

NOVA SCOTIA'S GAELIC ROOTS

The signposts of Gaelic culture are everywhere in Nova Scotia.

Town names like Inverness, Aberdeen and New Glasgow dot the landscape. Posters for ceilidhs (musical gatherings) hang in local post offices. The sound of bagpipes and fiddles drift through town squares and over mountain passes.

Nestled on the North Atlantic Ocean, in the Canadian Maritimes - about a 700 mile drive from Boston - Nova Scotia offers a startling natural beauty, robust way of life and an abundance of activities for visitors. Jazz festivals and culinary events plus fishing, golfing and arts performances are readily available to visitors, especially from June through October, the height of the tourism season.

Those amenities aside, what appeals to many visitors is the ubiquity of Gaelic culture, not just as a tourism showcase but as a living, daily tradition going back 300 years.

Nova Scotia has its own Office of Gaelic Affairs with branches in Halifax, Antigonish and Mabou. Director Lewis MacKinnon - a Gaelic language enthusiast himself - oversees the busy agency, which preserves and celebrates Gaelic culture year round. Indeed, over 2,000 people speak Gaelic in the

province and hundreds of students are taking classes in the schools.

The Celtic heart of Nova Scotia is Cape Breton, which Travel & Leisure Magazine selected as the number one island destination in North America in 2008.

You'll find daily reminders of Celtic culture all over the island. The Highland Village Museum, for example, takes a step back to the 19th century to experience life as one of the province's Scottish settlers. The Celtic Music Interpretive Center offers live Celtic music seven days a week from May through October.

There's also a strong academic accent. The Gaelic College of Celtic Arts & Crafts at St. Ann's Bay offers intensive and introductory courses on Gaelic language, bagpipe playing, fiddling and dancing.

St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish offers immersion weekends in Gaelic speaking. And St. Mary's University in Halifax offers courses in Irish studies.

For visitors, one of the real highlights of the year is the annual Celtic Colours International Festival which takes place in October, when over 250 musicians, dancers, singers and storytellers come together for an intensive celebration of Celtic culture.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT NOVA SCOTIA

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Comhairle na Gàidhlig
The Gaelic Council of Nova Scotia
Gaelic.ca/index.php

Highland Village Museum/An Clachan
Gàidhealach
Museum.gov.ns.ca/hv

Gaelic College
Gaeliccollege.edu

St. Francis Xavier University
Stfx.ca

St. Mary's University
smu.ca

