

One fish, two fish...

Close encounters at the aquarium

by Janet Wallace

Huntsman Marine



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Janet Wallace

Salmon circle a tank in front of me; scales glitter as they catch the light. To my right, a seal twirls while diving. At my left, a school of shiny, big-eyed gaspereau move as one entity, while a large pale cod retreats into a cave like an ugly troll.

I wander through the aquarium marvelling at the beauty of these creatures. Then I go to the touch tanks. Time dissolves as I spend ages picking up sea stars (often called starfish), hermit crabs, sea slugs and a live scallop. I even pat the head of a skate as it surfaces.

The only thing that tempts me to leave the touch tanks is feeding time in the big tank. Fish of all sizes and shapes swirl around as they grab at bits of food. The flat flounders rise from the sandy bottom and mingle with the heavyset cod and school of sleek mackerel.

Afterwards, I trace my steps and read every interpretative panel. I discover fascinating facts about the inhabitants of the waters that surround the Atlantic Provinces. All in all, a great day at the aquarium.

The beauty of Atlantic Canada lies in its proximity to the sea. Whether it is the Bay of Fundy, the Northumberland Strait, the Baie des Chaleurs or the open Atlantic Ocean, we are always close to salt water.

When I walk along beaches and rocky shores or kayak along coastlines, I get glimpses of the sea's inhabitants. At low tide, I see hermit crabs scuttling behind rocks encrusted with barnacles, while I walk around byzantine patterns left by periwinkles on muddy sand. I spot the long straight shell of a razor clam and a sand dollar. I find a 'mermaid's purse'. I wonder about the animals responsible for such treasures in the tidewrack.

Clockwise from top left: Sealed with a kiss at the Fundy Discovery Aquarium, part of the Huntsman Marine Science Centre in St. Andrews, NB; the aquarium's touch pool; feeding time in the salmon tank; lumpfish at the New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre in Shippagan; skate fish; sea stars at the Huntsman Marine Science Centre.



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*"I need the sea because it teaches me...
The fact is that until I fall asleep,
in some magnetic way I move in
the university of the waves..."* – Pablo Neruda

At the New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre, scientists help children aged seven to 12 discover the wonders of marine life in the Biologist Training Program. The children have a fun day of hands-on learning while beachcombing, handling aquatic animals in the aquarium and working inside a research lab. The aquarium is a popular venue for school field trips.

Huntsman offers Young Explorer day camps for children, week-long courses and

Now, thanks to two aquariums in New Brunswick, I have a better understanding and appreciation of the sea life. I have seen many creatures up close, and have held some in my hand. I have learned about their lives and also the link between humans and marine ecosystems.

The **Fundy Discovery Aquarium**, part of the **Huntsman Marine Science Centre**, is in **St. Andrews** within sight of Maine. At nearly the opposite corner of the province, the **New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre** is located in **Shippagan** on the Acadian Peninsula. Although the anemones and sea horses on display may seem exotic, both aquariums have only local specimens. The Fundy Discovery Aquarium contains species from the Bay of Fundy whereas the New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre displays fish and invertebrates found in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, as well as freshwater organisms from the lakes and rivers of Eastern Canada. The two aquariums also provide a venue for scientific research and offer more intense (and fun) educational programs.

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Above, from left: Sculpin; sea urchin.

even overnight adventures at the Fundy Discovery Aquarium. And the learning vacations aren't just for kids. Adults can take courses for university credit, as part of teacher professional development or take the adult summer field course for interest.

Both aquariums mix science, history and art. In Shippagan, you can see sculptures of leatherback turtles, mola mola (sunfish) and the blue shark. Outside of Huntsman, a large metal sculpture of a sculpin stands guard. A day at either aquarium will provide not only hours of entertainment, but also a greater appreciation of the seashore for years to come. 🐟



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Above: Hermit crab takes a peek.

Quick facts about the New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre:

- It is Atlantic Canada's largest public aquarium.
- The centre opened in 1982 after a four-year construction period.
- It cost \$6 million to build.
- The building was originally 31,360 square feet.
- Two expansions were added since 1990 to bring the building to approximately 52,500 square feet.
- It was built on a five-acre property owned by the province.
- The centre is operated by the department of Tourism and Parks.
- The aquarium houses more than 100 fish and invertebrate species in 31 display tanks, ranging from 500 gallons (2,270 litres) to 6,000 gallons (27,240 litres).
- A 25,000-gallon (113,500-litre) harbour seal tank and a touch tank are outside.
- About two-thirds of the aquarium's tanks are saltwater tanks; the remaining are freshwater.
- The aquarium maintains fish and invertebrates of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and from lakes and rivers of Eastern Canada. No exotic fish are found here.
- Harbour seals and a coloured lobster collection are the highlight of the visit.



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