



INSIDER

Jessica Huras ventures to often overlooked New Brunswick to explore its rustic culinary scene.

YOU'D BE FORGIVEN for thinking that New Brunswick lacks the star power of the other Maritime provinces, sometimes caustically described as a "drive-through province" that travellers are forced to cross on their way to more beloved parts of the East Coast. But the forgotten middle child of Atlantic Canada has charms equal to its siblings, including postcard-worthy seaside landscapes, traditional French-Canadian culture (francophones make up over 30 per cent of its population) and a rich food scene focused on the simple flavours of its farmlands and coastlines.

Start in St. Andrews to take in some of New Brunswick's prettiest maritime scenery. Scores of buildings

dating back to the 1880s and earlier hint at the town's long history as a summer retreat for well-heeled tourists. Take a stroll down Water Street, a cute main drag lined with gift shops, cafés and artists' studios – don't miss Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre, a multipurpose creative space with a beautiful harbourview exhibition gallery.

Next, make your way east to the province's port city, Saint John. Its historic core has a romantic industrial feel, with the windswept Bay of Fundy peeking out between rows of redbrick 19th-century buildings. It's a fitting setting for a winsome city packed with inviting pubs, cool restaurants, quaint shops and affable locals. Let lesser-informed vacationers drive on through if they want because you're going to be the savvy traveller who knows to pull the car over and stay for a while. **f**



ROSSMOUNT INN

If you're exploring the food scene in New Brunswick, you'll quickly learn that all roads lead to Rossmount Inn. Chef-owner Chris Aerni's daily-changing menu exemplifies the province's stripped-down approach to cuisine and continually influences other chefs in the region. The focuses here are as-fresh-as-possible, local seafood, wild ingredients like chanterelles and fiddleheads, as well as organic vegetables and herbs from the kitchen's garden. Set in a historic manor that also houses an inn with 18 guest rooms, the restaurant's old-fashioned aesthetic might not be to everyone's tastes but the artful dishes definitely will be. You'll need to make reservations well in advance for this one.

GETTING THERE

Saint John, New Brunswick is just over a two-hour flight from Toronto. Air Canada flies directly. Flights with Porter Airlines from Billy Bishop Airport have a quick, 20-minute stop-over in Ottawa. Return flights with both airlines start at around \$270. St. Andrews can be reached in a one-hour drive from Saint John. **aircanada.ca; flyporter.com**

PORT CITY ROYAL

With bearded servers, vintage-style decor and carefully-crafted cocktails, Port City Royal exudes a particular hipster swagger that will probably feel familiar to Torontonians but also stays true to Saint John's gritty coolness. A menu of local fare like duck confit served with apple-cider-braised red cabbage and oysters on the half shell with house-made condiments is complemented by a stylish cocktail programme that incorporates foraged ingredients. The intimate space lends itself to full dinners as well as casual pre- or post-dinner drinks (get there before 6 p.m. to take advantage of excellent happy hour specials). They've also recently started doubling as a cafe called Marjorie's during the day, serving coffee and tasty pastries.



UNCORKED SEAFOOD CITY TOUR

Uncorked's Seafood City Tour is a sure-fire way to ensure you get the necessary fix during your East Coast visit, combining tastings with a walking tour of the atmospheric Uptown. The tour starts at Saint John City Market, the oldest continuously-operating market in the country, where groups sample ultra-fresh lobster rolls from long-running vendor North Market Seafood. Other highlights include sturgeon dip at McGill's and hearty bowls of seafood chowder at Big Tide Brewing (which also has one of the few female brewasters in the area).



HOPSCOTCH WHISKY BAR

The only whisky bar in Saint John features a massive menu spanning more than a dozen pages, with offerings wide-ranging enough to appeal to casual whisky drinkers and aficionados alike. Tasting notes (often divided by nose, palate and finish) are outlined for everything from blended scotches priced at less than \$6 a glass to the Macallan M, which goes for \$450. The cozy space feels as warm and relaxed as...well....the experience of sipping whisky, decked out with exposed brick and warm woods and anchored by a towering glass shelving unit stocked with more than 70 bottles.