



It's easy to get distracted while playing the seaside layout at Fox Harb'r Resort in Nova Scotia.

Northern Star

Look no further than the Canadian Maritimes for a golf vacation that has every ingredient for a memorable trip

BY RAPHAEL TENNENBAUM

The recipe for a successful golf getaway calls for breathtaking scenery, a critical mass of courses, and other unique cultural or outdoor activities, liberally seasoned with intriguing local fare. Make sure it's a pretty good value, with a wide range of lodging options, and for good measure, why not a short flight away from the Met Area? Presto, you've got the Canadian Maritimes, a slice of primeval remoteness garnished with the homey comforts of small-town life.

Nova Scotia has the hardy character of a prosperous fishing, mining and agricultural port-of-call, and together with the more placid and recognizably upscale Prince Edward Island, both furnish traveling golfers with a bounty of placid lakes, rivers and coastal linklands. The courses on most itineraries run the gamut from the merely great to superb. And though Canada may not strike you as the most culturally exotic tourist destination, history has stitched a patchwork quilt in the Maritimes, thanks to the local descendants of English, Scottish and French settlers main-

taining and developing old-world traditions of art and cuisine.

But first, the golf. Even the most casual golf architecture enthusiast will want to make a priority of visiting **Highlands Links**, set, gem-like, among the forested hills of Cape Breton Island's easternmost tip. Conceived and built by Canadian golf giant Stanley Thompson at the bottom of the Great Depression, Highlands Links has turned out to be a durable source of joy. One afternoon in 1938, Thompson strode into the office of Canada's Prime Minister Mackenzie King and

Right: The ocean air is never far away at the Links at Crowbush Cove. Below: The Maritimes offer a wealth of activities, and the Confederation Bridge connects New Brunswick to Prince Edward Island.



convinced him to build a golf course as a make-work government project, using almost entirely manual labor.

After delays and cost overruns—including an eminent-domain grab of large parcels of land after Thompson decided the project needed expanding from nine to 18 holes—what emerged was one of the most engaging and fascinating golf courses you will play, set in oceanfront woods and alongside ponds and streams. It's a blend of golfing challenge, bewitching landscape, and invigorating contact with the elements.

There's something uncanny about the way Thompson's irrepressibly playful personality comes through without becoming tiresome or artificial—a remarkable demonstration of how charming an egoist can be, even posthu-

mously. It's a charm that goes beyond the clever titles of the holes—like the 164-yard “Canny Slap,” so named because a shot to the grassy greenside patch left of this par three will bank onto the green.

The ebb and flow of difficult and easy holes is keenly integrated with the scenery. Thompson liked to give golfers a chance to enjoy the surroundings, and in this case the bonus to saying “no” to a golf cart is a placid stroll alongside the Clyburn River from the 12th green to the 13th tee beneath a canopy of trees. On the 15th hole—a par five that is subtly complex and transparent at the same time—a good drive puts you in position to go for broke on your second shot, while the ocean frames your view of the green ahead.

Highlands Links is the centerpiece of Cape Breton Highlands National Park, offering plenty of family activities and accommodations including the main hotel, the Keltic Lodge, with a grand dining room and an



excellent bar stocked with single malts. Closer to the beach just down the road, the Glenhorm Beach Resort offers cabins just a few yards from the shore.

The defining tourism attraction of Cape Breton is the Cabot Trail, half a loop of spectacularly scenic winding roadway around the tip of the island. The journey takes you through a patchwork of French and Scottish-named villages and landmarks, testifying to deep-rooted colonial divisions. For golfing travelers who've long anticipated the opening of Cabot Links (*see sidebar, below*), the Trail

could someday be the magical link between an old classic and a new one. In the meantime, the Glenora Inn and Distillery makes a worthy goal of a half a day's magnificent odyssey. The sole distiller of single-malt in North America, the Inn backs up the distinctive flavor of its whiskey with superb cuisine, and the character of the auld sod persists in the hardy Scottish lilt of the folk music played in the background in the Inn's elegantly simple, airy dining room.

A little over an hour away is **Bell Bay Golf Club**, set on immaculate pine-strewn slopes

The scenery on the 4.3-mile Skyline trail in Cape Breton is the reward for reaching the top.

Cabot Links: Worth the Wait

If you're a golf course fan, you can't drive past the site of Cabot Links in Inverness, in the Cape Breton region of Nova Scotia, without the lonely stretch of rolling, scrubby seaside field catching your attention. The view takes in the old town of Inverness, mostly clapboard company houses left from the mining days, which ended in the late 1940s when the mine was shut for good.

Ben Cowan-Dewar hopes that the site will soon provide another valuable resource. After the Canadian government funded a cleanup in the late 1970s, the reclaimed land—designer Michael Hurdzan called it one of the fifty best remaining golf course sites in the world—caught the eye of many a course designer: Jack Nicklaus and Graham Cooke each tried putting together routing



plans, but for one reason or another the town of Inverness didn't sign up until Cowan-Dewar, a Toronto native, took on the project in 2003. Cowan-Dewar owns a golf travel company and is one of the co-founders of Golf Club Atlas, the online discussion forum for golf architecture fans, and he has taken up Cabot Links with an all-encompassing zeal, partnering

with Bandon Dunes Resort developer Mike Keiser, and as his architect, fellow Canadian Rod Whitman, designer of highly regarded courses elsewhere in the country (Wolf Creek and Blackhawk, both in central Alberta).

The gestation has been prolonged—once slated to open in 2007, it's now set to debut in 2011—which only encourages a few clucking skeptics on Cape Breton Island. Yet it would be hard to doubt Cowan-Dewar or his relentless optimism, especially with the backing of Keiser, who proved that you could build a golf resort in a remote shoreline in Oregon and the world would beat a path to its fairways. Says Cowan-Dewar, “After his last visit, Mike Keiser said, ‘I can see the golf course, and it's awesome.’ Frankly, I see it every day, and I feel the same way.” —R.T.



Timeless beauty awaits golfers at Highlands Golf Links, one of the most historic courses in Canada.

above the bay. Just outside the town of Baddeck (buh-DECK), a vacation spot long celebrated by prosperous Americans as well as Canadians and Europeans, Bell Bay is resort-style golf presented in a private club setting. It's not punishing, but at 7,037 yards from the tips, plenty long if you want it to be. The

routing is simple: holes terrace back and forth up the hill, parallel to the shore, gradually escalating in difficulty with the last five holes—if you can pound out a solid drive at the 463-yard 15th, you've still got to carry a deep gully to a fairly small green set in the woods. Number 18 is a reachable par five which, thanks to the wind behind your back, invites you to air it out off the tee. The atmosphere here is proper, but relaxed.

Down the road, **Dundee Golf Course**, part of the family-style Dundee Resort, is a friendly, old-timey nine-holer in the wooded hills. Also in the Cape Breton region is **The Lakes Golf Club**, a new design by prolific and talented Canadian architect Graham Cooke. The Lakes opened last summer and overlooks the inland expanse of the Bras d'Or Lakes, a popular summertime getaway. **Le Portage**, a charming layout in the mountains near the town of Cheticamp, is also not to be missed.

Across the Northumberland Strait from Cape Breton, more golf and scenery awaits on Prince Edward Island. Lush and temperate, PEI was a 19th-century playground for Victorian nobility, which helps account for its

storybook quality. The province's boundless scenic resources—including miles of captivating shoreline dunes—along with its aristocratic lineage and exclusive air make it a natural for golf courses, and sure enough there are more than 20.

To get to PEI from Nova Scotia, it is common to take the 35-mile ferry trip across the strait from Caribou, Nova Scotia to Wood Islands, PEI. While that is a scenic and enjoyable crossing, golfers will want to drive farther west to the Confederation Bridge, the eight-mile-long engineering marvel that is the longest bridge in Canada and one of the longest in the world. On the way to the bridge, stop to play **Fox Harb'r Golf Resort and Spa**, another Graham Cooke gem that has several holes fronting the water, and the nearby Northumberland Links. Each of these presents golfers with fresh sea breezes and a variety of challenges that typify golf in the Maritimes.

Once on Prince Edward Island, make a beeline for the **Links at Crowbush Cove**, which also has a first-class boutique hotel. Traversing parkland, meadow, and linksland,

Crowbush Cove presents an unusual variety of challenges: the front nine is mostly parkland, playing through scrubby forests dotted with inlets and ponds.

Then the course turns toward the ocean, with holes crossing the dunesland and furnishing glimpses of the ocean beyond: some of the seaside holes pose a fierce challenge in the wind, particularly number 17, a 113-yard par three with a small, elevated green ringed with disaster. This handsome, unpretentious resort is tucked away on the island's northeastern coast, and offers an array of airy, pleasant rooms.

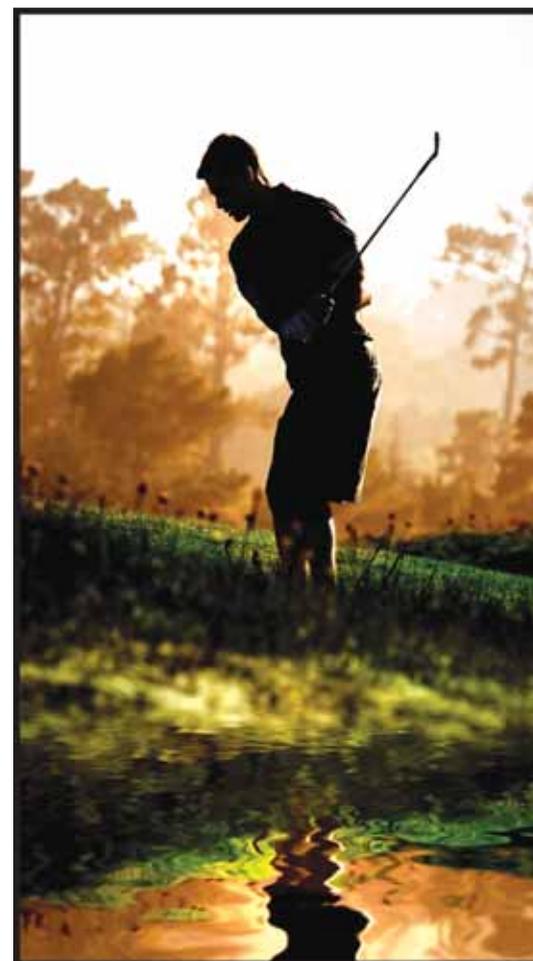
On the eastern shore of the island, the two tracks at **Brudenell River Resort** make the most of the pastoral riverside and wilderness setting in dramatically different ways. The newer of the pair, Michael Hurdzan/Dana Fry-designed Dundarave course, wends over long stretches of fields, blissfully far from civilization: your only care will be in traversing the occasional forced carries, such as on the fine par-four eighth, a severe right-to-left dogleg that practically begs you to cut it off at the knee. The green, perched steeply on a

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peninsula jutting out high above the river, makes for a tricky target even from the short grass. In all, this is one of the tougher 384-yard holes you're apt to come across.

Brudenell River's other course is older and a bit kinder—it will remind you of a proper New England tract, with wide bluegrass fairways rolling over hills alongside the Brudenell River. After your round, you can find excellent fare at the Gordon Dining Room (don't overlook PEI's signature mussels).

Anne of Green Gables, Lucy Maud Montgomery's 1908 novel set here in PEI, has sold 50 million copies since its publication in 1908 and draws hundreds of thousands of devoted readers from around the world to the author's home, including some golfers who will pay a visit to **Green Gables Golf Course**, next door to the Montgomery shrine.

Originally designed by Stanley Thompson, Green Gables recently completed a whole-

sale renovation under the direction of Thomas McBroom. The reworking gave Green Gables more length and shored up her defenses, incorporating Thompson's large, intricately-creased surfaces within McBroom's trademark round, scooped-out bunkers—the blend gives the golf course something of a split personality. Green Gables gets harder as you go along, reaching a peak at the terrific 453-yard, par-four 13th: a wide fairway that turns left and narrows at the green, just kissing the windswept ocean to the right.

As you finish up your round, with the sun setting in the northwest horizon, it hits you. Like a good book or a good meal, golf in the Maritimes is a feast for the discerning golfer, and as you make your way back home, don't be surprised if you find yourself planning a return for a second helping. ■

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Cruising the Maritime Waters By Sean Toohey

I could tell, as we pulled through the wrought-iron gates, that we were coming into someplace special. What I didn't realize was that it would be the first of several memorable courses I'd discover in a place I'd never before considered ideal for a golf vacation.

Nova Scotia, northeast of Maine, is in the opposite direction from where most Met Area players go for long weekends of summertime golf. I landed there after the owner of Fox Harb'r Golf Resort & Spa invited my wife and I for several days of golfing and cruising Atlantic Canada aboard his mega-yacht, *Destination Fox Harb'r Too*. (Being married to *Yachting* magazine's charter editor has its perks.) I was enthusiastic about scoping out the region's courses, but I'd always thought of Nova Scotia as cold, foggy, and just plain inhospitable.

As it turns out, I needed only sunscreen and shirtsleeves. Not only was the August weather downright hot, but the region proved perfect for a golfing vacation with a spouse. Halifax, Nova Scotia, requires a flight of about the same length as Myrtle Beach, but the vibe is entirely different after you land. Think family restaurants instead of strip malls; freshly swept sidewalks versus overpriced taxis and traffic. It's terrific for groups of laid-back golfers, couples, and families.

The sheer amount of golf in the region is noteworthy, too. We played Fox Harb'r Resort and Bell Bay in Nova Scotia, and Crowbush Cove on Prince Edward Island. If you don't want to drop a quarter-million dollars a week to charter *Destination Fox*

Harb'r Too, then you can access all three courses—and two dozen more within about a four-hour radius—by way of a rented car or your own vehicle via the ferry to Halifax from Portland, Maine. Resorts like Fox Harb'r offer hotel suites as well as townhouse and private home rentals, while the towns of Charlottetown and Baddeck, near Crowbush and Bell Bay, have everything from inexpensive



motels to five-star hotels. You can also mix-and-match outdoor activities with golf during a vacation here, since Fox Harb'r boasts a sporting clays range and Crowbush has a beach.

My experiences on the courses were varied, but all good. At Fox Harb'r, I played with the director of golf operations, Elliott Isenor, who has been on site since the course's inception and was a knowledgeable resource for learning about the area. There's also an excellent driving range for warm-ups and post-round practice swings—hey, I'm a pro, so I encourage my students to do both!

Crowbush is similar to Fox Harb'r in

that the course combines woodland and waterfront into beautiful scenery, but designer Thomas McBroom created a tighter par-72 with narrower fairways, more visual intimidation, and higher mounds. Plus, you will have to contend with off-water wind—not breezes—to play this course well.

Bell Bay falls nicely in between; it can be more challenging than Fox Harb'r but will always be easier than Crowbush because the fairways are wider and the wind is less of a factor. Head golf professional Ted Stonehouse was the 2002 Canadian PGA Professional of the Year and has developed a strong junior program, and the course is within sight of the Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site if you want to add an afternoon of science to a morning of golf with the kids.

The high season in Atlantic Canada is marketed as June through September, which our picture-perfect weather in August bore out. The local pros, though, told me September and October are actually ideal. You might face an early-autumn squall, but it's not as hot, the courses are in beautiful shape, and the tourists tend to be serious golfers as opposed to groups arriving by way of bus tours and cruise ships.

Based on my experience, I'm going back to Atlantic Canada's courses as soon as I can. I'll wave to you from the yacht while you line up your shot from the 15th tee overlooking the water at Fox Harb'r.

Sean Toohey is the Head PGA Golf Professional at New Jersey National Golf Club in Basking Ridge, N.J.

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