

Urban Trees Help Attract Tourists

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I have often wondered if people who visit Halifax from afar are attracted to this city, at all, by the trees we have along the streets and in parks and cemeteries. Perhaps also, visitors to Halifax may take note of the fact that on all sides of the city is woodland - even the harbour approach is flanked by wooded mainland and islands like McNabs. We boast about having naturalized woodland parks next to (or almost next to) the ocean, such as Fleming Park, Hemlock Ravine Park, Admiral Cove Park, and Point Pleasant Park. And I haven't even mentioned our pride in having wooded "wilderness" areas very close to the centre of the city - well-known examples are the Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area and the newly established Shaw Wilderness Park.

What does the literature say about the potential for trees in the city to be a drawing card for tourists? The literature is not replete with studies on this topic, but I found a couple of interesting papers. Jinyang Deng and colleagues (2010) studied the effect of urban forest on urban tourism in Savannah, Georgia. Based on their findings, they report that ". . . urban forests can positively and significantly contribute to the enhancement of city beauty and enrichment of tourist experience, which, in turn, positively and significantly contributes to tourism satisfaction, which can significantly lead to destination loyalty. This study also finds that urban forests not only function as a main attractor for most visitors, but also serve to complement other tourism attractions (i.e., historical sites) in the city". I have yet to visit Savannah, but a quick internet search points out that its nickname is "The Forest City".

When you think of the term "forest city", do any Canadian cities come to mind? Apparently, London, ON, also has the nickname "The Forest City". I know London reasonably well and have led some urban-forest research there - sorry, Londoners, but I don't think that your urban forest is any more special than that of many other Canadian cities. How about Halifax? Well, recently Halifax was named one of Canada's ten Tree Cities of the World, a program of recognition developed jointly by the Arbor Day Foundation and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (<https://treecitiesoftheworld.org/tree-cities.cfm?chosen=CAN>).

In a recent paper led by Lorien Nesbitt at UBC (Nesbitt et al., 2017), the authors point out that the tourism effects of urban forests are seriously understudied. It's probably high time that we did a survey of visitors to Halifax and asked them about whether the trees in the city were in any way remarkable and what the trees might mean to them as they continue their tourism activities here and elsewhere. Anyway, Nesbitt and colleagues provided two examples of highly visited urban forests in North American cities - Central Park in New York and Stanley Park in Vancouver. Central Park is so very special because it is centrally located in one of the world's greatest cities. It for sure is a draw for NYC tourists.

Back to my original question - what do the trees of Halifax mean to our tourists? One thing can't be denied - Halifax is indeed a very important tourist destination in Atlantic Canada. The

waterfront boardwalk is the most-used kilometre of tourism infrastructure in the region. Sure, that is largely a consequence of the increasing visitation of cruise ships to our harbour. In 2018 and 2019, over three hundred thousand people visited the downtown area of the city on cruise ships. What would those tourists say about the trees of Halifax? If they were paying attention as their vessel approached the inner harbour, they might marvel at the preponderance of woodland along the shores, culminating in the famous Point Pleasant Park very near the piers. If they just stayed downtown along the waterfront, they would encounter the few hundred trees populating the heavily built-up environment between Water St. and the shore (I doubt they'd even notice those trees). If they wander inland a bit, they might be looking for the Old Burial Ground, the Public Gardens, or the Camp Hill Cemetery. If they take a taxi or tour bus to visit the graves of Titanic victims, they would experience some of the treed residential streets along the way (see photo) and then the pleasantly wooded environments of Mount Olivet and Fairview Lawn cemeteries (the latter is featured in the photo). I wouldn't send them up Citadel Hill* for any tree-related experiences up close, but apart from the top floors of a few hotels around the city, it is probably the best place for a tourist to get a sense of the extensive tree canopy in the residential areas of the peninsula's west side (see photos).

The fact of the matter is that we don't know how important Halifax's trees are to our tourists. I feel confident to say, though, that if we had no trees, that would elicit a negative reaction from visitors. It would be my vision that, wherever a tourist might go in this city, that person should be impressed with our trees. We are far from that given the paltry tree canopy we have in the downtown core and some neighbourhoods around the city. The cup may be half empty, but thankfully at least it's half full! We have a good base to start with, and ongoing implementation of the Urban Forest Master Plan should help us get better!

* hmmm . . . Citadel Hill . . . how about a few more trees there to enhance the tourist experience?

References

Deng, J., K.G. Arano, C. Pierskalla, and J. McNeel. 2010. Linking urban forests and urban tourism: a case of Savannah, Georgia. *Tourism Analysis* 15(2):167-181.

Nesbitt, L., N. Hotte, S. Barron, J. Cowan, and S.R.J. Sheppard. 2017. The social and economic value of cultural ecosystem services provided by urban forests in North America: a review and suggestions for future research. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 25:103-111.







