

AFTER HOURS



Two if by sea

By Stephanie Porter

What is the thing to do when you're entertaining visitors from out of province, or better, from outside of Atlantic Canada? I've been asked this a few times lately and I say the answer is this: take them to see the sea. Weather permitting of course.

Sure, this end of the country can now hold its own when it comes to fine places to dine, wine, spa and sleep. And that's all great, but if you want visitors to really understand why we live and work here, you've got to get outside. There's whale watching, seal watching, tide watching, iceberg spotting, deep-sea fishing, sea kayaking, coastal Highland drives — or you can head out and haul in a lobster trap with Captain Mark Jenkins.

Jenkins is a lobster fisherman by trade and by birth. While many of his colleagues in the fishery went west to work for at least part of the year, Jenkins found a different way to make ends meet. The good captain has a special permit to keep three lobster traps in the water throughout the summer, and these traps are key to the success of Charlottetown, P.E.I.'s Top Notch Charters.

Jenkins can take 12 people on his boat at a time — this is definitely a small-group activity—for a tour, a chance to haul a lobster trap, a meal of fresh lobster (yes, the boat is licensed, if you're wondering), and education by way of entertainment.

"I do explain how I make a living," Jenkins says. "My grandfather, great-grandfather were fishermen. We talk history, technique, a little science, how lobsters live, how to tell a male from a female. We pull the traps . . . they can help if they want . . . I tell them how to cook, shell and eat the lobster."

Jenkins leads the excursions with his brother, and the two make it fun for themselves and their guests (recently including Regis Philbin), telling stories and

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carrying on "just like you'd expect from two fishermen."

Jenkins is pragmatic about his small business. The charters provide not only supplementary income, but also an opportunity to familiarize people with lobsters. Any promotion of the product, he figures, will only boost the value of his day job.

For more than a dozen people, though, the best options for a seaside event likely lay elsewhere. Just down the coast from Captain Mark's charters lies the ideal location for Over the Coals & Under the Moon — one of many superb-sounding seaside meals on offer during Atlantic Canada's finer months. This particular one caught my eye because it involves a fire on the beach.

Organized by Rodd Hotels and Resorts (they own a handful of properties in P.E.I., N.B. and N.S.), Over the Coals begins in the hotel lobby. Yawn, right? Then the piper arrives.

Guests follow the wailing bagpipes down to the beach. Then it's all about sand underfoot, an oyster shucker and seafood steamed in seaweed on the beach. There's music and refreshments and plenty of time to network. After the lobster bake, it's time to recline by the bonfire.

"Picture it: the sun is setting over the beach, the waves lapping in," begins Janet Higgins, national sales manager for the resorts. "People come here and they've never really spent time on the ocean and they can't get over it."

Some groups indulge in fireside Bailey's and marshmallows; others go with brandy and cigars. There could be storytelling, guitar and songs — depends on the crowd. Unlike some of the resort's other events (kitchen parties, barbecues and so on), Higgins says she always recommends this particular one be scheduled for the last night of a conference or retreat. "No one is going to shoo them off the beach at 10:30; these events can go deep into the night," she says.

"Look, I'm from here and it still gives me the chills," says Higgins of the view from the beach. But she's pragmatic too, as she reminds all that the great outdoors can inspire more than awe.

"People tell me there have been more deals made here on the beach ... million dollar deals have been made on that beach." | ABM

What's your favourite way to show off Atlantic Canada to your colleagues or business guests from away? Let me know: stephaniejporter@gmail.com