

New Brunswick Revealed

The fog skulks forth, cloaking land and sea alike in lifeless gloom. I emerge from the car, disregarding a shiver and donning layer number three. The weather is seasonable for an April getaway to Atlantic Canada. Unfortunately for us, it's June. It's our first real family vacation, and we've chosen New Brunswick because of its proximity, favorable exchange rates, and plethora of activities for our exuberant five-year-old daughter Julia. Now though, after our first day trudging through the steadfast 55-degree grey soup, my spirits sink a bit; I wonder if New Brunswick's personality will emerge in our precious few days here.

Drear notwithstanding, Julia stays upbeat, befriendng a black lab named Bear who bashfully shuffles about our accommodation in St Andrews. We saunter through quirky Kingsbrae Gardens, stunned by the absence of crowds. If this is shoulder season, I think, what does the low season look like? That evening a local waitress smiles genuinely and asks where we're headed, assuming we're just passing through to more glamorous PEI or Nova Scotia. *[Full disclosure – we did spend two days in Halifax as well, but the majority of our time was in NB].*

I'd always been intrigued by the Maritime Provinces on maps, pondering how different from Maine they could possibly be. Further atlas study showed that New Brunswick would be a saintly (Stephen, Andrews, George, John) landing place, even without knowing our Penobscis from our Quispamsis.

Place name confusion is the least of our problems as day three arrives damp and drizzly, and doubt over our destination choice begins to set in. But then the sun breaks free of its overcast prison at lunchtime, revealing historical treasures and tidy landscaping beneath the scruffy industrial façade of Saint John. The City Market pulses with passersby grabbing a bite or sharing a chuckle. King's Square – a landmark since 1785 – has awakened, easygoing residents savoring the suddenly verdant environs. Julia gleefully chases pigeons. The day's audacious brilliance is not solely from the sun.

Although carrying the mishmash of snacks, sweatshirts, and 372 other Julia-related items distracts me, New Brunswick's character begins to take shape. I gradually notice details – the lonely yellow star on a flapping Acadian flag, a waterfall's eloquent babblings in an otherwise silent forest landscape, the squishy low-tide Fundy mud underfoot, the salty crunch of fresh fried seafood – that melt the mental fog away.

Several days later we traverse another invitingly empty highway that will lead us back to familiar ground, and two ancient rounded hills appear on the horizon. I imagine these stoic, grizzled gents sharing nostalgia from bygone days. By themselves they are unimpressive, but seen with their surroundings they remain ruggedly handsome and perfectly symbolic of this unheralded province. We approach the grandfatherly earthen bumps and I peer contentedly skyward, now

certain that our New Brunswick exploits were worthwhile. Before vanishing back into the clouds, they seem to say to us "Bet you're glad you didn't just pass through, eh?"



The author and Julia at Fundy National Park