




Atlantic Tours
Worry Free World Vacations

BRINGING THE WORLD TO ATLANTIC CANADA



Based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Atlantic Tours & Travel has been offering worry-free travel experiences since 1968 to tourists from as far away as Australia and all points in between...

Written by Margaret Patricia Eaton

Atlantic Tours & Travel President Richard Arnold's 'travel bug' is highly contagious. If you listen to him speak for more than two minutes about Atlantic Canada which he calls "one of the world's most beautiful areas," you'll likely catch it. And before you know it, you'll be joining one of his company's guaranteed-departure guided coach tours to see for yourself if his enthusiasm about the breathtaking scenery and

warm hospitality of Canada's four Atlantic provinces is warranted.

Prefer to drive your own vehicle, but don't know where to go or what to see? Atlantic Tours & Travel has that covered too, through customized, self-guided tours that draw on the company's considerable knowledge and expertise. Want to spend a day golfing or sailing? That can be built into your schedule. ►►



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► **Doing just what you want**

Want a tour tailor-made for a specific group interest? Customized, guided coach tours are also offered because Atlantic Tours & Travel's number one concern is satisfying customers. As Arnold says, "Without customers, there's no business." Doing what people want and then going one step further to create the ultimate travel experience is number one on the company's agenda.

Prefer to travel in the shoulder seasons? No problem, regularly scheduled tours run from early May through the end of October, with shopping trips to Bangor and New York in November.

Organizing a national convention at the Halifax Convention Centre? Arnold can customize day or half-day tours to fit with the convention's schedule, meet attendees at the airport and offer pre- or post-conference travel experiences.

And what about a culinary tour? That's something Arnold says Atlantic Tours & Travel was doing long before it became "a thing," and is built into every tour in a region renowned for seafood—lobster, scallops, and crab, along with pure maple syrup, wild blueberries, and fiddlehead greens.

Arnold, who was born in Nova Scotia's fertile Annapolis Valley, which has a recorded history going back to the 1600s and the first French Acadian settlement, joined Atlantic Tours & Travel in the 1980s as a tour guide, something he loves doing to this day.

Thirteen years ago, however, he had the opportunity to become co-owner with business partner, Gary Biddle, and president of the company, which came with certain responsibilities, mainly more time in the office growing the company, and less on the road.

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But the lure of introducing tourists from western Canada and the U.S., from Europe and as far away as Australia to Atlantic Canada can't be denied. From time to time, he substitutes his business card that indicates he's the company president for one that simply indicates 'Director of Fun,' and hits the road wearing a kilt sewn from the distinctive tartan of one of the four Atlantic Provinces: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland & Labrador.

"I don't even tell the people on the tour that I'm the president," he says, "because I want to be judged as being a great tour director. I want people to relax and have fun and be worry-free."

With an extensive travel history and background, he says that the most beautiful place he has traveled to is right here in Atlantic Canada, with each province offering truly spectacular locations, whether it be the breathtaking scenic views of the Cabot Trail or the quaint charm of Peggy's Cove in Nova Scotia; New Brunswick's Hopewell Cape Rocks on the Bay of Fundy, carved by glaciers millions of years ago and where visitors can walk on the ocean floor at low tide; Prince Edward Island's patchwork quilt of green fields and red soil; or Newfoundland & Labrador's majestic icebergs, plentiful moose and the jelly-bean-coloured painted wooden houses of St. John's. ►





► What do 'folks from away' do?

The short answer is 'plenty' but Arnold will tell it his way. When he took over as president in 2011, Atlantic Tours & Travel's standard tour offering was a seven-day journey around the three Maritime Provinces—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island—but that was too little time to see everything.

He explains how he instead created a 13-day tour around the three Maritime Provinces but broke it up into two segments, which allowed people to do half or all, with each segment beginning and ending in Halifax.

Then he added an additional 13-day tour to Newfoundland & Labrador, which can be added to the 13-day tour when it arrives in Sydney, Cape Breton to make a grand 23-day tour when you remove the overlapping days or accessed as a stand-alone tour originating in Halifax. Even that tour can be broken into two segments with options to join or leave mid-way.

The first half of the 13-day tour is entitled "Circle the Bay of Fundy". From Halifax, the tour heads north to the UNESCO World Heritage Site at the Joggins Fossil Cliffs before crossing the Nova Scotia-New Brunswick border to visit Shediac and enjoy a lobster experience with Shediac Bay Cruises.

It continues to the Hopewell Cape's Flower Pot Rocks and Fundy National Park; and on to Saint John for two nights, with a day trip to St. Andrew's-by-the-Sea. Then the tour crosses the Bay of Fundy, arriving in Digby, home of succulent Digby scallops, and on through the fruit orchards and wineries of the Annapolis Valley with a stop at the Grand Pré National Historic Site and UNESCO World Heritage Site which commemorates the deportation of the Acadians in 1755 before it returns to Halifax.





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The second half

The second half of the tour, “The Enchanting Islands” departing from Halifax, includes visits to Peggy’s Cove and Lunenburg, another UNESCO World Heritage site on Nova Scotia’s South Shore, before it heads to New Brunswick and crosses the 12.9 km (8 miles) Confederation Bridge linking the mainland to Prince Edward Island.

Highlights of the two-night stay include the PEI National Park and Cavendish, home of Anne of Green Gables, and a New Glasgow Lobster Supper. There’s also a theatrical performance at the Charlottetown Festival.

Then it’s back to Nova Scotia via the Wood Island ferry and on to Cape Breton with two nights in Baddeck, the summer home of Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone. There’s a full day touring the scenic Cabot Trail and another reliving history at the fully restored Fortress of Louisbourg.

When the tour reaches Sydney, the group has the option of returning to Halifax or joining the 12-day Newfoundland & Labrador tour, which begins aboard an overnight ferry, and travelling the scenic great Northern Peninsula before arriving in Port Aux Basques. Highlights include another ferry ride to the big land of Labrador, the mainland part of the province, and a visit to an early Basque whaling station and UNESCO World Heritage site at Red Bay.

Back on the island of Newfoundland, there are visits to the UNESCO Heritage Site of L’Anse aux Meadows where Vikings established a settlement more than 1,000 years ago, and optional boat tours to see whales and thousands of seabirds, including puffins—and icebergs, depending on the season overnighing in the community of St. Anthony. Later you will visit Gros Morne National Park and UNESCO World Heritage site where you will get an opportunity to pick up and hold in your hand a piece of the earth’s mantle and enjoy a two-night stay in Cow Head with its stunning sunsets. ►►

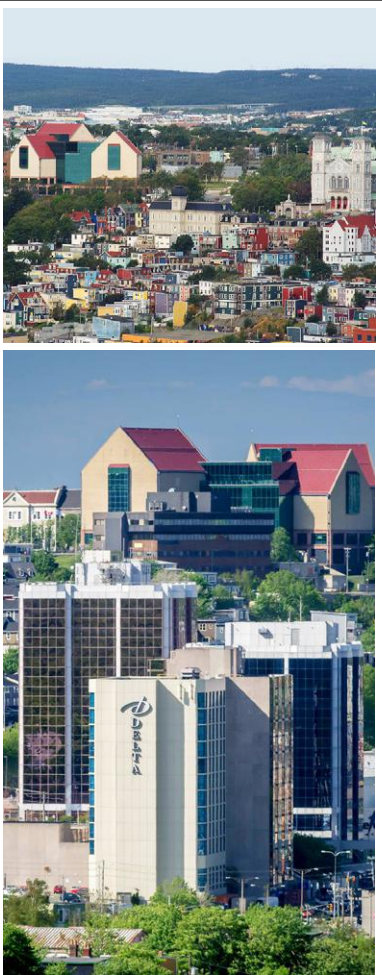

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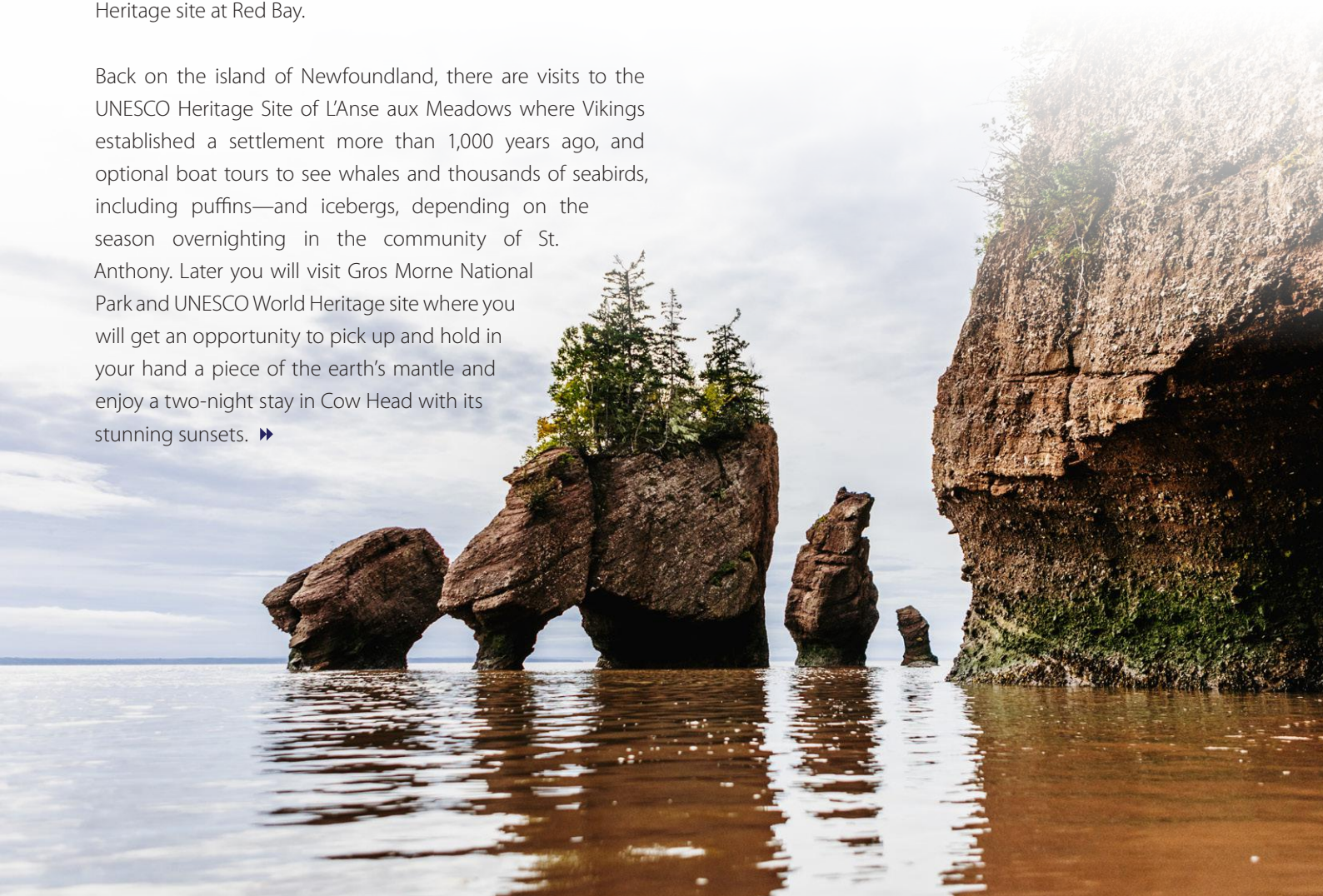
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► There's also a stop at the Gander Aviation Museum to learn how the small town of Gander hosted the world on September 11, 2001, when all North American airlines, in- and out-bound, were grounded. The adventure concludes with a visit of Newfoundland & Labrador's capital St. John's and the Cape Spear Lighthouse, the most easterly point of Canada, from where Marconi transmitted the first trans-Atlantic message.

Before flying home from St. John's, tour groups have the option of visiting the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, just off the coast. The eight-island archipelago has been a self-governing French territory since 1814 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris between France and Great Britain. According to Arnold, "This tour provides a chance to visit France without leaving North America. What we've done is take structured touring and customized it, so people can do it in bits and pieces or do the whole thing, depending on interests and time."

He goes on to note that these tours, with guaranteed departures, are by no means Atlantic Tours & Travel's only offerings and that, if there's enough interest, he can arrange tours to other locations, including the Magdalen Islands, which are part of Quebec, but accessible by ferry from Souris, PEI; or to the Gaspé Peninsula, via New Brunswick.

There are also some specialized tours, such as the tour to Cape Breton's music festival, Celtic Colours, every October.

Additionally, Arnold works behind the scenes to provide tour programs and arrangements to U.S. tour companies who bring their clients in their own coaches from various departure points in the U.S., and who may cross into Canada at any of several border crossings—on a ferry between Bar Harbour, ME and Yarmouth, NS or at one of the land border crossings.

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Taking Canadians to the world

While Atlantic Canada accounts for 85 percent of Atlantic Tours & Travel business, making it a considerable contribution to the tourist industry as a whole (hotels, restaurants, attractions) and so to the economy of the four provinces, the company also offers international tours, giving Canadians the same worry-free experience international tourists enjoy here.

Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, there were no such tours in 2020 or 2021, but Arnold more than made up for that in 2022. "I hosted six trips last year, starting in Bordeaux on a river cruise in April, Bermuda in May, and in August with a Rhine River cruise with AMA Waterways. Then I did the Greek Isles and Italy with Norwegian cruise lines. In October there was the lower Danube out of Romania, and I ended the year with Christmas in the Caribbean with Norwegian Cruise Lines."

In April this year, he'll be hosting 16 days in Ireland and Scotland on a traditional motor coach tour, flying into Dublin and out of London, and later in the year will be hosting the 10-day Tennessee Musical Treasures tour, flying out of Halifax, with stops in Nashville, Memphis, and the Smokey Mountains.

Free of worry

Any final words? "I think what I'd like to emphasize is 'worry-free travel,'" says Arnold. "We look after all the details, whether for people arriving in Atlantic Canada or Atlantic Canadians traveling abroad. I'm thinking of the trip to France last spring. When we left Halifax we knew we had missed our connection in Toronto and so needed a hotel there, and when we arrived the next day in Bordeaux, the ship had left without us and we had to play catch-up," he shares.

"But that was something I had the experience and background to deal with. And when we caught up with the ship and got onboard, the group, which had become friends, looked so relieved and thanked me for making this happen." And that's what a worry-free travel experience is all about: every detail taken care of, and every unforeseen "crisis" efficiently resolved. ■

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