

The Hot Spot: Halifax

Where to eat, drink, play and stay in the seaside city right now

By Sarah Treleaven

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Halifax has an exhilarating spring in its step. Amid an abundance of cranes erecting condos for a growing population, a raft of new businesses offer high-design goods and playful culinary adaptations inspired by Nova Scotian ingredients that extend beyond the typical—though still much appreciated—boiled lobster. Beer gardens and open-air cocktail bars line the waterfront. Mobile gelato bikes roam the city. Delicious destinations are serving up snacks like cinnamon-sugar doughnuts (Trickdough Baking Co.) and chili con carne tacos on Oaxacan corn tortillas (Beverley Taco Service). Here, a selection of exceptional places that reflects Halifax old and new, and the plenitude of fun to be found there.

The Narrows Public House

Best East Coast Cuisine

2720 Gottingen Street

After an ambitious eight-year renovation, this restored heritage home finally opened its doors as a pub last March. Promising true Nova Scotian hospitality, the traditional Maritime menu serves dishes found in old cookbooks—try the Dutch mess (braised haddock with chopped egg and fried potatoes) or the boiled dinner (corned beef, turnip, carrot, cabbage, fried leeks). All the produce and meat are local, with a standout smoked salmon pâté sourced from Halifax fishmonger Afishionado.

The ambience is as classic as the menu. During the winter, two wood stoves provide heat and a warm, smoky aroma. The antique lighting was salvaged from garage sales, and much of the decor belonged to the owners' grandparents. On weekends, there's live East Coast music. This spot is so beloved by locals that it went without any signage for months and still had lineups out the door. Don't leave without admiring the stunning stained-glass windows, which date back to 1896.

Luke's Small Goods

Best Bakery

2393 Agricola Street | lukessmallgoods.com

This recent addition to busy Agricola Street in Halifax's charming North End is a bakery, pantry and then some. In addition to wonderfully flavourful sourdough breads—the sesame rye is a perennial favourite—Luke's specialties include the sticky kouign-amann (a sweet and salty French pastry), seasonal scones, and the tomato and ricotta Danish. They also do breakfast and lunch sandwiches, including the delectable jambon-beurre, a hunk of baguette filled with butter, ham and sliced cornichons. Luke's in-house brand of jarred delicacies includes chicken

liver mousse and tomato relish, sold alongside an eclectic mix of imported small goods like chili crisps, tinned fish and truffle-laced potato chips.

Café Lunette

Best Cocktails

1741 Lower Water Street | cafelunette.com

Steps from Halifax's boardwalk, this classic Parisian-inspired spot serves lattes and cannelés by day, steak frites and boeuf bourguignon by night. Inside the elegantly ornate space are soft pink banquettes, low lighting and a long marble bar. The generous outdoor patio has small, round tables and baskets overflowing with flowers. Drop by après midi (3 to 4:30 p.m.) for a bowl of French onion soup—topped with melted gruyère and rye croutons that maintain their crunch—or a spritz à lunette (St-Germain, Annapolis cider, thyme, rosemary, lemon, soda, olive). It's a great place for people-watching and taking in the ocean view as the sun begins to dip.

Africville Museum

Best History Lesson

5795 Africville Road | africvillemuseum.org

As Halifax evolves, this small museum, which opened in 2012, preserves an important part of local history that continues to reverberate. For more than 100 years, Africville was home to the African Nova Scotian population, until the community was forcibly relocated in the 1960s. Houses were torn down and families were dispersed to industrialize the harbour. The museum, housed in a replica of an Africville church, chronicles the history of the African Nova Scotian community—like trailblazing civil rights activist Viola Desmond—and serves as a repository of their stories. The adjacent Africville Park, with a view across the harbour, has trails, a playground and picnic tables.

Slowly Slowly

Best Boutique

5685 Cunard Street | shopslowlyslowly.ca

Hannah Sears' gem of a shop has elevated the area's aesthetic possibilities with a colourful display of clothing, ceramics and accessories, and an emphasis on high-quality, sustainable goods. The store itself is a breezy delight, with high ceilings, beams of natural light and custom woodwork. Expect playfully patterned jumpsuits, knitwear in jewel tones, and chic, flowing dresses from brands such as Paloma Wool, A Bronze Age, Mijeong Park and Halifax's Maggie Jayne.

Brewery Park

Best stay on a budget

2853 Agricola Street | brewerypark.ca

All 16 suites at this fuss-free North End spot have kitchenettes and modern touches like blond wood, concrete walls and arched windows. There's also a cute little café on the first floor, Sidekick, to satisfy breakfast sandwich cravings. For guests who don't feel like venturing out, the room service menu includes White Claw and kombucha.

Muir Halifax

Best splurge on a stay

1709 Lower Water Street | muirhotel.com

This elegant new property is part of the lively Queen's Marque waterfront development. Rooms are panelled in white oak and outfitted with tartan accents. There's an Atlantic-inspired restaurant, an in-house art gallery showcasing regional work and, for blissed out afternoons, the Windward Wellness spa, which features halotherapy salt and eucalyptus steam rooms. A 36-foot yacht can be chartered for sunset sails.

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