happy birthday Canada!

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

As modern Canada marks its 150th anniversary, Gillian Thornton sees where it began

All eyes on PEI! There will be special events from coast to coast this year as Canada marks the 150th anniversary of the confederation of provinces which launched on July 1, 1867.

The idea of a united Canada was born not in the cosmopolitan cities of Vancouver, Montreal or Quebec, but in the modest seaside community of Charlottetown on Prince Edward Island, or PEI – Canada's smallest province.

Here in 1864, 23 delegates from the three Maritime Provinces of PEI, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia met with representatives from Ontario and Quebec to discuss a confederation.

Today, Charlottetown is a delightful spot to start your exploration of the Maritimes, the closest corner of Canada to Britain.

In the 17th century, under French rule, PEI was called Île St Jean. By the mid-18th century it had been ceded to King George and in 1799 was renamed Prince Edward Island. Today, some 40% of the population have Scottish blood, the rest being mostly of Irish and English descent.

So a walk round historic Charlottetown – home to 50,000 of PEI's 147,000 inhabitants – is a journey back through the history of four nations. I loved Great George Street with its colourful clapboard houses, information panels and statues of Canada's founding fathers, and the picturesque waterfront which will host the Tall Ships Regatta over Canada Day weekend, June 30 to July 2.

Take a walking tour with the costumed Confederation Players; see the town from a horse-drawn carriage; and enjoy anniversary events at the Confederation Centre of the Arts. The Dream Catchers of Canada show will be performed daily during summer, while on summer evenings, music and images will be projected on the walls next to Province House where the Fathers of Confederation first met.

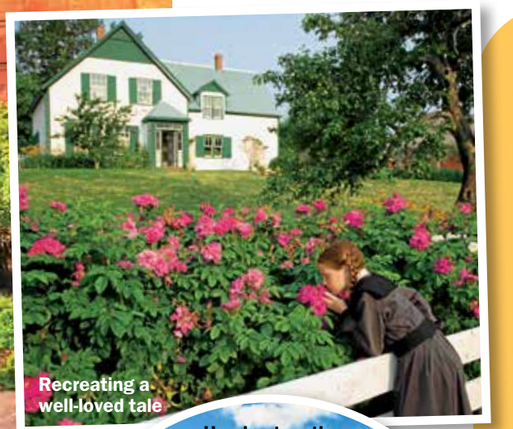
Outside town, PEI is renowned for its laid-back lifestyle, glorious sandy beaches, and seafood suppers. I particularly loved the heritage hotel of Dalvay-by-the-Sea. Go cycling or walking; try sea kayaking; and visit the three properties associated with the *Anne of Green Gables* books by PEI author L M Montgomery (www.tourismpei.com).

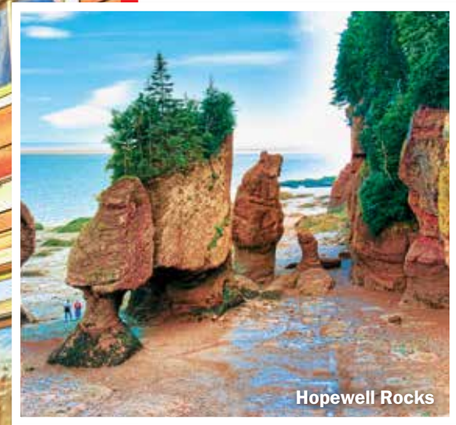
Walk through history with costumed guides

Fine seafood

A gentler way to see the sights

Head out on the water


Recreating a well-loved tale


Hopewell Rocks

Explore The Maritimes

Nova Scotia and New Brunswick face each other across the Bay of Fundy, home to the world's highest tides. On the New Brunswick side, walk on the ocean floor at Hopewell Rocks and explore the paths and lookouts of The Fundy Trail. Canada's oldest incorporated city, Saint John, has a bustling waterfront while stylish Saint Andrews includes the Algonquin Resort. A whale-watching cruise among the Fundy Islands is unforgettable. www.tourismnewbrunswick.co.uk

A ferry links Saint John's with Digby, scallop capital of Nova Scotia. At Annapolis Royal, discover the story of French settlers at Grand Pré and sample wines in Annapolis Valley.

I had a real adrenalin rush riding the tidal bore that races up the Shubenacadie twice daily in an 8-seater Zodiac. In Halifax, see memorials to Titanic victims. www.novascotia.com

Getting Around

Chance to see the Tall Ships

Fly to Halifax on Nova Scotia's Eastern shore with Air Canada from London Heathrow or with Westjet from Glasgow in around six hours. A regular 30-minute flight in an 18-seater plane connects Halifax with Charlottetown, or hire a car to drive through Nova Scotia, crossing to PEI by ferry from Pictou or by the spectacular Confederation Bridge.

Winters are cold here so the holiday season runs from May to October, when many visitors come to see the Fall colours. The Tall Ships Regatta calls at Halifax from July 29 -Aug 1 and at various ports around Nova Scotia until Aug 16. www.my-waterfront.ca

Travel News

Feeling flush? Book a stay at Richard Branson's Necker Island for… wait for it… £3,496 per night! This does include a Balinese-style villa with views of the Caribbean, Atlantic and nearby islands, a terrace, piano and two-person rooftop Jacuzzi. Oh, and personal butlers and chefs! www.tripadvisor.co.uk/rentals

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