



Atlantic Canada

Atlantic Canada's four provinces are home to a vast array of wildlife and strikingly varied landscapes. Explore tidal bays, rocky tablelands and iceberg channels across a region often underestimated for its wildlife watching, writes Laura Millar

The four provinces of Atlantic Canada, spanning the eastern edge of the country, comprise Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island (PEI). Together, they form one of North America's most geologically diverse regions – a place of spectacular wildlife watching and ancient landscapes.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, rock formations over a billion years old decorate the sprawling Gros Morne National Park. These include the rich, rust-red terrain of the Tablelands, a rare example of tectonic forces pushing the Earth's mantle to the surface. Over in Nova Scotia, the dramatic Bay of Fundy coastline showcases the world's highest tides, which have sculpted rugged cliffs, towering sea stacks and fossil beds over millennia. And in New Brunswick, river valleys and forested highlands sit on top of folded sedimentary layers, while PEI's soft red sandstone creates gently curving cliffs and dunes, eroded over time by wind and sea.

All this creates an incredibly diverse mix of wildlife habitats, from rugged headlands to boreal forests, salt marshes, sandy beaches and peat bogs. But perhaps the most precious habitat

of all is the Atlantic, particularly around Newfoundland and the eastern coast of Nova Scotia, where the cold waters of the Labrador Current meet the warmer Gulf Stream, creating nutrient-rich conditions for the humpback, minke and fin whales that migrate along the coast.

On land, boreal forests are home to moose, black bears, lynx and white-tailed deer, with caribou particularly abundant in Newfoundland. The coastal wetlands are vital stopovers for migratory shorebirds, such as American oystercatchers and red knots, travelling the Atlantic Flyway in search of warmer climes.

To maximise your chances of sighting some wildlife, head to key spots such as the Bay of Fundy, Gros Morne National Park and Iceberg Alley – a stretch of water along the coast of Labrador and eastern Newfoundland. But you'll want to hire a car to get around.

The provinces' blissfully empty roads and epic scenery not only make driving here a pleasure, but it's also the easiest and most effective way to get from place to place. You can also arrange boat trips, whalewatching tours and guided tours on foot or by kayak. The parks and coast are full of passionate park rangers, guides and custodians of the land.



Heading east (this page; top to bottom) A huge congregation of humpback whales returns to the waters of Newfoundland and Labrador to feed in summer; around 95% of all North American Atlantic puffins breed along the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador; (opposite page; clockwise from top left) bald eagles and grey seals can be seen in the Bay of Fundy; moose were originally introduced to Newfoundland as a source of food; Peggy Cove Lighthouse overlooks the dolphin-rich waters off the coast



Bay of Fundy

Stretching across both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the Bay of Fundy is home to some otherworldly scenery, particularly the quirky ‘flowerpot’ rock formations at Hopewell Rocks Provincial Park. The bay also experiences the world’s highest tidal range, with sea levels rising and falling up to 16m daily as roughly 160 billion tonnes of water flow in and out every six hours. This unique and highly diverse ecosystem supports more than 2,000 species, including Atlantic white-sided dolphins, harbour porpoises and grey seals, and it is a critical summer feeding ground for multiple whale species. Seabirds, including Atlantic puffins and razorbills, can be seen crowding the cliffs, and the occasional bald eagle is often sighted patrolling overhead. The adjoining Fundy National Park is home to moose, deer and beavers.

Best for: Whales. Over a dozen species are found here, thanks to the nutrient-rich waters. Look for humpback, minke, fin and rare North Atlantic right whales during the peak season (Jun–Sep).



Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador is another location known for its whale sightings, with one of the world’s largest populations of humpbacks returning to its waters every year (May–Sep). It’s also one of the few places where whales, seabirds and towering icebergs coincide – usually in May – as vast chunks of ice many thousands of years old drift south along Iceberg Alley. More than 350 species of bird have been recorded in the province, too, from Atlantic puffins to storm petrels. Inland, Gros Morne National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site spanning some 1,805 sq km, protects a mix of native and introduced wildlife, including caribou and ptarmigans.

Best for: Moose. Introduced to Newfoundland (as a source of meat) more than a century ago, these huge ruminants are abundant in Gros Morne, with densities five to twenty times higher than elsewhere in Canada. You might also spot woodland caribou, black bears and Arctic hares.



Nova Scotia

With around 13,300km of coastline, this province is a prime spot for sighting marine wildlife. You can see everything from whales – humpback, fin and pilot – to grey and harbour seals. On rare occasions, boats have even been known to sight the odd orca. Seabirds, including puffins and herons, flock close to the rocky shoreline, while inland areas such as the Cape Breton Highlands offer the chance to spot moose, black bears and deer. Nova Scotia also boasts more than 160 historic lighthouses, but none is as photographed as the one in the fishing village of Peggy’s Cove. The ecologically sensitive Peggy’s Cove Preservation Area was transformed by glaciers over 12,000 years ago, and today you’ll find unique vegetation and wildlife there, including the endangered leatherback Atlantic sea turtle.

Best for: Dolphins. The waters around Peggy’s Cove are home to white-sided, common and white-beaked dolphins. ▶



WHERE ELSE?

Sable Island, Nova Scotia

Around 420 wild horses roam Sable Island, a crescent-shaped sandbar 290km south-east of Nova Scotia's capital, Halifax, that is known as the 'Graveyard of the Atlantic' – thanks to the hundreds of ships that have been wrecked off its shores. The horses here are descended from those originally introduced in the 18th century. Small and hardy, they survive on tough marram grass and other low-growing, salt-tolerant plants, and drink from the island's freshwater ponds.

Prince Edward Island

Red foxes are the island's official mascot, often spotted at dusk along quiet rural roads or in the dunes of Prince Edward Island National



Park. Harbour seals bask on sandbars off the North Shore coast, while great blue herons stalk tidal flats in the Basin Head area between spring and late autumn. Inland, look for snowshoe hares and beavers along the Confederation Trail.

Kouchibouguac National Park, New Brunswick

A diverse landscape of barrier islands, salt marshes, bogs and sand dunes makes this 238 sq km national park a hotspot for biodiversity. It provides habitats for around 50 species currently protected under the Canadian Species at Risk Act, including the endangered piping plover, as well as the second-largest common tern colony in North America. You'll also find harbour and grey seals among its 25km of dunes.



THE RISE OF INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION

First Nations peoples, including the Mi'kmaq, Innu, Inuit, Beothuk, Maliseet and Abenaki, have called Atlantic Canada home for thousands of years, developing unique ways of living from and with the land. Today, the region is being recognised for its efforts to build a tourism industry centred on Indigenous experiences. Visitors can now learn not just about the cultures and traditional practices of First Nations communities firsthand, but also why local authorities are increasingly turning to them to help care for the land and the seas.

The last few decades have seen widespread recognition of the vital role of Indigenous peoples in ecosystem stewardship. The Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqey and Innu communities now co-manage several land and marine ecosystems, from salmon rivers to coastal habitats, while First Nations communities have also been heavily involved in the expansion of the region's Marine Protected Areas, helping to preserve the critically endangered North Atlantic right whales.

There are many ways for visitors to connect with these communities and learn about both their heritage and their contributions to local conservation. Whether attending a powwow, joining an Indigenous-led tour or participating in a craft workshop or smudging ceremony, you will leave with a deeper understanding of their cultures and learn about why caring for the land is so important to them.

In New Brunswick, you can stroll old-growth forest with Wabanaki medicine keepers to learn how plants and trees are used in medicine, food and ceremonies, or head to Newfoundland to book a place on Gros Morne National Park's first-ever Indigenous tour. Alternatively, you can visit Kejimikujik National Park, Nova Scotia, to experience its guided Mi'kmaw cultural programmes, paddling ancestral waterways, visiting petroglyphs and learning from cultural interpreters. **W**

Wild isles (this page; top to bottom) Red foxes are native to Prince Edward Island, and sightings are extremely common; the horses of Sable Island have woolly coats and stocky bodies and live in small family groups known as bands

Need to know

**When to go**

Whales are best spotted in the Bay of Fundy between June and September. Breeding season for **seabirds** is May to early August, when the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve is home to North America's largest **puffin colony** and the cliffs at Cape St Mary's Ecological Reserve fill with **gannets**.

Moose are more visible in rutting season (Sep–Oct). You can spot them in Gros Morne National Park and the Cape Breton Highlands in Nova Scotia.

**Getting there & around**

Fly direct from London Heathrow to Halifax Stanfield International in Nova Scotia with **Air Canada** (aircanada.com) or **Lufthansa** (lufthansa.com). UK flights to Atlantic hubs such as Fredericton, St John's and Moncton go via Toronto or Montreal.

Car hire is the best way to get around. **Canada by Design** offers an 18-day self-drive trip covering all four provinces that includes flights from the UK, hotels and car hire (canadabydesign.com).

**Carbon offset**

A return flight between **London** and **Halifax** produces around 434kg of CO2 per passenger. *Wanderlust* encourages you to **offset your travel footprint** through a reputable provider. To find one, visit wanderlustmagazine.com/inspiration/sustainable-travel.

**Further Information**

For more details, visit Atlantic Canada Tourism (atlanticcanadaholiday.co.uk), tourismpei.com, newfoundlandlabrador.com, novascotia.com and tourismnewbrunswick.ca.