

travel

An Artistic, Artisinal Canadian Capital

Discover Fredericton!

By KYM WOLFE

My bucket list includes a wish to visit every provincial capital, so when my son decided to go to New Brunswick University, I jumped at the opportunity to drive him to Fredericton. Because we traveled by car, I got to enjoy the province's rugged beauty, with the trees and rock cuts along the highways reminding me very much of northern Ontario. (One interesting feature that you won't see in Ontario is moose fencing, which the NB government has installed to reduce vehicle-moose collisions, and which thankfully seems to be working well.)

Fredericton itself is a charming and historic city that boasts year-round entertainment and events, from the annual winter Frostival to the summer Highland Games. As well as being the seat of New Brunswick's provincial parliament, it has abundant cultural capital, and prides itself on having the most per capita working artisans in Canada.

The city straddles the St. John River. Riverfront walking and biking trails on both the north and south shores are connected for pedestrians and cyclists by the Bill Thorpe Walking Bridge, a former railway bridge that is now part of the Trans Canada Trail. We meandered along the scenic downtown waterfront, and for a small donation were allowed to climb to the viewing platform of the Lighthouse on The Green. We also

Beautiful scenery leads into the city (below), which straddles the St. John River. Fredericton's extensive walking and biking trails include Odell Park (top right) and the Bill Thorpe Walking Bridge (below right).



A free concert with Cy, an Acadian-indie folk group, on Officers Square, where we also took in the Changing of the Guard historic re-enactments (below).



enjoyed other walking paths and green spaces throughout the city, including Odell Park, a 400-acre expanse of fields, old growth forest, trails, wildlife, gardens and ponds.

From galleries and gift shops, to a free outdoor evening concert featuring Cy, an Acadian indie-folk group, in downtown's Historic Garrison District (where British troops were garrisoned 1784 to 1869), to a late night Haunted Hike hosted by the Calithumpians, we took in as much as we could during our brief few days. Everyone we met was friendly and helpful, and went out of their way to ensure we enjoyed our visit.

We started one morning on Queen Street with the Changing of the Guard in Officers Square. The Canadian army was born in Fredericton 1883, and the twice daily ceremony features soldiers, pipers and drummers in period dress who re-enact some battle maneuvers, complete with gunfire. Afterwards we wandered down to the Old Soldiers Barracks, part of which is used for craft shops where local artisans can produce and sell their wares.

On route to the Beaverbrook Art Gallery we stopped to feed our parking meter. I later learned that out-of-province tourists can register at Visitor Information Centre at City Hall and receive 3-day free parking passes. There are also free Heritage Walking Tours of the downtown historic sites, led by costumed guides.



There's a lot of choice, when it comes to eating. Enjoy gourmet comfort food at Vault 29 (left), or local seafood at Isaac's Way (second from top), formerly the courthouse. Following the photos down, here are two of the shops and galleries that make Fredericton a haven for artists and artisans. At bottom is the entrance to the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, which houses an impressive and eclectic collection.

The Beaverbrook has an impressive collection, but one of my favourite exhibits featured pieces by an engineer who didn't even consider himself to be an artist! Harold "Doc" Edgerton invented ultra-high-speed and stop action photography for scientific and industrial uses; his photographs were first exhibited in 1937, at the New York Museum of Modern Art.

The most difficult decisions came at meal times, because we had been offered so many recommendations. Restaurants here tend to feature locally harvested foods from land and sea, and we experienced some fine meals: tasty sushi at Park's Noodles; fresh, local seafood at Isaac's Way (located in the old courthouse building); filling pub fare at the Snooty Fox; gourmet meatloaf and lobster mac & cheese at Vault 29 (so named because the bank on this site burned down in 1929, leaving only its three bank vaults intact), a grill-bar with a speakeasy atmosphere, complete with menu references to New Brunswick's own Al Capone. There are many more on our list for future visits. We also plan to visit Fredericton-Boyce traditional Saturday morning farmers' market, which has run since 1951 and is considered one of Canada's top 10 community markets.

With craft brewers, dozens of nano-brewers, and at least one cidery and one meadery in and around the city, Fredericton is a hotbed for brewing entrepreneurs. We sampled some really good local craft beers, some chosen simply because I liked their names. The James Joyce is recommended by the locals as the pub that carries the widest selection of New Brunswick brews, with the taps rotated regularly.

The best known craft brewery in Fredericton is Picaroons Traditional Ales, and you're apt to find at least one Picaroons at most bars and restaurants in the city. I indulged in a few and enjoyed them all, including Foxtail Ale, brewed exclusively for the Snooty Fox.

We also found our way to the Grimross brewtique and tap room, a nano- turned micro-brewery that produces a range of Belgian-style beers. Grimross sold its beers out of Picaroons' boutique until demand dictated the opening of an independent location. The new taproom is large enough to host musical performances, including one this past August by London's own Allison Brown & Uncle Dan.

Covered Bridge Potato Chips are another item you'll find in most local establishments. There are still a number of covered bridges in NB (colloquially referred to as 'kissing bridges' since courting couples would take advantage of briefly being out of sight). Hartland boasts the world's longest covered bridge and is also home to the family-owned potato chip company, which uses dark Russet potatoes grown on the 500-acreage family farm.



Fredericton is a hotbed for craft brewers. Stephen and Dawn Dixon of Grimross Brewing Co. (above) also offer a brewtique and taproom. Sample from a creatively presented flight of beer (top right) at Big Axe Brewing Company. But don't drink and drive — stay over at the B & B!

One last side trip before leaving the province — to Nackawic, to see the world's largest axe (a tribute to province's forestry industry), and the Big Axe Brewing Company, Bed & Breakfast. The is a new but booming brewery and tap house. Some of the ingredients are taken literally from the back yard (the seasonal maple and spruce beers use sap tapped from trees on the property). It is popular with cyclists who will make it their lunch destination, and often indulge in the Big Axe Picnic — a flight of four beers, served in a picnic table holder, with chalkboard seats where the name of each beer is written.

The few days I spent in Fredericton definitely whetted my appetite to go back to see more. However ... to complete my list I still have to get to St. John's ... so maybe next time I'll carry on even further east!

KYM WOLFE is a London-based writer who always manages to come across interesting places and people, wherever her road trips take her. Visit her at kymwolfe.com.



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