

ANNAPOLIS ROYAL

I used to be a policeman. It was a good job, but it seemed like everybody I met was always having a bad day. So in 2002, I retired with my wife to Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia and opened a bed and breakfast. Now the people I meet are having good days and all I have to do is keep it that way. Interesting people; relaxed, smiling, on vacation, lots of them retired like me. We sit around the breakfast table telling each other stories, sometime stretching the truth a bit. The fish just keep getting bigger and bigger.

My adopted town is small; one traffic light, less than 500 people, with no McDonalds, or for that matter any fast food outlets. No big hotels either. When you walk down the main street at night you hear the echo of your footsteps. It's that kind of town - and we wouldn't have it any other way.

OK then, what does it have? Well, despite it's size, to borrow a metaphor from the sport's world, Annapolis Royal punches above its weight. In a 2004 international competition, it was voted the most livable small town in the world. That's right, the whole world. Of course those judges were probably never here in February, but then neither am I. Annapolis Royal is a town of comfortable old houses on quiet shady streets surrounded, by apple orchards and lush farmland - close by the sea. All of this you will find, and quite a bit more.

At four hundred years of age, it has history. Once the capital of Nova Scotia before Halifax came along, today you can explore the historical landmarks of Fort Anne, fought over by the French and British for nearly 100 years, and nearby, a re-creation of the original French settlement, Port Royal. Here, in 1605, the French Commander, Pierre Dugua Sieur de Mons, first landed with a small group of French settlers and a young lieutenant who would soon make a name for himself in North America; Samuel de Champlain.

For tranquil beauty, it is hard to beat the Historic Gardens, a place where you can easily spend a day wandering the pathways amid brilliant colours and fragrances that fill the senses. Along the shore you can still find remnants of the old dyke-works, built by the early Acadian settlers to reclaim the rich bottomland from the relentless surge of the Bay of Fundy tides. Surely the ghosts of these hard working farmers linger nearby, for how could they bear to leave such a place.

If you come on a Saturday morning, the Farmer's Market is sure to be in full swing. Presided over by the Town Crier in his 18th century British military uniform, it is a place alive with activity. Throughout the morning most of the town's 500 residents can be found at the market, shopping and socializing. Be warned through, they are a friendly bunch. You will not be permitted to drift

anonymously through this crowd. Filling the stalls are craftsmen, bakers, buskers, antique dealers and organic farmers; the latter offering an abundance of fresh produce and preserves of every description. It's a good way to spend a Saturday morning.

After a dinner of the famous Digby scallops or fresh lobster if you prefer, in one of the many fine restaurants scattered along the main street, you may look for something to do to round out the evening. Check out the Kings Theater. Frequently it offers live performances, or on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday throughout the spring, summer and fall, there is always the graveyard tour. For nineteen years Alan Melanson, a proud Acadian has conducted a historic tour of the Garrison Cemetery, commencing at 9:30 p.m., rain or shine. Dressed in period undertakers garb, Alan will tell you the story of Annapolis Royal and of the men and women who lived and died here, including his own ancestors. If it can be said that historic tours are only as good as the people who give them, then it is certain you will not find a better one than this.

There are daytime activities as well; museums and historic properties, lots of these, a golf course, walking tours, even a ship repair yard beside the wharf with benches nearby, in case you just like to sit and watch others work. Take a walk on the boardwalk. It starts at the wharf and runs along the water's edge almost to Fort Anne - more benches here as well. There are lots of things to sit and contemplate in Annapolis Royal. And the view is spectacular. Gaze across the water from anywhere on the Annapolis Royal side and the picture perfect town of Granville Ferry with white church steeples and colorful old homes, comes into view. Once accessible only by ferry, now a causeway connects these two old friends and you can easily visit both.

Bring your camera. It is essential equipment, as are walking shoes; because what ever you decide to do, you can probably do it on foot. Annapolis Royal is a walk-around kind of town - a nice town. You should come.