



# Don't stop for winter!

A smorgasbord of off-season fun in Atlantic Canada

BY SANDRA PHINNEY

The International Pond Hockey Tournament in Plaster Rock.

It's 15 degrees below zero and I'm milling through a sea of smiling faces on the edge of Roulston Lake in Plaster Rock, New Brunswick. In front of us is a sight to behold—24 outdoor rinks. Twenty are occupied by 40 teams skating their hearts out, competing in the International Pond Hockey Tournament. Members of 80 other teams are nursing sore muscles, eating poutine, or kibitzing with others while hundreds of spectators join in the fun. Close by, toddlers to grandparents are skating on rinks earmarked for guests. Flags from across Canada, the US, Europe and further afield flap in the wind.

This is day three, leading up to the finals; the camaraderie on and off the ice is palpable. Later, there will be campfires and tailgate parties. Everyone seems to be ignoring forecasts that a major blizzard is on its way. I ask someone next to me if they are worried. "Worried? Heck, it's only a blizzard."

How did this international tournament begin? Twenty years ago, the community of Plaster Rock (pop. 1,135) needed to replace the dilapidated skating rink. Knowing that raffles and bake sales wouldn't cut it, the volunteer committee aimed for something big. Why not set up a pond-hockey tournament, and invite the world?



NEW BRUNSWICK TOURISM

Five years later, *voilà!* Tobique-Plex opened its doors, home to a huge rink, fitness centre, walking track and municipal offices. Bobby Hull, ex-NHL great who was on hand one year, referred to this International Pond Hockey Tournament as the 8th Wonder of the World. The event now draws upwards of 8,000 people.

Turning to other winter draws in New Brunswick, consider dog sledding in Allardville or North Tetagouche, hiking into the ice caves at Midland, or trekking into the spectacular 100-ft. iced up Fall Brook Falls.

Next year, Winter Frolic—a family winter festival—makes its debut in Fredericton during the ever-popular FROSTival. This new festival will offer snow slides, a snow maze, sleigh rides, and even a lit-up Ferris wheel and merry-go-round.

Love to skate? For a unique experience, try the Mactaquac Forest Skate on a 940-metre trail through the forest of Mactaquac Provincial Park. It also features night lights for evening skating.

Every province in Atlantic Canada has special winter events; consider yourself spoiled for choice. Here are a few more winter pleasures to add to your bucket list.

## Prince Edward Island

Tonging for oysters anyone? This is likely the only place on the planet where you can fetch oysters through the ice on a private oyster lease and learn how to clean and shuck 'em. Of course, eating them straight up is all part of the fun. Bonus: Captain Perry Gotell (Tranquility Cove Adventures) also provides a pot of steaming PEI mussels next to a bonfire he makes on the ice to keep you warm.

After you've had your fill of seafood, you can work it off at the Mark Arendz Provincial Park at Brookvale, a Nordic/X-Country site featuring 24.5 km of groomed recreational trails, 7.5 km of competitive and biathlon trails, a complete rental shop, lodge, waxing huts, biathlon range, and toboggan hill. More energy to burn? Check out the new winter activity hub at Cavendish, where

you'll find fat biking, snowshoeing, and some interesting walking options.

For a slower pace, take in Charlottetown's Ice City Festival where you'll find everything from an International Ice Carving Championship to horse and wagon rides, sugar-shack weekends, snowshoeing after dark at Victoria Park—and more.

**Newfoundland and Labrador**

If you are a snowmobile enthusiast, consider testing your skill in a 3,100-km, gruelling race titled Cain's Quest. If you'd rather go as an arm-chair traveller, hunker down in Labrador City where you'll be privy to lots of activities and can track the race via satellite.

In Western Newfoundland, Marble Mountain is arguably the best place to ski in Atlantic Canada. It boasts a 1,700-foot vertical drop, 39 runs ranging from novice to expert, five lifts, and an average annual snowfall of 16 ft. Bonus: close by, you'll find Marble Zip Tours with nine zip lines! Imagine zooming along 285 feet in the sky through a winter wonderland.

Central Newfoundland goes all out in the winter with offerings such as Mid Winter Biver in Exploits Valley and SnowFari in Gander. Several adventure companies arrange special activities in the winter—everything from a "Survival 101 course" to ice fishing and traditional boil-ups.

And you can't go wrong visiting the capital, St. John's. Aside from enjoying the dining options and night life, consider signing up for a sleigh ride at Lester's Farm Chalet, or head out for a good old-fashioned slide at Bowring, Victoria, and Pippy Parks.

**Nova Scotia**

What does one do when one can't compete with the mounds of snow found in other

Atlantic Provinces? Create a whopping event that doesn't depend on the white stuff and call it the Nova Scotia Lobster Crawl. During the month of February, communities between Barrington and Peggy's Cove go all out celebrating *Homarus americanus* and the importance of the lobster industry. Along with eating lobster dishes galore, you'll meet Lucy the Lobster and discover plenty of lobster lore—art, music, stories and traditions shaped by the lobster industry.

Foodies love Halifax's "Dine Around," also during the month of February. For 28 days, numerous cafes, bistros and restaurants offer special menu items ranging from \$10-\$50. Across the harbour, Dartmouth hosts an Ice Festival, which gets a lot of attention the first week of March.

If you really want to shake things up, head to Mavillette Beach in early February for the Second Annual Polar Surf & Swim. The brave souls who took part this past winter raised \$4,600 for the Clare Food Bank. You, too, could be part of the next endeavour. And as long as there's wind, surfing's great at Mavillette—any time of year.



Marble Mountain, western Newfoundland.

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR TOURISM/ DRU KENNEDY



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**Hot Lobster Sandwich, Clara Harris style**

**Ingredients**

- 2 cups lobster
- ¼ cup butter
- 2 tsp vinegar
- 2 cups 18% cream

**Method**

Sauté lobster in butter for one minute, stir in vinegar for one minute, stir in cream until it thickens. Season with salt and pepper. Serve on toast. 🍷



Tonging for oysters in PEI.

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