

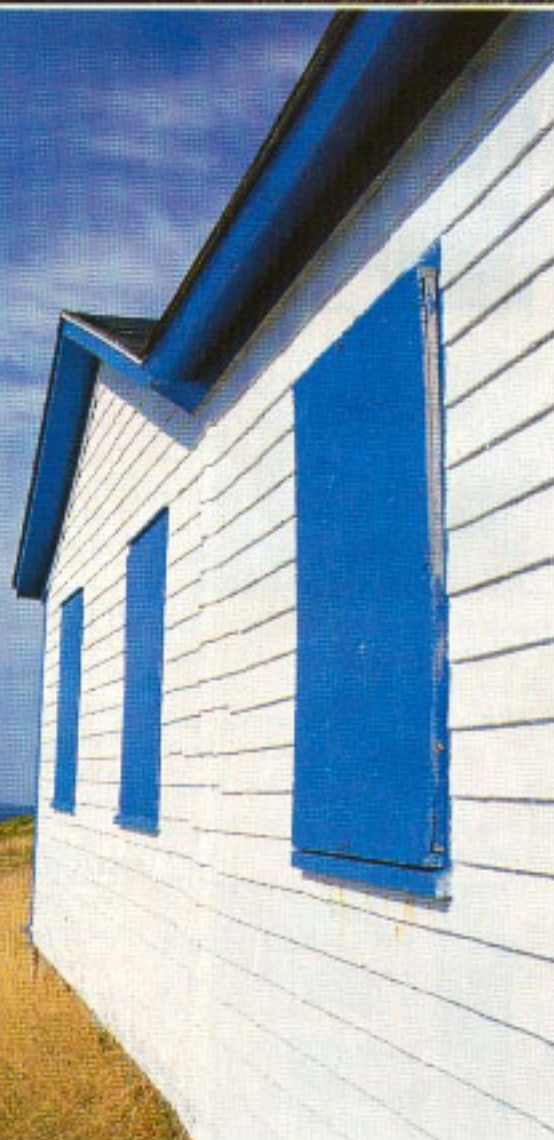
Nova Scotia

An affordable paradise for nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts that offers plenty of comforts and superb dining. **By Charles Gaines**

Canada's ocean playground, my adopted home of Nova Scotia, is bounded by four bodies of water—the Atlantic Ocean, the Northumberland Strait, the Bay of Fundy (home of the world's highest tides), and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, which serves up the warmest ocean water north of the Carolinas. At no point along the province's 350-mile length are you ever more than 30 minutes from the sea.

In addition to its 4,625 miles of stunning coastline, Nova Scotia has more than 5,400 lakes, unfouled rivers and forests, and fewer than a million big-hearted, exuberant inhabitants. It is an azure-blue, sea-wrapped place of comeliness and verve where you can wear yourself thin during the day with some of the world's best outdoor sports, then restore yourself at night in fine hotels and country inns with first-rate local cuisine that spotlights seafood.

With the present exchange rate between United States and Canadian dollars (\$1 U.S. to \$1.48 Canadian at press time), Nova Scotia is also one of the best travel bargains on the market. Here are insider suggestions on how to enjoy it.



PHOTOGRAPHY: DOUGLAS SPRUELL



No visit to Nova Scotia is complete without a lobster feast "in the rough."

Best Lobster Supper ▶

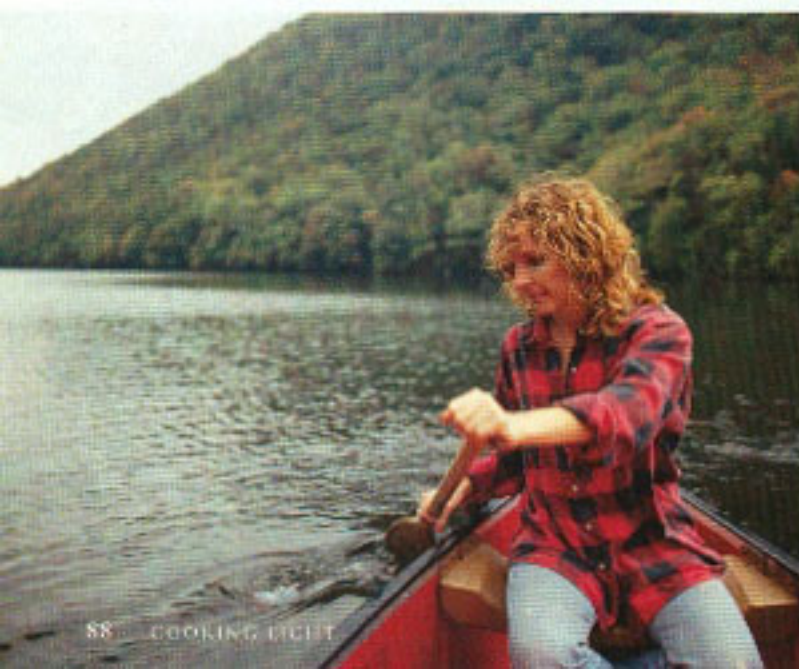
Nova Scotia is world-famous for its lobsters, and the best place to enjoy them "in the rough" is **Hall's Harbour Lobster Pound** (902-679-5299) near Kentville, in the lush Annapolis Valley. Located picturesquely on an inner harbor of the Bay of Fundy, the place serves chicken, hamburgers, chowder, and other seafood. But the specialty is lobster, which you "meet and greet before you eat" by choosing one from the pound, then walking it over to the cook, who boils it in seawater from the Bay. It is then served precracked with drawn butter, a roll, and salad for market price of the day at a table either outside or in. Can't wait? Clearwater will ship live Nova Scotia lobsters within 36 hours to anywhere in North America. Order online at www.clearwater.ca.



◀ Best Canoeing

Less than an hour south of Annapolis Royal, Canada's only dually recognized national park and national historic site, **Kejimikujik National Park** (902-682-2771, www.parkscanada.gc.ca), is 147 square miles of pristine lakes, rivers, and forests, many of them old-growth hemlock and hardwoods. In addition to more than 50 miles of hiking trails and one of the largest collections of petroglyphs in eastern North America, the park offers superb wilderness canoe camping over a vast, interconnected system of lakes, rivers, and portages. There is good trout fishing in many of the lakes, and Kejimikujik has healthy populations of deer, black bears, porcupines, and foxes. Forty-seven backcountry camping sites for up to six people, as well as a few group sites for up to 10 people, are available by reservation. Canoes may be rented by the hour, day, or week (\$15 per day, 902-685-5253).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 87





Enjoy chowder and good times at the Red Shoe Pub.

◀ **Best Pub**

Rob Willson's Red Shoe Pub (902-945-2626) is located in the little town of Mabou, deep in the fiddle-crazed, Scottish heart of Cape Breton. Named for the great Nova Scotian fiddler and songwriter Dan R. MacDonald, creator of the *Red Shoe Reel*, this utterly charming place serves up good wings, burgers, steak sandwiches, and chowder, along with wine and a wide variety of local and imported beers. But what people really come here for are the live concerts (blues, jazz, and especially Celtic) held three to four nights a week during the

summer and the fabulous Fiddler Matinee every Sunday from 4:00 to 8:00 P.M. I dare you to attend one without tapping the leather off your shoes.

Best Way to Spend a Day in Halifax ▶

Founded in 1749 and built around the world's second largest natural harbor, Halifax is one of Canada's loveliest cities. Its breezy spirit, tree-lined streets, sidewalk cafés, and restored waterfront make it ideal to explore on foot.

Start your day with a cup of cappuccino at the Daily Grind Newsstand and Café (5686 Spring Garden Road, 902-429-6397) while perusing one of the 6,000 magazines for sale there. Then, shop along Spring Garden Road, the city's chicest street, to the stately, 17-acre Public Gardens for a stroll among Victorian flower beds and duck ponds. A short hike takes you to the Citadel, a meticulously restored 19th-century British fortress, for the noon canon firing and a spectacular view of the city and harbor. Lunch on homemade fish cakes or a curried chicken and chutney sandwich at the folk-art Soho Kitchen (1582 Granville St., 902-423-3049), then walk the harbor boardwalk past the Historic Properties, 19th-century privateers' warehouses restored as specialty boutiques, to the marvelous Maritime Museum of the Atlantic (1675 Lower Water St., 902-424-7490). The museum has exhibits from more than 100 shipwrecks.

Have a drink with *oué* Halifax at the outdoor tables of the Economy Shoe Shop Café and Bar (1663 Argyle St., 902-423-7463). Then, end the evening with a spin of the roulette at the Casino Nova Scotia Hotel (1919 Upper Water St., 902-425-7777).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 98



Best of Cape Breton ▶

Connected to mainland Nova Scotia at its northeast end by a causeway, the 4,039-square-mile island of Cape Breton is an utterly lovely combination of river valleys and farmland, an inland sea, thickly forested mountains, glorious beaches, and plunging shoreline cliffs. Inhabited by a lively and friendly people of mostly Scottish and French descent, Cape Breton is one of the premier, if least known, active and natural beauty destinations on the continent. Around the rocky splendors of its northern shore loops the 186-mile-long Cabot Trail, often called the most scenic coastal highway in North America. Drive the length of it. Also, hike as many as you can of the 27 trails in the Cape Breton Highland National Park. Sea kayak with Mike Crimp of Cape Breton Sea Coast Adventures (Ingonish, 877-929-2800). If you are a golfer, don't miss a few rounds on the stunning oceanside Highlands Links (902-285-2600), the top-rated course in Canada, also in Ingonish. Finally, take time to visit Cape Breton Clay (902-235-2467) in the Margaree Valley, where Bell Fraser makes some of the most beautiful pottery in Canada.



Cape Breton's charms include rugged scenery and Canada's best golf.

Best Whale-Watching

There are many good whale- and seabird-viewing operations throughout Nova Scotia, including the excellent Brier Island Whale and Seabird cruises near the western township of Digby. But my favorite is Captain Danny Robinson's *Sail to the Whales* (Bay St. Lawrence; 877-488-2319) at the northeastern end of the province on the spectacular Gulf of St. Lawrence. Robinson uses a 52-foot schooner to get you noiselessly up close and personal with swooping gannets, humpback whales, and Atlantic white-sided dolphins, adding the thrill of schooner sailing to your wildlife viewing.



Where to Stay

In Halifax, stay in one of 25 antique-decorated rooms or four suites at the historic and lovingly restored **Halliburton House Inn** (\$88 per night; 5184 Morris St.; 902-420-0658, www.halliburton.ns.ca). It has a garden courtyard and a superb relaxed fine-dining restaurant, **Stories**, which specializes in local seafood and game.

There are many fine country resort hotels, inns, and bed and breakfasts scattered across Nova Scotia. Among the best are the three Signature Resorts (\$73–\$125 per night; 877-375-6343, www.signatureresorts.com) that belong to the province: the baronial **Keltic Lodge**, which sits atop a cliff overlooking the Atlantic on Cape Breton's Cabot Trail and is home to the Highland Links golf course; the lovely and tranquil **Liscombe Lodge** on southeastern Marine Drive; and **The Pines Resort** on the Bay of Fundy, a Norman-style chateau with full resort activities and five-star cuisine.

My two favorite inns in the province are both in Cape Breton: Dave MacDonald's wonderful **Normaway Inn** (\$68–\$135 per night; 800-565-8463, www.normaway.com) in the Margaret River Valley, with its beautiful grounds, snug cottages, and fine food; and the **Markland Coastal Resort** (\$68–\$135 per night; Dingwall; 800-872-6084, www.marklandresort.com) at the dramatic northern tip of Cape Breton, with its private beach, great sailing and sea-kayaking, and (again) excellent dining. ☐

Chris Games is a contributing editor to Men's Journal and Field and Stream. He is also the author of 21 books, including A Family Place (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994), an account of building a home in Nova Scotia, where he and his wife, Patricia, live six months each year.



Cape Breton's Normaway Inn offers a warm welcome.

