

Nova Scotia Adventures: Forest Bathing, UFOs and More

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Our intrepid contributor Jennifer Bain explores southern Nova Scotia, a welcome respite after two years of pandemic living.

To face upstream or downstream? That's the first choice to make while forest bathing in southern Nova Scotia, and it seems deliciously existential.



Forest bathing by the Tusket River at Trout Point Lodge

Standing on a footbridge in the thick summer forest surrounding Trout Point Lodge, I consider how people who swim upstream make things happen, while those who swim downstream go with the flow. And so, I stand still facing upstream, taking note of movements and colors as the Tusket River spills around a tiny island.

“Now close your eyes,” staff naturalist Naomi Nixon says softly. Touch the bridge. Smell the air. Listen to the birds and forest sounds.

Forest bathing at Trout Point Lodge



Outdoor riverside hot tub at Trout Point Lodge

Eventually, the guide — a recreation and leisure studies student on a co-op placement — says it's time to reopen my eyes and notice what's different. The world is bright and vivid. My notoriously restless energy is almost calm.

This is forest bathing, the Japanese practice of forest therapy known as *shinrin-yoku* (shinrin means forest and yoku means bath). American journalist/author Florence Williams famously detailed the practice in *Outside* in 2012, writing, “take two hours of pine forest and call me in the morning.” Although a decade has passed, people are still confused by forest bathing.

I've taken thoughtful guided walks through the woods to embrace the healing properties of trees and plants before in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario, and so I am well versed in the four “invitations” that will come after the bridge choice and before a closing tea.



Closing tea at Trout Point Lodge from guide Naomi Nixon

I cross the bridge onto an island filled with balsam fir, white pine, white spruce and red maple. When given 15 minutes to “feel anything” that catches my interest, I study fallen pine cones and decaying needles on the forest floor.

Perched on a rock by the river, I spend another 15 minutes absorbing noises near and far. Finally, I microfocus on gnarly lung lichen before sipping a camping mug full of balsam fir and wintergreen tea.

“As you drink it, just absorb your times here and allow it to go with you throughout your day,” urges Nixon. “Wintergreen helps with body aches and headaches as well as relieving stress. Balsam fir gives the immune system strength and relieves cold and flu symptoms.”

| Who isn't stressed from more than two years of pandemic living?



The Forest-Whisper Cocktail at Trout Point Lodge

First stop: Halifax

I flew into [Halifax](#), Nova Scotia's walkable capital with a population of 460,000. Based at the [Westin Nova Scotian Hotel](#), I explored the [Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21](#) and the iconic [Halifax Citadel National Historic Site](#).

I also caught a ferry to [Georges Island National Historic Site](#). And I made a pilgrimage to [King of Donair](#) for the city's official food: spiced, pressed beef cooked on a vertical rotisserie and shaved into a pita along with a signature sweet sauce, tomatoes and onions.

Luxury in the Nova Scotia wilderness



Trout Point Lodge view from Tusket River

It's a joy to begin exploring the world again at this luxury wilderness escape three hours southwest of Halifax in the Yarmouth and Acadian Shores region of Nova Scotia. Nestled in the UNESCO Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve, Trout Point Lodge is on 120 secluded acres of the Acadian forest. It's located on a peninsula near the vast Tobeatic Wilderness area and a few hours from Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site.

The seaside gets most of the tourism attention in this Maritime province. But more visitors are joining locals and exploring the inland forests and lakes.

At Trout Point Lodge, a modest daily event calendar is written on a chalkboard. I join Nixon, the staff naturalist, to:

- hike and kayak,
- slip into an outdoor hot tub,
- eat gorgeous meals,
- drink clever cocktails (the Forest Whisper combines gin, vermouth, pine water and lime),
- relax in the sun, and
- unwind in my quiet room, which is blessedly free of a television or telephone.

TROUT POINT LODGE ACTIVITY SCHEDULE							
	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
10:00-11:00	FOREST BATHING	FOREST BATHING	FOREST BATHING	FOREST BATHING	FOREST BATHING	FOREST BATHING	KAYAKING
11:30-12:30	NATURE WALK	WILD TEA FORAGING	KAYAKING	NATURE WALK	KAYAKING	NATURE WALK	FOREST BATHING
1:00-2:00	KAYAKING	NATURE WALK	NATURE WALK	KAYAKING	NATURE WALK	KAYAKING	NATURE WALK
2:30-3:30	WILD TEA FORAGING	KAYAKING	WILD TEA FORAGING	FOREST BATHING	WILD TEA FORAGING	FOREST BATHING	WILD TEA FORAGING
4:00-5:00	STAND UP PADDLE BOARDING	FOREST BATHING	STAND UP PADDLE BOARDING	WILD TEA FORAGING	MEDITATION	WILD TEA FORAGING	STAND UP PADDLE BOARDING
5:00	Live Music with Gerard		Live Music with Gerard	Live Music with Richard + Sue	Live Music with Gerard	Live Music with Richard + Sue	
NIGHTLY STARGAZING @ 10:30pm <small>*weather permitting*</small>							

Our activity schedule

"It's luxury, culinary, and wilderness kind of put together," allows Patrick Wallace. He and his wife Pamela bought the lodge from its first owners in 2018.



My room at Trout Point Lodge

The lodge, which opened in 2000, promotes itself as “wildly luxurious” and “wildly delicious.” It has recently parted ways with the Small Luxury Hotels of the World. Still, it touts itself as the world’s first certified Starlight Hotel, a distinction awarded in 2014 by the non-profit [Starlight Foundation](#) headquartered at the Institute of Astrophysics in the Canary Islands. Alas, rain and clouds scuttle my stargazing.

Exploring Southern Nova Scotia



Cape Forchu Lighthouse has an apple core shape

Yarmouth, with a modest population of 7,000, is a regional center that punches above its weight. And it matches my speed as I ease back into travel.

The Rodd Grand Yarmouth is on the town's main drag, steps from Sip Café's addictive oatcakes (a biscuit popular in this province). At nearby Honey Bee's Deli & Ice Cream Parlour, owners Sonia Park Lawrence and Troy Lawrence make stellar Korean fried chicken. They also serve the classic hot stone pot rice bowl dolsot bibimbap alongside sushi.



Chocolate-dipped oatcake from Sipe Cafe

What to see in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia

The interactive [W. Laurence Sweeney Fisheries Museum](#) details the area's fishing history with a room full of reproduced buildings and even a coastal freighter. With David Sollows of the Yarmouth Shantymen band, I take guided, behind-the-scenes visits to a lobster plant and herring/sardine cannery. The self-guided Sea Captains' Homes and Mercantile Heritage Walk is a jackpot for architecture buffs.



Inside the idiosyncratic W. Laurence Sweeney Fisheries Museum

Extra-friendly locals at the weekly Yarmouth Farmers' Community Market offer a ride to the Cape Forchu Lighthouse. This distinctive “apple core” lighthouse is surrounded by walking trails. The Keeper’s Kitchen café whips up lobster rolls, seafood chowder and one of the better smoked salmon sandwiches I’ve tasted.

But, as wholesome as my time in Nova Scotia was, the oddities stand out.

UFOs in Shag Harbour



Laurie Wickens of the Shag Harbour Incident Society at the seasonal interpretive centre

Townsfolk, police and even a commercial airline pilot in the fishing village of Shag Harbour famously witnessed an Oct. 4, 1967, UFO visit. An object with flashing lights — originally feared to be a small plane — hovered over the ocean, crashed, and glowed in the water before disappearing, leaving behind only a yellow foam slick.

The volunteer Shag Harbour UFO Incident Society runs a seasonal interpretive center that hasn't changed since my last visit in 2018.

"They had divers come, and according to the government, nothing was ever found, to make a long story short," says society president Laurie Wickens. A witness and retired fisherman, Wickens has recounted the story so many times you can hear the weariness in his voice.

"The light just went out. Whether they turned the light off and went down, or whether they turned the light and went back to the sky, I don't know."

Wickens admits it's probably the last year for the museum, which is getting harder and harder to staff. But he flags the Shag Harbour UFO XPO slated for Oct. 1 and 2, 2022, at the Rodd Grand Yarmouth (coincidence?). The annual conference brings together UFO experts and eyewitnesses to share their observations, latest theories and research about unidentified flying objects.

I'm no expert but have an above-average fascination with the unexplained. So, at an oceanside rest stop, I mark this visit with photos at the "Crash Site of the 1967 Shag Harbour UFO" sign. And, of course, I snuggle with the lobster alien sculpture painted by artist Tara Goreham.

Called *Secrets of the Sea*, the human-sized sculpture starts with a bright red lobster tail but then boasts a menacing black head and claws. Inside that head and claws, though, is the outline of a skinny neon green alien. On its belly, a UFO casts light toward a buoy bobbing in a swirling ocean below.



Lobster alien sculpture in Shag Harbour

What's appealing to the over-50 luxury traveler?

Trout Point Lodge, a luxury wilderness resort, offers ecotourism vacations and fine dining in southwestern Nova Scotia.

Take note

Guests at Trout Point Lodge must be at least 14 years of age. Most guests stay three nights in one of the 12 suites or the two-bedroom lakeside cottage. It's open from May to early January.

Before COVID, the lodge drew mainly Canadians with some Americans and Europeans who fly in through Halifax. Now it's attracting New Englanders who take the high-speed [CAT Ferry](#) from Bar Harbor, Maine to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, and then drive the final 45 minutes. The voyage is 3.5 hours and runs from May 19 to Oct. 10 this year, with daily trips in July and August.

Nova Scotia's climate is ideal for ticks, including the black-legged ticks that can carry a bacteria that causes Lyme disease. Reduce your risk by wearing long pants, sleeves and light-colored clothing, and wearing enclosed shoes with your pants tucked into socks. Apply insect repellants containing DEET or Icaridin to exposed skin and clothes. Check for ticks after being outside and have a bath or shower within two hours of coming inside.

COVID-19 Update Info: What You Need to Know

Take note by calling ahead to find out about temporary closures, travel advisories and other restrictions put in place because of the pandemic.

People who have received at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine at least 14 days before entering Canada qualify as fully vaccinated travelers, can enter for tourism, and are not subject to pre-entry testing.

Use of [ArriveCAN](#) is currently mandatory and all travelers must use either the website or mobile app to provide proof of vaccination and travel plans within 72 hours before arrival and prepare for arrival testing if randomly selected.

All photo credits: Jennifer Bain

Disclosure: The author attended a Travel Media Association of Canada conference in Yarmouth, and was partially hosted by Tourism Nova Scotia and the Yarmouth and Acadian Shores Tourism Association.

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Adventures in Nova Scotia
