



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

TRAVEL

The Nordic spa scene is booming in a surprising place—Nova Scotia

Brisk Atlantic Ocean breezes and rocky shorelines make Nova Scotia the perfect home for nature-centric Nordic spas.



Nova Scotia's rugged landscape makes it an ideal spot for Nordic spas.

JESSICA EMIN

By Megan Margulies

Published April 17, 2026

Flying into Halifax plays like a cinematic introduction to the province of Nova Scotia. Whether it's autumn and the plane hovers over red and orange foliage, or it's winter and snow blankets the land below, you will quickly understand why this destination is known for its rugged beauty. From the ecology of the land to the people who inhabit it, diversity abounds here. The second-smallest province in Canada, Nova Scotia was first inhabited by the Mi'kmaq, then European settlers and African communities who arrived as early as 1632.

The landscape is just as rich. Shaped by a terrain that changes with the seasons and even time—like the fossil-filled Blue Beach—this region may be one of the most magical locations for Nordic spas. “There's a rawness and the adaptability to Nova Scotia's landscape,” says June Pardy, co-owner of Saltair Nordic Spa and Wellness in Baxter's Harbour.

History of the Nordic spa

At the root of Nordic spas is the Scandinavian tradition of repeating a hot-cold-rest cycle while surrounded by natural elements. While most enjoy the warming sauna experience of the Nordic spa, or “contrast therapy,” and are not quite sold on the frigid step of the process, cold-water immersion isn't a new technique and has been used for centuries. The physiological benefits of cold-water immersion dates as far back as 3500 B.C., with the Edwin Smith Papyrus, the ancient Egyptian medial text written in hieratic script, making numerous references to cold being used for therapeutic purposes.

Today, Nordic spas are booming worldwide and Canada is no exception. While Nova Scotia is relatively new to the Nordic spa scene, opening its first location at the start of 2020, it is now home to four Nordic spas with a fifth opening its doors by next year. “They all have very high occupancy levels, so obviously our Nordic spas are filling a need,” says Pam Wamback of Tourism Nova Scotia. In terms of Nova Scotia's population, this makes sense. A 2022 census shows that the median age of residents in Nova Scotia was 45.6, and a 2025 global consumer survey notes that these “middle adulthood” years make wellness habits feel more critical.

Here's where you can experience it



| Nature Folk's thermal circuit has two large Finnish saunas, a cold plunge pool, a warm pool, a ritual corner, and various areas to sit and relax.

RIAZ OOZEER

Dartmouth: Your first stop isn't far from Halifax and its international airport. Just across the harbor via a quick ferry ride is Dartmouth, founded in 1750 and now a trendy spot to grab lunch before finding your way down toward the waterfront for a visit to [Nature Folk Wellness Collective](#). Don't let the old city hall building exterior fool you; once you enter, you will quickly forget that you're inside a mid-century concrete building. The communal area has two Finnish saunas, a warm and cold plunge, and a salt scrub room. In an effort to embrace the nature that surrounds the spa and block out the city noise, the windows are high enough to only show clouds drifting behind the tops of trees. The water therapy doesn't need to end here. Thanks to [The Shubenacadie Canal Commission](#), the Dartmouth area is a great place to enjoy the history and natural features of the waterway that runs from Halifax Harbour to the Bay of Fundy with paddle boarding or kayaking.



| Sensea was the first Nordic spa to open in Nova Scotia.

JESSICA EMIN

Chester: The quiet seaside town of Chester may look innocent enough, but it holds a secret history of pirates and bathtub gin smugglers. A mile or so outside of this slightly bustling town—amid a tranquil forest setting with outdoor saunas, plunge pools, and steam baths—is Sensea Nordic Spa, the first Nordic spa in Nova Scotia opened by Christophe Debeaumont and Laetitia Gonthier. “When you are walking around the space and look at how the ground kind of slopes and moves, you feel like you’re tucked away. [Debeaumont and Gonthier] were very specific and careful about how they curated the spaces moving together,” explains Marisa Holley, Sensea’s communications manager. Sensea continues to evolve with plans to implement a new food menu and spa offerings in the coming months.



| Oceanstone's Hydrothermal Spa has two warm vitality pools, a north Atlantic plunge pool, a hammam, aromatherapy sauna, and a sweet pebbled "cold-immersion" river walk.

RIAZ OOZEER (LEFT) AND JESSICA EMIN (RIGHT)

Indian Harbour: Much like life, you soon find yourself back on the rocky shoreline. A drive along the coast offers stunning ocean views, and the opportunity to stop at Peggy's Cove, a popular tourist destination and fishing village. The white and red Peggy's Cove Lighthouse is surrounded by 375 million-year-old granite. Continuing along route 333, stop at the Swissair Flight 111 Memorial Site; two sculpted and smoothed boulders bear the names of the victims.

When you reach [Oceanstone Seaside Resort](#), rent a beachfront cabin and sleep to the sounds of the ocean lapping against the rugged shoreline. [Oceanstone's Hydrothermal Spa](#) is its own oasis, with two warm vitality pools, a north Atlantic plunge pool, salt-inhalation hammam, aromatherapy sauna, and a sweet pebbled "cold-immersion" river walk. The resort's resident restaurant is currently undergoing a revamp and will return as Watermark Restaurant with the same local ingredient-forward menu.

Baxter's Harbour: Set on the North Mountain at the northern edge of Nova Scotia's wine country is Saltair Nordic Spa and Wellness in Baxter's Harbour. Co-founder June Pardy teamed up with longtime friend Jenny Sinclair to start Saltair, a Nordic cycle of hot, cold, and rest therapies, complemented by guided classes featuring movement, aromatherapy, and breathwork. "We were lucky and found a beautiful piece of land with acreage around it that we could develop." The best part? It's perched above the Bay of Fundy that holds the Guinness World Record for highest tides, rising up to 52.5 feet and as Pardy tells it, creates a powerful movement of air around the spa space. "That's really what we cared about—having all the sensory elements; it's being able to see it, being able to hear it, being able to smell the salt air, and being really tapped into nature." If you're heading back to Halifax to catch a flight home, don't miss out on continuing your exploration of the Bay of Fundy and its history with a visit to Blue Beach where fossils abound.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/nova-scotia-nordic-spas>