

How Canada's smallest province became a culinary wonderland

The windswept coasts of Prince Edward Island that inspired *Anne of Green Gables* have also influenced an innovative new generation of chefs and farmers.



The Inn at Bay Fortune's FireWorks Feast runs nightly from mid-May through mid-October.

PHOTOGRAPH BY AL DOUGLAS MEDIA VIA THE INN AT BAY FORTUNE

On a deserted beach on the far eastern coast of Canada's Prince Edward Island (also known as PEI), chef Nick Chindamo squats among a stand of low-growing weeds, their tips displaying the telltale yellowing of late summer. He rummages for a few seconds before holding out a fat, eight-leaved cluster of sea sandwort, an abundant coastal succulent in northern climates. "Try this," he says. "It will surprise you."

He's right. The leaves, which resemble flattened versions of backyard-garden mainstays like ghost plant, are juicy, with a briny, cucumber-like flavor. Sandwort is among dozens of plants that Chindamo harvests during daily foraging adventures on various patches of scrub, sand, and forest that few would suspect of harboring a trove of edible plants—and that now make their way onto PEI restaurant menus.

The farm-to-table movement on the island was "about 10 years behind the times," says Chindamo, thanks to a remote location. Up until the 1993 building of the Confederation Bridge, linking New Brunswick to southwestern PEI, the only way to get to there was by boat. But Chindamo, a self-described forager who likes to cook, is among a new generation of culinary innovators who are transforming Prince Edward Island into Canada's eastern farm-to-table capital.

Small island, big impact

At 139 miles long and 39 miles at its widest point, Prince Edward Island is Canada's smallest province. The island was primarily colonized by Scotland, England, and Ireland in the late 1700s, and is part of the ancestral lands of the Mi'kmaq, who foraged for wild plants and berries, and fished, especially for eel.

A popular summer coastal destination, PEI's shores are abundant in wild roses, purple asters, and bright pink spires of fireweed, but refreshingly devoid of vista-blocking resorts. Instead, you'll find plenty of hayfields and sparsely populated residential towns, rural roads with caution signs for horse-drawn buggies, and chunky, red-capped lighthouses. Architectural styles may have changed since the early 1900s, but the brambly, windswept landscape, which inspired the setting of Lucy Maud Montgomery's 1908 classic *Anne of Green Gables*, has not.

According to Ilona Daniel, chef instructor at the Culinary Institute of Canada in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island's "big five" foods are lobster, oysters, beef, potatoes, and mussels. Daniel says the island produces 80 percent of Canada's mussel harvest, and more than 2 billion pounds of potatoes, including the cult-favorite Irish Cobbler, a creamy, flavorful heirloom variety with a thin, papery skin. PEI also has superb dairy products, thanks to one of the last cooperative dairies in the country.

Sebastian Manago, owner of Double Hill Cidery in Caledonia, explains that new projects and changing philosophies over the past 15 years have encouraged islanders to “beat the drums” about these products. It’s not without challenge on an island where the growing season is only a few months long. “There are dozens of young farmers and chefs, but it’s not an easy life,” says Manago. “They really do it as a passion.”



| The Inn at Bay Fortune's greenhouse and 10-acre farm produce 60-to-90 percent of what appears on the menu.
PHOTOGRAPH BY AL DOUGLAS MEDIA VIA
THE INN AT BAY FORTUNE



| The Inn's FireWorks Feast invites diners to arrive at 3 p.m. to tour the gardens before the dinner.
PHOTOGRAPH BY AL DOUGLAS MEDIA VIA
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PEI's food innovators

Ask any culinary insider on Prince Edward Island about the roots of the terroir-to-table movement, and they'll point to Michael Smith, a chef who worked in Michelin-starred restaurants before landing in Souris in 1991 at The Inn at Bay Fortune, on a serene eastern inlet that empties into the Northumberland Strait. Since then, Smith has appeared on multiple Canadian TV programs and authored several cookbooks. In 2013, he and his wife, Chastity, purchased the inn.

The Inn at Bay Fortune's signature is the FireWorks Feast, a five-hour gastronomic extravaganza that runs nightly from mid-May through mid-October and includes cocktails, garden-set appetizer stations, and a leisurely, family-style dinner prepared by a battalion of chefs and line cooks. The inn's greenhouse and 10-acre organic farm, where old wooden crates and decommissioned lobster traps are repurposed into growing vessels and decoration, produce 60-to-90 percent of what appears on the menu, depending on the season.

Many of the meal's sides and garnishes come from Chindamo, the inn's first full-time forager. He is also the founder of An Island Collective, 34-person, twice-annual dinners. Billed as "10 chefs, 10 courses, zero waste," event participants use all parts of all-PEI foods, whether seafood like Jonah crab; wild-harvested mushrooms; grains from lamb's quarters—an ancestor to modern quinoa; or acidic coastal gooseberries juiced to create a lemon substitute.

Many of Prince Edward Island's new epicurean wave have come up through the Culinary Institute of Canada, like Seth Shaw, head chef at two-year-old Mysa Nordic Spa & Resort in St. Peters Bay, just five miles from the dramatic dunes and butterfly-saturated meadows of Greenwich Prince Edward Island National Park. Similar to The Inn at Bay Fortune, Mysa has its own greenhouse and gardens, which produce about 30 percent of the spa restaurant's ingredients. Shaw jars and ferments some of the garden's bounty for the colder months, and displays these delicacies in a tall cabinet in the restaurant's dining room, from curried green tomatoes to pickled cauliflower and fennel, and a range of chutneys, jams, and jellies.

For Shaw, one of the island's most welcome developments are farm hubs or aggregators, which allow him to order local foods from one place. Now he can more quickly adapt his recipes, which lean toward Mediterranean, presented in a Scandinavian-minimalist style, according to what's available, and still showcase the island's finest. "We keep everything natural and fresh, and let the ingredients speak for themselves," says Shaw.



| Mysa's garden-to-table menu changes often to highlight what ingredients are in season.

PHOTOGRAPH AL DOUGLAS VIA MYSA
NORDIC SPA & RESORT



| Mysa's chef Seth Shaw menu highlights produce grown in the property's greenhouse and gardens.

PHOTOGRAPH AL DOUGLAS VIA MYSA
NORDIC SPA & RESORT

Apples are perhaps the island's most plentiful local products—so much so that Manago says, “You can't let a field go fallow, or apple trees will start growing on it.” The Double Hill team uses 100 percent Prince Edward Island apples to craft products like Oistre, a dry cider aged for two years 20-feet-deep in the sea; Lumina, which is made from a second pressing of apple pomace, the fibrous solids left over from an initial pressing; and earthy, complex Nomad, made entirely from wild-harvested apples.

This year, Double Hill will release its first vintage from their own orchards, which are planted with predominantly French and Spanish cider apples. They will also create a proprietary cider for the Inn at Bay Fortune—an example of what insiders like Shaw refer to as “making our own little scene” on Prince Edward Island.

“PEI is really small, but we do a lot of big things,” says Daniel of the creative ways culinary trendsetters are approaching the island's farm-to-table foods. “Our size is our strength. It has made us more resilient as people and business owners. And it allows us to have an interconnectedness. We're telling our story, and telling it well.”

Where to eat in Prince Edward Island

Ada: Book a dinner—menus change continuously— at this restaurant and creative cooking space, or pick up premade salads, soups, sandwiches, doughnuts, and other sweets.

Dreadnaught Eatery: A family-owned food trailer in Morell that serves local, seasonal takes on favorites like fish and chips, lobster rolls, burgers, pulled pork, and generous salads.

The Inn at Bay Fortune: Beyond the exceptional FireWorks Feast, the inn also offers chef-led culinary immersions in its on-site restaurant.

Founders Food Hall & Market: Charlottetown's food hub features 14 local vendors selling everything from Mexican street food to potato-based fudge.

Holy Cannoli: A seasonal, limited-edition pop-up serving homemade Sicilian cannoli in a variety of ricotta flavors. Check their Instagram for ordering instructions and date and pickup locations.

Mysa: Healthy, fresh-from-the-garden menus change frequently. Don't miss the indulgent desserts.

How to do it

Air Canada flies domestically into Charlottetown Airport from cities like Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. You can also fly on United, Delta, or WestJet into Halifax, Nova Scotia, and pick up the Northumberland Ferry from Caribou. Or land in Moncton, New Brunswick, and drive over the scenic Confederation Bridge into PEI.

The Great George Hotel, in capital city Charlottetown, has spacious rooms and suites. For a nature-immersed glamping experience, Nature Space Resort & Retreat Centre is in St. Peters Harbor.

For more information, visit [tourismpei.com](https://www.tourismpei.com).

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/where-to-eat-in-prince-edward-island>