



# MY CITY\*: HALIFAX

MELISSA BUOTE TALKS HISTORY, NATURE AND THE VIBRANT ARTS SCENE OF HALIFAX, **NOVA SCOTIA**





#### MELISSA BUOTE

Melissa is a Canadian food and culture writer who works for weekly newspaper *The Coast* and is based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. When she isn't travelling elsewhere, you'll find her at home cuddling her cat. Her food blog can be found at [www.passable.ca](http://www.passable.ca)

There's no better way to get to the heart of a city than through the people that live there. Every month we ask someone, clearly in love with their city, to take us on a personal tour and tell us what makes it so special. You may feel inspired to visit one day or to rediscover the charms of a city closer to you, but for now just sit back, relax and enjoy some armchair travel.

#### How long have you lived in Halifax?

Seventeen years. I grew up in Dartmouth, then a sister-city across the bridge, which is now a community of Halifax. When I was at university in Prince Edward Island (the tiniest maritime province) I fell deeper in love with the music scene in Halifax. I moved back here and started working as a publicist for an independent record label and a music festival, now the Halifax Pop Explosion.

#### Tell us a bit about Nova Scotia?

It's one of Canada's smallest provinces on the east coast. Along with the other maritime provinces, we're Canada's vacation playground because we're surrounded by water and the area is so beautiful. A lot of work here is resource-based, like fishing, so most Canadians wouldn't want to live here permanently. The winters can be really cold but not as dry or as cold



- 1 The Dartmouth ferry is a novelty that "never wears thin" says Melissa.
- 2 Colourful clapboard houses on Gottingen Street.
- 3 Downtown Barrington Street, home to Stillwell Bar.
- 4 Granville Street is where to find galleries including Anna Leonowens (see page 62) as well as Page and Strange.
- 5 A trove of gift ideas, Kept is Melissa's favourite shop

as Montreal – the harbour here never freezes. Actually people in Halifax would be more likely to go on holiday to London than Vancouver because it's a quicker, cheaper flight (only six hours).

#### What makes Halifax unique?

The music and arts scene. We have one of the most prestigious art schools in North America, the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, and a small, tight-knit music scene that has everything from pop and rock to R&B, jazz, and hip-hop and many festivals. There's a real sense of community here, with open-air markets in the North End, farmers' markets in the South End, and small mom-and-pop businesses throughout town.

#### What does it feel like at this time of year?

In November the mornings tend to be foggy and crisp, the last of the leaves are falling from the trees and »



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the city is brisk. Fall is my favourite season, although we do have quite an active hurricane season around this time of year.

**What time of day do you most enjoy?**

There is nothing I love more than the golden hour before the sun sets, especially those last 15 minutes when it is slipping away and the sky explodes into a final splash of pinks, purples and blues. I also like that beautiful moment on a city street when lamps flicker to life.

**What's the landscape like?**

The city is built around a hill and curves around a harbour. Citadel Hill, an old fort, sits in the middle of town with no buildings built tall enough to spoil the view to the water. In the south end of the city Point Pleasant Park takes up the rest of the land before it dips down into the Atlantic. Halifax is dotted with lakes (great for swimming in summer) and parks.

**Tell us about the light and colours**

It's watery and earthy, with greys and blues, browns

and greens. A grey foginess starts off a lot of our mornings. It can engulf you. The colours are almost soft and smudged, from the dark greys and blues of the water to the sandy browns and muddy, brick reds of the buildings.

**And what are the people like who live there?**

Halifax often feels like a young city because of the abundance of students. It's also a blue-collar town in a lot of ways with many people who work in trades. What we lack in glamour, we make up for in ingenuity. There are a lot of artists and musicians, film-makers and craftspeople, so creativity abounds.

**Where do you like to escape to?**

Within the city, my favourite escape is the Public Gardens, a Victorian-style garden. I also really like going just outside of town to Peggy's Cove, which has a huge white lighthouse perched at the edge of the Atlantic ocean on a jumble of huge granite rocks. Within an hour or so you can be sipping wine in a vineyard in the Annapolis Valley, or wandering through Lunenburg, a fishing village with bobbing boats and brightly coloured shacks. Halifax really benefits from being in a beautiful, small province.

**What's the best-kept secret?**

It has to be the cocktails. Halifax is, at its core, a beer town but craft cocktails are sneaking in to a few places



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around the city and taking a firm hold. My favourite place is a small restaurant and bar called Field Guide. The cocktails are tremendous and it's a warm, playful, mellow place to meet friends.

**What do you miss most if you've been away?**

I miss the harbour and the ocean. I have a hard time imagining living anywhere where there isn't a bit of salt in the air.

**What's your favourite way to get around?**

Halifax is a very walkable city, which is great. But the ferry between Halifax and Dartmouth is the best. It's a novelty that never wears thin; you can basically go sailing any day of the week, all year long.

**What would surprise a newcomer?**

The noon gun. A cannon fires every day at noon sharp from the Citadel. It's been fired at the same time every day (except Christmas Day) since the fort was completed in 1865. Historically it was used to give ships an accurate time reference and is now a handy reminder for us all that it's lunch time! The noon gun

even has its own Twitter account which tweets the 'boom' every day at midday!

**What's the best time of day to eat out?**

I love lunch. Renée Lavallée is one of the best chefs in Atlantic Canada and she has a great lunchtime sandwich shop in downtown Dartmouth called the Canteen. The restaurant is run by a team of talented women, including a baker, Jessica Best, who makes the most perfectly crusty loaves, bread rolls and flatbreads. I love a good sandwich, and every one here is a delight, especially the Cuban. »

- 1 Nearby escape Hackett's Cove.
- 2 Lighthouse-topped Peggy's Cove is a short hop from town.
- 3 For fabulous cocktails, Field Guide is hard to beat.
- 4 More than a comic books store, Strange Adventures has helped launch the illustration careers of local artists.
- 5 Seafood in a smart setting at Edna Restaurant on Gottingen Street



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1 The Anna Leonowens Gallery nurtures up and coming local talent as well as exhibiting established artists.  
 2 Superb sarnies from Two if By Sea.  
 3 Melissa can't imagine living anywhere "there isn't salt in the air". Neither can this chap...



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**What types of shop do you most like to visit?**

It's hard to beat the arts and crafts here. There are a lot of artisans and artists, so there are some really cool things to pick up at farmers' markets, at stores like Kept in Dartmouth (see right) and at crafter's fairs throughout the year. One special place is Strange Adventures, a comic book store. Some great illustrators developed their careers in Halifax and Strange Adventures has always supported local artists.

**Where would you recommend staying in Halifax?**

The Waverley Inn ([www.waverleyinn.com](http://www.waverleyinn.com)) is a well situated antique-filled historic hotel. It becomes a landmark at Christmas when it's overwhelmingly and adorably adorned in twinkly lights.

**What keeps you in Halifax?**

It's a small city with a real sense of community, and it's situated on the edge of a very beautiful province.

**Where would you live if you couldn't live here?**

I would probably want to live somewhere similar: a port city like Helsinki, or a small, arty city like Ghent. 5

# MELISSA'S PRIVATE TOUR

## FAVOURITE SHOP

### Kept

127 Portland St, Dartmouth  
 This is where all my dreams for the perfect wedding or birthday gift become a reality. Think covetable art, jewellery and knick-knacks.  
[www.keptshop.ca](http://www.keptshop.ca)

## FAVOURITE GALLERY

### Anna Leonowens Gallery

1891 Granville St, Halifax  
 When it isn't hosting exciting installations from a well-known artist, this gallery debuts the art of the students at the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design. [www.nscad.ca](http://www.nscad.ca)

## FAVOURITE CAFE

### Two if by Sea

66 Ochterloney St, Dartmouth  
 Their motto is Drink Drip, Eat Butter. They serve fruity, light-roast coffee along with huge, buttery croissants, scones, and cookies.  
[www.twoifbyseacafe.ca](http://www.twoifbyseacafe.ca)

## FAVOURITE NATURE SPOT

### Halifax Public Gardens

5665, Spring Garden Road, Halifax  
 A sprawling Victorian garden that lets you connect with nature right in the middle of the city. [www.halifaxpublicgardens.ca](http://www.halifaxpublicgardens.ca)

## BEST BY NIGHT

### The Wooden Monkey

40 Alderney Drive, Dartmouth  
 Situated above the Dartmouth ferry terminal, the Wooden Monkey restaurant is perfectly situated to watch the sun set and boats flicker through the inky night-time waters.  
[www.thewoodenmonkey.ca](http://www.thewoodenmonkey.ca)

## FAVOURITE SOUVENIR

### Theodore Tugboat

Halifax Waterfront  
 If you've ever wanted to say that you met an anthropomorphised boat, now is your chance! Just grab a photo with Theodore.

## FAVOURITE VIEW

### The Alderney Ferry

Dartmouth & Halifax Waterfronts  
 The best way to take in all of the waterfront views in Halifax and Dartmouth.

## THE ONE MUST-SEE

### The Seaport Market

1209 Marginal Rd, Halifax  
 For the best local food and lovely handmade crafts. [www.halifaxfarmersmarket.com](http://www.halifaxfarmersmarket.com)