HISTORY.

Words and Photography **Jocelyn Pride**

I bought my lobster licence for 25 cents. Today they start at around \$300K,” says Roger Crooks, his seafaring face disappearing into crinkly laugh lines. “Lobster is now fashionable. When I was a boy, eating it was a punishment. We used lobsters as fertiliser. They were the rats of the sea.” These ‘rats’ are now big business in Nova Scotia, Canada, especially in places like Roger’s tiny village of Peggy’s Cove.

As the first overnight stop of a week’s driving trip of the Southwest pocket of Nova Scotia (ex Halifax), Peggy’s Cove is the perfect introduction to a province renowned for its rugged coastline, fairy tale lighthouses, patchwork quilted hills, cute-as-a-button villages, cheery locals with open arms and, of course, its legendary seafood and evolving wine industries.

The picture perfect lighthouse perched amongst granite boulders above crashing waves is one of the most photographed scenes in Canada. In keeping with the heritage of Nova Scotia (New Scotland), the evocative sound of a lone piper drifts on the sea air amidst the squawking gulls. Although it’s the height of summer and Peggy’s Cove is swarming with day trippers, there’s plenty of space to meander. The pretty harbour is the workplace for a fleet of wooden boats that haul in not only lobster, but also halibut and mackerel.

Eager to taste my first Nova Scotian lobster, I take the advice of Dan Cotterell, the dry-witted owner of Peggy’s Cove B&B, and head a few minutes drive down the road to Ryer’s lobster shack. With no frills, but all thrills, I choose a medium sized crustacean and plonk myself at a picnic table trying not to drool as I wait for it to be cooked. One of the beauties of travelling solo is there’s no-one to tell me I have melted butter dribbling down my chin or that I’m smacking my lips too loudly. There’s an art to extracting every tiny morsel of succulent sweet meat from the claws and tail. I learn fast. It’s all about twisting and cracking. Essential skills for eating lobster in Nova Scotia.

## LOST AND FOUND

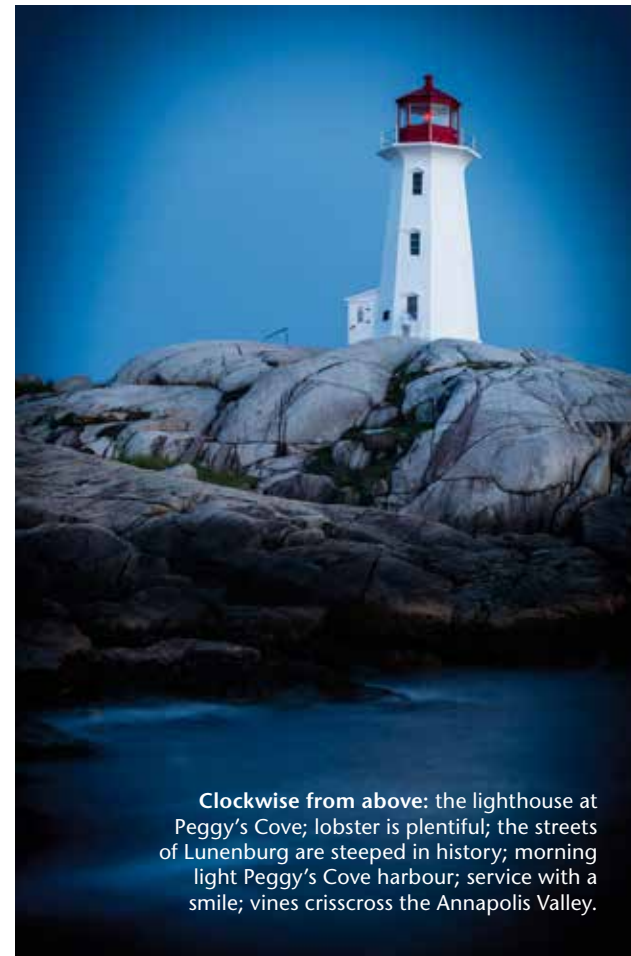
The next day I continue along the Lighthouse Route to Lunenburg, another seafaring village. Hugging the dramatic coastline, it’s easy to get side tracked. Driving on the wrong side of the road (and car) with poor sense of direction also makes for numerous ‘lost’ moments. Help is never far away. In the space of an hour, two coast guards (no I didn’t drive in the water), a berry farmer and a family with young children fascinated by my Aussie accent give directions and all recommend I drop into Mahone Bay.

A haven for artists and dreamers, the streets of Mahone Bay are lined with a mix of gourmet food shops and galleries. I lose myself in The Biscuit Eater Café, an unusual name for a cosy organic eatery where tables and comfy chairs are dotted amongst shelves of antiquarian books in the oldest building in the village (circa 1775). The Amos Pewter showroom is worth a visit and the smell of home baked ‘grandma style’ pies wafting out of Jo-Ann’s market shop is too alluring to walk past.

From Mahone Bay it’s a short drive (in theory) to the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Lunenburg. As soon as I arrive I’m glad to have two nights to explore this chapter of Canadian history.

## OLD AND NEW

Dating back to 1753, with 70% of the original 18th and 19th century buildings still in tact, Lunenburg is considered one of the best examples of a British colonial village in North America. It’s set on a hill ablaze with different coloured buildings, a nod to the sea captains of the 1800s who painted their house the same colour as their boat to identify their home from afar and to use up excess paint. From crimson to cobalt, aqua to daffodil yellow, the more flamboyant the better. I stay at the beautifully restored Mariner’s King Inn, an eclectic series of cranberry,



**Clockwise from above:** the lighthouse at Peggy’s Cove; lobster is plentiful; the streets of Lunenburg are steeped in history; morning light Peggy’s Cove harbour; service with a smile; vines crisscross the Annapolis Valley.





candy apple and navy blue historic buildings along King Street, more commonly known as 'UNESCO fresco'.

To fully appreciate this stunning village, I join a tour with Lunenburg Walking Tours. Guide Ashlee Feener is a proud 8th generation (both sides) local, her every word revealing a deep passion for the area. We wind in and out of the steep (and steeped in history) narrow streets and laneways stopping at various significant sites. "Shoes were placed in the walls of houses to wane off evil spirits," says Ashlee, as we stand outside a tiny cottage where seven generations of the same family have lived with three generations still living there. "If people renovate and find a shoe, it's recorded and left in the wall."

From the hill we wander down and along the wharf where the pride of local shipbuilding mastery is bathed in afternoon sunshine. "The Bluenose II is a replica of the original tall ship that was also built right here," says Ashlee. Canada's most famous tall ship (it graces the 10c coin) was unbeaten as a racing schooner, but unfortunately hit a reef in 1946. The Bluenose II was launched in 1963 and many local craftsmen built both Bluenose ships. At 44 metres in length, and with the largest working mainsail in the world, the Bluenose II is the ambassador ship for Nova Scotia, but there are many more tall ships and wooden boats bobbing about in the harbour. Small traditional Nova Scotian fishing boats called dories are also made here and I watch in fascination as people paddle through the still water tucked into these beautiful pieces of nautical art.

That night I dine harbourside at The Old Fish Factory and swap lobster for another local delicacy, sweet plump scallops with the lowest of food miles – namely from one side of the wharf to the other. The scarlet buildings of Adams and Knickle

are as distinctive as their famed scallops. Awarded a coveted sustainability certificate, this family-run scalloping business has been part of Lunenburg's history since 1887.

#### SWEET AND SAVOURY

The next couple of days I continue my taste fest by zig-zagging the coastal and inland minor roads towards the Annapolis Valley. Ethiopian spice bread with mushrooms and cheese from The LaHave Bakery an-everything-by-hand-using-only-local-ingredients type of place nestled into the riverbank at Bridgewater, lobster straight from the boat at Lobster in the Rough, Halls Harbour, a degustation dinner featuring local beef in a green peppercorn sauce at the rustic-luxe hideaway Trout Point Lodge, even 'smores' on the beach at White Point Beach Resort. Testing my navigational skills to the max, I find my way to Eel Lake Oyster Farm, where Nolan D'Eon (known as the oysterman) heads up his innovative family business farming Ruisseau oysters. Around half a million of them. Every year.

"I used to be a lobster fisherman," says Nolan, winking at his wife, Kim. "But I wanted to do something different." And different he did. I watch as Nolan lifts one of his cleverly designed cages out of the lake. Each cage holds around six mesh bags filled with 300 oysters and rests on pontoons. "Before the lake freezes over in winter, we fill the pontoons with water and

**Clockwise from above:** a toast to Tidal Bay whites; shucking oysters at Eel Lake Oyster Farm; Bruce Ewert pops the cork on his Sparkling wine; UNESCO listed village of Lunenburg; fishing villages are dotted throughout the region.

**Clockwise from above:** a British phone box is the centrepiece of Lockett's Winery; traditional dories are a common sight; the Buoy Shack in Peggy's Cove.

drop the cages. They sit on the bottom so the oysters continue to grow." The clear water and a slightly lower salinity level than the ocean makes for a unique taste. "Oysters are filter feeders so whatever they eat is what they taste like." And taste they do. Divine. After eating way too many oysters, I head to Wolfville for two nights at the charming Blomidon Inn to explore Nova Scotia's wine country.

#### RED AND (A SPECIAL) WHITE

Is there a reason why I save the wine region until last? Probably. If I'd started here, I may never have left. The Annapolis Valley is everything expected in a thriving agricultural area – rich soil, rolling hills and a favourable climate. But this is an area with something extra – a natural phenomenon. Tides. Ginormous ones. In fact the biggest in the world. And with the tides creating a unique terroir, a new appellation has burst onto the wine scene.

"I want my wine to tell a story," says Swiss born Hanspeter Stutz, owner of Domaine Grand Pre, the region's oldest winery. "Tidal Bay is all about Bay of Fundy where the tide fluctuates by 16 metres, twice a day. It's linked with the moon. The warm currents help moderate temperatures to ripen our grapes."

As with all appellations, strict guidelines are adhered to. To produce a Tidal Bay, only grapes from the region, particularly cold-climate l'acadie, can be used. Each year an independent tasting panel of wine aficionados gives the esteemed stamp of approval to vineyards to use the label. Described as slightly on the sweet side, light in body (bright and breezy like the terroir), Tidal Bay pairs perfectly with Nova Scotia's seafood. Launched in 2012, the number of wineries with a Tidal Bay varietal has now grown to 12. There are more than 20 wineries in the valley, less than 20 years ago there were four.

"It's an exciting industry to be in here," says John McLarty, owner of one of the region's newest wineries, Planters Ridge.

Originally from Ontario, John and his partner Lisa were attracted to the beauty and history of the region. "We found this property on the internet and didn't waste anytime moving in and planting our dream." With a stunning view over the valley, the 150-year-old restored barn is the perfect spot to wile away an hour or two.

Across at Lockett's Winery, the story is similar. "I'm a barrow boy from Nottingham, England," says owner Peter Lockett, who's as lively as his wines.

"I arrived in Canada many moons ago with a couple of hundred bucks in my pocket." After developing the hugely successful Pete's Frootique in 2010, he fell in love with the valley and moved onto a new challenge. A winery. And it's not only his wines that attract attention. An original red British phone box sits in the middle of the vines beckoning people to call home (for free within North America) because 'sharing great wine leads to sharing great conversations'. "Best not to ask how I got the phone box here," he says.

Although the weather conditions are better suited to whites, the region is also producing reds using hybrid grapes to wane off the cold winters. Blomidon Estate's Baco Noir is a local favourite. I also stumble upon L'Acadie Vineyards where Bruce Ewert and his wife Pauline craft sparkling wines using the traditional method. I watch in fascination as Bruce puts the bubbles into the bottle and then pops the cork. Another wine going places.

After eight days, 1500km (mostly in the right direction), I return to Halifax with a full belly and a wonderful appreciation for the natural beauty of Nova Scotia and its people.

+ Getting there

The easiest way to get Nova Scotia is to fly with Air Canada. They have flights daily out of Australia with links directly to Halifax. For more details visit [aircanada.com](http://aircanada.com)