

Ways to save at Canada's top summer destinations

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Tags: The Frugal Traveller, Things to do in Alberta, Things to do in BC, Things to do in New Brunswick, Things to do in Ontario, Things to do in Ottawa, Things to do in Quebec, Things to do on Vancouver Island

We are pleased to introduce a new weekly travel columnist. Calgary-based Russell Hannon calls himself an "ultra-economical travel expert" and uses lean principles to travel economically. He has been featured on CNBC, FOX, CBS, America Tonight, CTV, ShopSmart, Around the World Travel TV, and nationally broadcast lifestyle and personal finance shows. Russell speaks at travel shows, has worked as a CBC Calgary budget travel columnist, and is the author of *Stop Dreaming Start Traveling: The Ultimate Guide to Traveling More and Spending Less*. The book is endorsed by Emmy-winning producer Danette Kubanda, formerly of CNN and the Oprah Winfrey Show.



RUSSELL HANNON
Travel Writer

If the low-flying loonie sunk your plans to travel abroad, a common misperception amongst travellers is that a thrill abroad is somehow greater than a thrill near home. It's why so many people travel half way around the world, despite having yet to explore the wonders in their own backyard.

Having lived in five Canadian cities, I've met too many Western Canadians who have yet to visit our national capital. I know too many Torontonians who have never been to the Rockies. I have too many friends and family on the East Coast who have never heard the thundering roar of the Pacific waves crashing along B.C.'s coast. And far too many of us have yet to step foot on the majestic island of Newfoundland.

Travelling the second-largest country in the world hardly carries the stigma of a staycation. And there has never been a better year to explore

our country.

Here are ways to save money when visiting Canada's top summer destinations:

Maritimes

New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island are famous for their small-town hospitality, simple way of life and beaches. Parlee Beach in the touristy town of Shediac, N.B. (the Lobster Capital of the World) attracts the most visitors, and is one of the few remaining places where you can watch a movie from your car at the Neptune Drive-In theatre.

The 13-km Confederation Bridge connecting P.E.I. to the mainland of New Brunswick is an engineering marvel that's worth the \$46.50 toll (\$18.50 for motorcycles) payable when returning from P.E.I.

You can witness the tall ships festival commemorating ships navigated by early explorers to the New World in Halifax harbour (July 28 to Aug. 1) and Saint John (Aug. 18 to Aug. 20). When passing through Saint John, stop into the Hall of Great Whales, a museum showcasing enormous whale skeletons.

Fundy National Park (30 minutes from Moncton, N.B.) has some of the world's highest fluctuating tides (up to four storeys per tide cycle), giving formation to the often-photographed flower-pot rocks.

Few know the most economical summer accommodations in the area are empty university dormitories. University de Moncton rents dorm rooms with a communal washroom for \$58 a night. UNB offers one-bedroom apartments in Fredericton from \$25 a night, and Saint John from \$28 a night. UPEI in Charlottetown rents rooms from \$28 a night.

Vieux (Old) Quebec

Vieux Quebec is called North America's Europe for its combined French heritage, cobblestone roads and architecture, including the Cathedral-Basilica of Notre-Dame de Quebec.

The first thing you should do is stroll the winding narrow streets of Vieux Quebec, then visit the Chateau Frontenac and ride the funicular (a trolley on rails) down the hill.

Twenty minutes away are the enormous Montmorency Falls, which are taller than Niagara Falls. They're surrounded by trails, observation decks, a suspension bridge overlooking the falls, a gondola and even a zip line.

RVers can park at more than 135 private lots offered by farmers adjacent to vineyards, orchards, cheese factories, farms, activity areas and breeding farms when they subscribe to a \$105 annual membership at terroirenvr.ca. The only restriction is that any single stay is limited to 24 hours.

Quebec City also has Canada's largest hostel with 260 beds at the Auberge International.

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Ontario

You have not truly experienced Canadian patriotism until you spend Canada Day on Parliament Hill. Even more so this year as the capital will roll out the red carpet for Canada 150. It's extending the celebration through July 2 by sodding the Alexandra Bridge walkway that connects Ottawa to Gatineau for an interprovincial picnic on the bridge.

Those who brave the notorious Hwy 400 north traffic from Toronto to cottage country (the area from Collingwood to Wasaga Beach, Muskoka and Huntsville) are rewarded with lakeside cottage towns and long sandy beaches.

Toronto's large population and its hyper-inflated real estate prices have both spilled over to cottage country, but you can still have an economical escape by being selective with private rentals during off-season, or by camping/RVing. According to Freecampsites.net, you can camp free in the Blue Mountain parking lot, on Crown land at Bear Lake in Kilworthy and at Torrance Barrens Dark Sky Preserve.

Rocky Mountains

You sometimes need to hear the perspective of a tourist to truly appreciate the treasures we take for granted. Just ask Lee Abbamonte, a New Yorker who claims to be the youngest American to visit every country in the world. He touts the drive from Jasper to Banff/Lake Louise as among the most beautiful he's ever seen.

Campsites are plentiful in the Rockies, but they still sell out as fast as a hockey playoff game, and even more so this year due to the free national park access and the low Canadian dollar attracting tourists.

Your best bet at snagging a campsite is to book as far out as you can on a weekday. If that fails, a number of campsites rent lots on a first-come-first-served basis only – no reservations. The trick is to arrive at the registration desk earlier than other keen campers so you can get a campsite as others check out.

Vancouver Island

If the words surfing and Canada in the same sentence sound odd to you, it's unlikely you've been to Vancouver Island. Surfing is a lifestyle for many people in the Tofino area. Surfers of any skill level can find areas with suitable waves.

The most popular route along the island is from the east coast of Nanaimo, down to Victoria, then up the west coast to Tofino.

Vancouver Island's largest airport and ferry terminal are both in close proximity to the charming (and very walkable) provincial capital of Victoria, where you can wander Fisherman's Wharf and enjoy seafood (or ice cream) waterside as you marvel at the views. The city will host a slew of free events leading to and including Canada Day. Details available at spirit150victoria.ca.

Once feeling unable to afford to travel, Russell Hannon uses lean principles to travel at a fraction of the going rate. He's the author of Stop Dreaming Start Traveling: The Ultimate Guide to Traveling More & Spending Less. breakthetravelbarrier.com

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