AUTISM OR HIGH IQ?

Tap the item that does not match

HIDDEN CANADA: 2026 EDITION

CANADA IS CALLING

COMPILED BY CATHERINE DAWSON MARCH

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79 COMMENTS SHARE SAVE FOR LATER GIVE THIS ARTICLE

The *ninth edition* of The Globe's guide to sating Canadian wanderlust showcases 10 new destinations

Discover our home-grown travel tips for 2026: ferry to historical and timeless islands in Lake Winnipeg, Man., and B.C.'s Queen Charlotte Strait; find a valley north of Moose Jaw that Trans-Canada roadtrippers pass by; go aurora hunting in Yellowknife or uncover urban delights within the wilds of Whitehorse; enjoy artsy, small-town charm in Warkworth, Ont., scenic snowmobiling in Western New Brunswick and peace while walking the prettiest section of PEI's Island Walk; stand up to the gusty winds of Advocate Harbour, N.S. and settle in to cozy eco-cabins in Mauricie, Que.

ALERT BAY, BRITISH COLUMBIA

BY CASANDRA KARPIAK
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The Seine Boat Inn in Alert Bay, a small and vibrant village located on Cormorant Island, off the northeastern edge of Vancouver Island.
JOSH MCGAREL/SUPPLIED

Every time I come to Alert Bay, a village on Cormorant Island, most mornings begin the same way: I pull on a jacket and step outside into the mist, setting out on foot across an island, just off the northern tip of Vancouver Island, that's small enough to cross in about an hour. Alert Bay - population 1,300 - is the kind of place where strangers say "hello" and even stop to chat.

I watch the ship traffic passing offshore, hinting at a marine corridor travelled for thousands of years, long before the Inside Passage became a cruise route. The 'Namgis people have lived here for millennia, while European settlement began in the mid-19th century. The village takes its name from HMS Alert, a Royal Navy survey ship that charted the waters in the 1860s, while Cormorant Island is known as Yalis in the language of the 'Namgis people.

Cormorant Island, also known as 'Yalis, is home of the 'Namgis First Nation.
VANCOUVER ISLAND NORTH TOURISM

Along the waterfront, totem poles carved by 'Namgis First Nation line my morning walk, their expressions softened by decades of wind and rain. At the north end, the 'Namgis Traditional Big House comes into view, a centre of cultural life and ceremony. Just beyond it rises the world's tallest totem pole.

Long before I began visiting, Alert Bay existed for me through my father's stories. He would often talk about "the Bay," where he was born and raised, and where he published the local paper. After moving to Toronto in his mid-20s, he travelled home every June. When I moved to Vancouver in my early 20s, I finally followed those stories back to their source.

The 'Namgis Burial Ground is a centuries-old resting place for the Kwakwaka'wakw.
NATHAN MARTIN/DESTINATION BC

On my first visit, the island felt both familiar and disarming. I traced the shoreline the way my father once had, near the old dock, the water lapping at my boots, past coloured houses, the owners of which he could still name decades later.

The island climbs quickly from the shoreline, opening views across the Broughton Strait toward Vancouver Island to the west and east to Malcolm Island and the mainland, the coastal range often capped in snow. I enjoy the exhibits at the U'mista Cultural Centre, where light slips through narrow wooden slats and falls across masks and regalia once seized during Canada's potlatch ban, then repatriated to the island from Ottawa in the late 1970s. Today, the centre draws visitors seeking a deeper understanding of Indigenous history on the northwest coast.

The U'mista Cultural Centre is a "living place of learning" rather than a traditional museum.
TOM POWELL/VANCOUVER ISLAND NORTH TOURISM

The centre houses the Potlatch Collection, a world-renowned assembly of regalia that were seized by the federal government in 1921.
JORDAN DYCK/U'MISTA CULTURAL CENTRE

In the centre of the village, the Alert Bay Public Library & Museum's centenarian librarian, Joyce Wilby, still comes to work more than 35 years after official retirement, revered as both steward and storyteller. Community members describe her as the library's walking, talking archive. Among the collections are photographs taken by my grandfather, Ronald E. Shuker, who settled in Alert Bay in the early 1930s. "He started a newspaper that documented life in the village through his excellent photography and stories published from 1939 to 1960," local historian Catherine Marie Gilbert says.

A 45-minute ferry from Port McNeill, B.C., brings visitors to Alert Bay.
NATHAN MARTIN/DESTINATION BC

The Alert Bay Ecological Park, formerly known as Gator Gardens, has a wooden boardwalk that takes visitors on a scenic tour of the landscape.
VANCOUVER ISLAND NORTH TOURISM

The Alert Bay Visitor's Centre is a great resource for those looking to explore and learn more about the island's history.
GEOFF HEITH/VANCOUVER ISLAND NORTH TOURISM

Visitors who step off the ferry are drawn here by the chance to see humpback whales, orcas and porpoises moving through the strait. Others head for forest trails thick with ferns and moss or toward the ecological park that borders the village. Many plan to stay a night or two before continuing on, only to find themselves lingering longer than planned.

On my last evening, I take one final walk along the water, the air cooling, the dock quiet underfoot. The strait settles into a surface as smooth glass, the ferry's wake fading into the dark, as I think about how this small island holds the heart of the coast.

GEOFF HEITH/VANCOUVER ISLAND NORTH TOURISM

If you go

HOW TO GET THERE

Fly into Port Hardy, then drive 33 kilometres south to Port McNeill for the 45-minute ferry crossing to Alert Bay.

WHERE TO STAY

Alert Bay Lodge sits across the road from the ocean, its Great Room overlooks the Johnstone Strait. Rooms from $185 per night in high season, with a two-night minimum.

WHAT TO BRING

Layers and a waterproof jacket for shifting weather. Comfortable walking shoes, binoculars and extra room in your bag for books or local art.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: OPENSTREETMAP

HECLA ISLAND, MANITOBA

BY SHANNON VANRAES
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Fewer than 100 people live on Hecla Island year-round, though the population grows with the influx of campers and cottagers in warmer months.
KEITH LEVIT/TRAVEL MANITOBA

My mouth is full of wild raspberries when I hear my husband's satirical lament.

"Oh no, it's getting crowded now."

If I squint hard, I can make out what looks like a father and son carrying fishing poles a few hundred metres away. They are the only other humans we've seen since starting our two-kilometre hike to the Gull Harbour Lighthouse, or rather, a pair of historic lighthouses, perched on a slim spit of land protruding from Hecla Island into Lake Winnipeg.

Accessible only by ferry until 1971, little has changed since the island was designated a provincial park in 1969. Largely undeveloped and uninhabited, the island feels as timeless as it does remote, leaving one to wonder what decade it is, if not what century, as fishers unload their skiffs at the local marina, woodsmoke hanging in the air.

The wooden Gull Harbour Lighthouse is one of three lighthouses on the island.
GEORGE FISCHER

Fewer than 100 people live on Hecla Island year-round, mostly descendants of the original Icelandic settlers. However, campers and seasonal cottagers swell the population in the warmer months and winter sees hardier folk return for ice fishing, snowshoeing and power tobogganing.

Trails criss-cross the island, allowing visitors to explore wetlands and chance upon wildlife, including moose, beaver, mink, black bears, coyotes and even wolves. After our lighthouse pilgrimage, we decide to to bike toward Hecla Village.

It's 13 kilometres of smooth road from Gull Harbour Campground to the edge of the historic townsite, where we dismount to wander past sparsely situated buildings and bungalows that could have been plucked from the East Coast.

Hecla Island's historic Lutheran church has been restored by local volunteers.
TRAVEL MANITOBA

I pause to tug on the door of a wood-clad Lutheran church, built in 1927 if the plaque by the door is to be believed, and am surprised to find it unlocked. We step into the sanctuary's time capsule interior, complete with a shiplap ceiling, pine floors and Gothic Revival windows.

Local volunteers have restored several buildings, including a two-room schoolhouse now serving as an interpretive centre and the fish station's former icehouse, popular with anglers who come in pursuit of greenback walleye. The village's general store, first opened in 1932, is still a community hub.

Stop at the general store for vinarterta, an Icelandic cake with layers of sponge and jam.
TRAVEL MANITOBA

A short way up the coast from Gull Harbour Beach is the local marina and the Gull Harbour restaurant, try the pickerel tacos.
TRAVEL MANITOBA

My husband walks past shelves of used books, condiments, liquor and camping fuel, straight to a cooler filled with freshly smoked goldeye, a Prairie delicacy. I beeline for baked goods, including vinarterta, an Icelandic celebration cake with delicate layers of sponge and jam.

Halfway into our return journey to the campground, we veer off the road and carry our bikes down to a pebble-strewn waterfront known as the East Quarry, where limestone blocks were once hewn before being shipped to Winnipeg.

Picnic tables are available, but we opt for a great slab of rock tilting lakeward and lay out our meal where the Paleozoic meets the Precambrian. Not only is Hecla Island part of Manitoba's only marine park, it also lies at the intersection of three distinct landscapes: prairie, boreal plains and boreal shield. Green frogs keep us company as we lie back, sated, and listen to the waves.

On the northern tip of the island is Lakeview Hecla Golf Course, an 18-hole course.
TRAVEL MANITOBA

By the time we begin the last leg of our ride, the sun is low in the sky. We roll past the island's 18-hole golf course, then walk the length of Gull Harbour Beach (one of three sandy beaches), heading toward our final stop of the day.

Behind our carefully chosen campsite, chunks of limestone cleave away from an escarpment, creating a series of jagged steps down to a west-facing shoreline. The first footfall is a leap of faith, but the rest come easily. When the sun hits the horizon, I'm sitting with my feet in the water. For a split-second, I regret leaving my phone and camera topside, but the feeling passes – some moments cannot be captured, only experienced.

In 1926, a steel-framed lighthouse was built next to the much smaller historic wooden Gull Harbour Lighthouse. To this day the pair stand side-by-side, looking out over Lake Winnipeg.
GEORGE FISCHER PHOTOGRAPHY

If you go

HOW TO GET THERE

From Winnipeg, head north on Highway 8 for 160 kilometres. When you cross the Captain Grimsi Grimolfson Causeway, you've arrived on Hecla Island.

WHERE TO STAY

Basic sites at Gull Harbour Campground start at $11.55 a night, plus park entry and reservation fee, and can be reserved online. The park also has 20 cabins accommodating two, four or six guests, while the privately owned Lighthouse Inn offers motel-style rooms facing Lake Winnipeg from $155 a night.

WHAT TO BRING

Comfortable walking shoes, bug repellent and a solid knowledge of bear safety.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: OPENSTREETMAP

HISTORIC HIGHLANDS SIGNATURE TRAIL, NEW BRUNSWICK

BY JENNIFER BAIN
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

New Brunswick has more than 8,000 kilometres of groomed snowmobiling trails, many of which turn into ATV and hiking trails when the snow melts.
TOURISM NEW BRUNSWICK

Of all the places I've snowmobiled in Canada, western New Brunswick is the most memorable.

The province has more than 8,000 kilometres of groomed snowmobiling trails, which let people ride through the wilderness, along the coast, over abandoned rail beds, across some of its 56 covered bridges and into communities.

I've never snowmobiled through town before or seen such impressive permanent sign structures with panels and maps directing riders to gas, food and lodging to ensure they never feel lost. Volunteers proudly maintain the area with a GPS-equipped grooming fleet that feeds trail conditions into an interactive live map and app.

"Winter can feel so long when you don't have something to do – people really get seasonal depression," says Ashlie Brown, who works for the Western New Brunswick Service Commission. Getting outside in nature, especially on a snowmobile, "helps with that a lot."

At almost 300 kilometres long, the Historic Highlands snowmobile trail network is one of three of the province's main runs.
KYLE GOOD/SNOWMOBILE NEW BRUNSWICK

I visited in February and rode with Brown in a four-sled convoy to explore the Historic Highlands Signature Trail. Opened in December, 2023, it winds 293 kilometres along the Saint John River and through the forests, river valleys and hilly terrain connecting the towns of Woodstock, Hartland, Florenceville-Bristol, Juniper, Perth-Andover and Nackawic. When the snow melts, visitors and locals drive side-by-sides and ATVs down the trail — or hike it.

Today we'll experience just 18 km before resting and looping back on a high-performance Polaris Patriot 9R (it's even got passenger hand warmers), which is a far cry from the utilitarian Ski-Doos I grew up riding with my dad when we ice fished in Ontario.

The Historic Highlands Signature Trail takes visitors along the St. John River through the forests and river valleys of Western New Brunswick.
JENNIFER BAIN

Spanning the St. John River, the Hartland Covered Bridge is considered to be the longest bridge of its kind in the world.
JENNIFER BAIN

New Brunswick excels at trail signs for snowmobilers, who have hundreds of kilometres of trails to navigate.
JENNIFER BAIN

Fresh cut fries at Unit XIII in Hartland, one of the towns accessible by the Historic Highlands Signature Trail.
JENNIFER BAIN

We rip through fields and carefully weave through snow-dusted forests. My guides respect stop signs in town before zipping over roads but I do love the way local drivers stop and wait for us to cross at intersections. It's only -7 C but feels like -17 C. We pass the Tim Hortons and make a pit stop at one of the volunteer-run warming huts. Inside the tidy but spartan room, I find padded church pews near a simple wood stove. There's a decent outhouse nearby, and that's pure luxury in the bush.

The Historic Highlands trail is one of three of the province's main runs: The 450-km Christmas Mountains trail carves through the Appalachian range, while the 225-km Fundy Highlands trail offers great views of the Bay of Fundy coastline.

Fresh air, ever changing scenery and camaraderie – I was reminded why I loved snowmobiling again in western New Brunswick. "We have the greatest trails in Canada," boasts outdoorsman Kyle Good, who manages the trails for the province. "It's about more smiles per mile."

TOURISM NEW BRUNSWICK

If you go

HOW TO GET THERE

You can enter the Historic Highlands trail anywhere, but we picked Florenceville-Bristol, about 90 minutes northwest of Fredericton. Snowmobile season runs December through April.

WHERE TO STAY

In Florenceville-Bristol, the Shamrock Suites is a charming 19th-century home with comfortable rooms and free breakfast, from $159 a night. Five minutes away - at the Shogomoc Railway Site - guests can also sleep in restored railway cars (sleeps six), from $269 a night.

WHAT TO BRING

Pack warm outdoor clothes and boots. Snowmobile rentals (with a permit, helmet and guide) are found at Grey Rock Adventure Tours in Edmundston or Rusty Lantern Cabins in Juniper. For more information on trails and permits, visit snowmobilenb.com

THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: OPENSTREETMAP

The writer was a guest of Tourism New Brunswick, which did not review or approve this article. Stories are based on merit; The Globe does not guarantee coverage.

YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

BY CATHERINE DAWSON MARCH
THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Northern Lights on display in Yellowknife, NWT, where visitors learn that the Dene word for aurora - yak'enàges – means the sky is stirring.
DESTINATION CANADA

Joe Buffalo Child won't stop for just any flicker in the night sky. In Yellowknife, the Northern Lights are most active between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. and we zoom past pullouts close to the Northwest Territories capital that are full of tour buses. He scoffs. Too many people and there's barely a ripple of mist-like light overhead. Buffalo Child's apps and astrology sources point to night-sky activity farther down the Ingraham Trail highway. But I'm not yet an "aurora snob" – what every Yellowknifer becomes. I'm still easily impressed and press my face against the window.

Buffalo Child, a member of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, talks as he drives. Did we know muskrats are a favourite Dene greasy snack food ("It's our KFC!")? Or that the Dene word for aurora - yak'enàges – means the sky is stirring? I've arrived in September but Yellowknife, he says, is the best spot to see the lights anytime because it's directly under the auroral oval and not troubled by coastal fogs.

The Northern Lights illuminate the sky over the Cozy Cabin. In Yellowknife, the Northern Lights are most active between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m.
DESTINATION CANADA

Buffalo Child interrupts his stories, shouting, "Son of a beachball!" And veers off the road. We quickly tumble out of the van and a curtain of lights unfurls in the sky. Even Buffalo Child admits he's gobsmacked, and he's been running North Star Adventures for 19 years. We raise phones and cameras to capture the greens and yellows and pinks. The longer the lens stays open, the more impressive the photo, so tripods are shared. It's magical and feels like a light show just for our small group of eight.

"They don't call me the aurora hunter for nothing," Buffalo Child boasts.

Every night of my four-night visit was spent scanning the skies with Indigenous tour operators; bleary-eyed days were for exploring the carefree frontier vibe in this capital city of 21,000. In the Old Town, I ran my hands over a stromatolite that's 1.8-million years old and sits without fanfare outside someone's home. It's just around the corner from – I kid you not – Ragged Ass Road.

A night of aurora watching with B-Dene Adventures begins with Bobby Drygeese inviting visitors inside family camp to share stories.
JAY R. MCDONALD/DESTINATION CANADA

Traditional drumming is performed by members of Yellowknives Dene First Nation at B-Dene Adventures.
DESTINATION CANADA

Guests of North Star Adventures enjoy the view along the Ingraham Trail highway in Yellowknife.
JOE BUFFALO CHILD/NORTH STAR ADVENTURES

Later, I entered an old Quonset hut to discover Weaver & Devore Trading: groceries on the first floor and top-quality winter gear at fair prices on the next. But the sleeper hit was a hangar tour of Buffalo Airways, where old bush planes hang from the ceiling and planes of all shapes are in the midst of repair. A D-Day DC3 is parked out back and we clamber in for photos. Not just for gear-heads, this stop was a fascinating look at how the North does business.

But it was the night sky viewing that drew me here. On another night, I enjoyed a laid-back evening at the family camp of Bobby Drygeese of B-Dene Adventures. Drygeese, a member of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, drove us outside town where we joined a larger group of about 30 visitors. Flashlights were handed out and we walked through the bush for 15 minutes to reach his waterfront property. Here, we wandered about waiting for the light show to start, from camp chairs by the lake to a tipi (where his family grilled jackfish to share) to the main building to hear Dene legends and stories. Sitting by Great Slave Lake to watch the aurora reflection was memorable, as were Drygeese's stories about life on the land.

Visitors can tour the Buffalo Airways hangar, where old bush planes are on display. The aircraft were crucial to the development of the North.
CATHERINE DAWSON MARCH

Tracy Therrien cooks up a "midnight lunch" of bannock and fish chowder for visitors at the Cozy Cabin.
DESTINATION CANADA

My last night was spent at Bucket List Tour's Cozy Cabin. Owner Tracy Therrien welcomed us to her log cabin and while she made bannock and fish chowder, we went outside with borrowed tripods (she stocks enough for her 20 guests). After an hour of ho-hum skies, the heavens stirred. Even to the naked eye the Northern Lights waved like emerald sheets on a clothesline, flapping toward Earth. I felt enveloped.

It was spectacular. Even for aurora snobs.

Even an older iPhone can capture Northern Lights brilliance when secured to a tripod.
CATHERINE DAWSON MARCH

If you go

HOW TO GET THERE

Air North has seasonal direct flights from Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa and Whitehorse, and from Vancouver over the winter; otherwise transfer through Edmonton on WestJet, Air Canada or Canadian North.

WHERE TO STAY

Many hotels in town offer a free shuttle from the airport. North Star Adventures tours start at $179; Cozy Cabin nights start at $115; B-Dene Adventures aurora tours from $120.

WHAT TO BRING

A tripod; warm layers and gloves no matter what time of year you visit.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: OPENSTREETMAP

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ADVOCATE HARBOUR, NOVA SCOTIA

BY DAKSHANA BASCARAMURTY
THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The sun sets over the Bay of Fundy off the coast of Advocate Harbour.
DAKSHANA BASCARAMURTY

As I stood on a cliff beside the Cape D'Or Lighthouse in Nova Scotia's Advocate Harbour, the surf beating violently against the rocks below sounded like cannon fire. Each crash sent a spray up nine metres, coating my face with moisture. The wind was so strong it bent the tall grasses 90 degrees and I had to grip my phone tightly to keep it from flying out of my hands.

Three tidal currents violently meet in this spot in the Minas Basin, causing the riptide known as the Dory Rips. It is the Atlantic Ocean at its most ferocious and awe-inspiring, like every Claude-Joseph Vernet painting of a sea storm.

I was in Advocate Harbour last autumn on a three-day escape with my husband to squeeze in a last bit of outdoor exploration before going into winter hibernation mode.