

A Digital Nomad Strategy for Prince Edward Island

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Introduction: During this practicum placement, I reviewed the pertinent digital nomad literature (peer-reviewed and ‘grey’) and used the information derived from these sources to concoct a digital nomad strategy for Prince Edward Island (PEI). The literature revealed that a destination must typically possess 5 main amenities for digital nomads to be interested in (temporarily) relocating there. These include: well-equipped coworking spaces; comfortable and well-designed coliving spaces; an affordable and intuitive visa program; widespread, fast and reliable Wi-Fi and a well-planned and conveniently located nomad village. I decided to devise this strategy, so that the relevant authorities (workers at the Community Foundation of Prince Edward Island, Tourism PEI, etc.) in PEI may better comprehend the digital nomad phenomenon and understand what is required to entice nomads to come to the island. My hope is that these authorities will read this report, research the topic more thoroughly and then act swiftly to attempt to lure as many nomads to PEI’s shores as possible, in order to reap the full benefits of the movement.

Digital Nomad Strategy for PEI: Digital nomads are defined as “people who are location-independent and use technology to perform their job, living a nomadic lifestyle [in the process]” (Hayes, 2021, para. 1). Prince Edward Island has the potential to become a world-class digital nomad destination, as it is beautiful, tranquil, safe and located a short flight away from major cities and tech hubs such as Toronto and Montreal, among others. PEI clearly has tremendous potential, but still needs a concrete and tenable plan to lure digital nomads to its shores. A preliminary strategy will be outlined below (commencing on page 3), but a more comprehensive plan is most certainly required.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions imposed by the provincial government, PEI’s economy (and especially its tourism sector) has been reeling from a very steep reduction in tourist arrivals. Additionally, prior to the pandemic, PEI was likely

experiencing some form of ‘overtourism’ during the summer months/peak season, as popular tourist hotspots (i.e. Cavendish Beach, Victoria Row, etc.) were being overrun with tourists. It is therefore quite clear that the tourism industry is both highly vulnerable to exogenous ‘shocks’ (i.e. pandemics) that occur due to the negative externalities of modern forces like globalization; and it is also glaringly obvious that traditional mass tourism has a plethora of fundamental failings (i.e. overtourism) that cannot be easily and effectively ameliorated in short order. Ergo, it is vital for tourist economies like PEI to consider more responsible and stable alternatives to traditional forms of tourism. One viable alternative is digital nomadism.

According to *Island Innovation*-which is a social enterprise that seeks to spur positive, tangible change on islands around the world-the future of work will be drastically different post-pandemic, as digital nomadism will become more prevalent, resulting from the digital economy augmenting, internet connectivity improving and home ownership becoming less likely (Island Innovation, 2021). These three happenings will lead to upwards of 1 billion people becoming digital nomads by 2035 (Island Innovation, 2021). Many island nations and sub-national island jurisdictions will likely be ideal destinations for these nomads, and PEI needs to act swiftly to ensure that it gets in on the action and reaps the rewards of the digital nomad phenomenon. These rewards may include a significant ‘brain gain,’ where innovation and entrepreneurship may increase on the island and a significant injection of capital into the island’s economy, resulting from these nomads purchasing a visa upon entry and spending an abundance of money during their stay. (Island Innovation, 2021).

Coworking Spaces: A destination must have coworking spaces to be attractive to digital nomads. These spaces should be clean, visually appealing and equipped with the infrastructure necessary for facilitating meaningful and productive work, including having desks, chairs, high-

speed internet and diverse spaces for workers to congregate in. They must also have “[an] open floor plan, [and an] arrangement of tables to enable eye contact between coworkers...” (Putra & Agirachman, 2016, p.169). These spaces offer stability, or an ‘anchoring’ of sorts (in both a real and symbolic sense) for nomads, who are perpetually mobile. These spaces also “facilitate both social and work interactions, as well as enable their mobile technologies to work properly” (Nash, Jarrahi & Sutherland, 2020, p.272). Additionally, they help nomads to remain productive and focused (Nash, Jarrahi & Sutherland, 2020). In a nutshell, “a combination of a well-designed and well-curated work experience” (Spreitzer, Bacevice & Garrett, 2015) at these coworking spaces is essential for nomads, as this type of environment is known to spur productivity and help nomads to thrive during their tenure as ‘location-independent’ workers.

Prince Edward Island already has 2 designated coworking spaces (*Knest Studio & Co-work Co-win Training Centre Limited*) and one “Business Center” (*Startup Zone*), which is akin to a coworking space, but not quite the same thing. There may be other places on the island that function as coworking spaces, but they may not be designated as such. It is imperative that these spaces are made visible to both digital nomads currently residing on PEI and for prospective nomads who wish to move to the island. Along those lines, it is advisable for the owners of these spaces to advertise more aggressively on various social media platforms (i.e. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) to have a better chance of attracting these people.

It may also be wise to partner with the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) to create a coworking space at the university. UPEI has many underutilized spaces that could be easily and swiftly converted into functioning coworking spaces. Constructing these spaces on campus could lead to revenue being generated for the university (by way of charging daily, weekly or monthly fees for their use) and could also lead to the importation of innovative,

intelligent and like-minded people onto campus, which could result in potential positive and fruitful collaboration between nomads and academics at a later date.

Coliving Spaces: Digital nomads prefer residing in coliving spaces with fellow nomads for the duration of their stay, as they have a knack for wanting to live and interact with like-minded people (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017). These coliving spaces are likely to facilitate bonding between nomads, which is essential for their well-being, given that they are living away from home and frequently do not know people in destinations where they settle temporarily (Widdicombe, 2016). In order for coliving spaces to be appealing to nomads, they must have a welcoming and pleasant vibe/atmosphere and possess features like “comfortable furniture, good lighting, plants, air-conditioning, [low] noise level[s], [high] internet speed and [good] coffee quality” (Chevtaeva, 2021, p. 205). They must also be situated in a convenient location, close to coworking spaces and local attractions (Chevtaeva, 2021). If these spaces are comfortable, well-equipped with the aforementioned items, based in a convenient location, and have a positive vibe (which, admittedly, is difficult to measure), the bulk of digital nomads report being content with their coliving space, with the only major drawback being feelings of segregation (from a social standpoint) from the local community (Chevtaeva, 2021). To combat this (real or perceived) segregation, it may be preferable to host social events to help integrate nomads into local communities. Specifically, it may be a nice gesture to host *Ceilidhs* or *Lobster Suppers* in their honour once a month or so at or near these coliving spaces, so that they may get a true sense of PEI culture and hospitality and ultimately feel welcomed.

Some of these nomads may also become emotionally attached to these communities due to the interactions they have with locals and may choose to live in PEI permanently when their visas expire (provided that there are no obstacles to them staying). Because many of these

nomads are young, affluent, educated and adept with technology, it could be a very positive occurrence if some of them choose to stay.

There is also a shortage of affordable housing on PEI at the moment, and perhaps one stipulation for building these coliving spaces, could be that a few units in these spaces must be reserved for low-income families to reside in on the cheap. Considerations should be given to where specifically these coliving spaces should be erected on PEI. Given that these nomads want coliving spaces to be located in beautiful and convenient (close to amenities) places, a good place to build a coliving space in PEI may be in a small municipality like Cornwall. Cornwall is close enough to downtown Charlottetown (15 minutes by car; 30 minutes on public transit, according to Google Maps) to be close to amenities, attractions and coworking spaces, but also far enough away to feel detached from the hustle and bustle of the city. There may also be cheap land to build on, given that it is located reasonably far away from the capital, although admittedly, this is pure conjecture. Additionally, Cornwall is very pretty and idyllic, has high-speed and stable internet connectivity in the area and is a “young, vibrant and growing town...” (Town of Cornwall, 2021). There are many other places on the island where coliving spaces could be built too.

Nomad Village: The relevant authorities should look into building a digital nomad village on PEI. If this village was created now, it would be the first in Canada and only the second in the world. The sole nomad village on the planet at the moment is in Madeira, which is a small Portuguese island in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Morocco. This village opened to nomads in February of this year (Smith, 2021). It is located in Ponta Del Sol, which is a small town of approximately 8,200 residents on Madeira’s south coast (Smith, 2021). It can host 100 nomads at

any given time and has hosted 300 so far (Smith, 2021). There will be two new villages opening soon in Funchal, the capital and in Santa Cruz, in eastern Madeira (Startup Madeira, 2021).

At the village in Ponta Del Sol, nomads are provided with access to a Slack channel and free high-speed internet from 8 am to 10 pm every day of the week at the John dos Passos Cultural Centre in town (Poitevien, 2021). *Startup Madeira*, which is the organization that founded this initiative, provides them with a free workspace and gives them access to various events (Startup Madeira, 2021). They have also partnered with *Flatio* and *NomadX* to help nomads find fully furnished short-term rentals on the island for the duration of their stay (Startup Madeira, 2021). Additionally, they have collaborated with companies in the area to create fun and engaging professional events where nomads may socialize and network with one another (Startup Madeira, 2021). The municipality of Ponta Del Sol is also invested in the well-being of its guests and has endeavoured to help nomads enjoy a healthy work-life balance by offering activities like mindfulness meditation, Reiki, yoga, and Tai Chi outside of working hours (Startup Madeira, 2021).

If the relevant authorities in PEI decide to pursue a digital nomad strategy, then they should look into creating a village akin to the one in Ponta Del Sol to accommodate these nomads. One potential location for this village could be Cornwall, but there are many other towns on the island that could host nomad villages (i.e. Stratford, Charlottetown, etc.). It could be an interesting concept for Tourism PEI and Startup Madeira to discuss creating a partnership program between the two islands, where nomads reside in PEI for part of the year and in Madeira for another portion of the year (perhaps six months in Madeira and six months in PEI). This is merely an idea, but it is one that could bear fruit for both islands, their residents and the nomads themselves.

Visas: Visas need to be created for digital nomads, so that they can (legally) work in PEI.

Numerous nomads likely work and earn money in many places around the world under the guise of being “tourists,” as it is quite difficult to track/monitor remote work. This *is* illegal, as “entering a country as a tourist generally doesn’t permit the traveller to work while living there” (Williams, 2021, para. 2). Therefore, a digital nomad visa program should be implemented and methods should be devised to enforce the rules. It will probably be the case that some people will still disregard the rules and work in PEI illegally. This is unfortunate, as it defrauds PEI and its residents of deserved funds (derived from visa fees) and frankly brings the nomad community into disrepute: however, most nomads should be honest, and if some of them are caught lying, then perhaps this small minority should be given stiff fines to discourage and hopefully even eradicate this type of behaviour.

A number of countries have already established visa programs for digital nomads. For instance, Bermuda has launched the *Work from Bermuda Certificate* that is valid for both workers and students. The government requires proof of enrollment for students and some form (this varies from person to person) of verification of employment for workers (Williams, 2021). Dominica possesses a unique program and has allowed employers to apply for a visa for their entire company, for a fee of \$800 USD. This visa permits any staff member from that organization that can work remotely to do so in Dominica for a set period of time for an additional fee; the fee per employee is \$500 USD for businesses with four or more employees (Williams, 2021).

The powers that be should endeavour to create an affordable (but not too cheap) and intuitive visa program in PEI, perhaps based on the two previously mentioned island nations’ ones. It is crucial to establish a reasonably priced visa; not pricey enough that it deters nomads

from coming to the island, but not cheap enough that the fee is rendered relatively meaningless, in terms of its contribution to PEI's economy. It is also imperative to contrive a timeframe for how long these nomads may reside on PEI: Most visas range between 6-12 months in duration, so PEI should create a visa program with that timeframe in mind. It may also be a good idea to set a minimum income threshold for nomads to be able to enter: this way you are able to ascertain that they have the individual purchasing power necessary to contribute to the local economy in earnest during their stay. It may also be shrewd to follow Dominica's lead and have companies apply for visas on behalf of their employees, with an initial administration fee to process the visas, followed by a fee per employee. Perhaps it may even be smart to proactively and aggressively pursue nomads by contacting a few large tech companies (reaching directly to the CEO or second in command) to see if they would advertise PEI as a digital nomad destination to their employees. One such company could be *Shopify*-a large E-commerce company which is 'digital by default', meaning that all of their employees are now working remotely in perpetuity. They would very likely be willing to listen to proposals (especially because they are proudly Canadian) and could encourage their employees to relocate to PEI.

Wi-Fi: The relevant authorities in PEI need to ensure that there is widespread high-speed, reliable internet on the island. Wi-fi is essential for digital nomads to have access to for both work and leisure during their stay. In fact, it is so crucial that nomads listed Wi-Fi as the most important amenity in a recent survey (Saltzman, 2021). Specifically, fibre-optic internet needs to be prioritized, as it is very fast and stable (Archer, 2021). There needs to be broad coverage implemented on PEI, as rural internet infrastructure must be upgraded, in case these nomads choose to live and work in rural portions of the province during their stay. PEI's government already has a plan to supply high-speed internet (up to 50 Mbps for downloads and 10 Mbps for

uploads) to 95% of civic addresses in the province by 2023 and to 100% of them by 2025 (Government of PEI, 2020). This is a wonderful initiative, and there is certainly much to be optimistic about: however, it is recommended that the provincial government research the feasibility of upgrading to fibre-optic technology, as it will make an enormous difference, providing speeds up to 940 Mbps (Archer, 2021), thus ensuring that nomads never have to fret over obtaining a fast, stable connection.

As well, it is recommended that a mobile hotspot is provided to each nomad that comes to PEI (assuming they do not have one with them already). This would be a very nice gesture and the hotspots would enable nomads to explore many remote parts of the island while still being able to procure a strong internet connection. These hotspots need to have a strong battery life, support 3 and 4G connections, be small and lightweight and capable of supporting multiple devices simultaneously (Archer, 2021). They could also be used as a marketing tool for the province, as nomads may keep them as souvenirs and show them to their friends, family and hopefully other nomads. It is also likely that these highly connected nomads would take pictures of these hotspots and share them on their social media platforms, which may lead to more visitation to the island in the medium and long-term.

It is also advisable that coworking and coliving spaces on the island are fitted (or potentially retrofitted) with fibre-optic technology. It may even be feasible to construct a gazebo or a similar structure at or near Cavendish Beach and transform this space into an outdoor (or semi-outdoor) coworking space during the summer months-a 'pop-up' coworking space, if you will-so that nomads may enjoy the fresh air, warm weather and splendid views that this area has to offer while they work.

Future Work: If I was afforded the opportunity to research the digital nomad phenomenon further, I would delve deeper into the literature to more precisely ascertain what motivates nomads to travel to certain destinations over others. I would also like to produce a comprehensive review of the digital nomad literature to see if there is any mention of motivation factors specific to *islands* that ‘pull’ nomads to these unique geographic spaces. I think that islands have many unique characteristics that render them captivating to ‘outsiders’ or ‘mainlanders,’ and I would like to know if any of the typical ‘fascination factors’ associated with them serve to enchant nomads and help to entice them to settle in these places.

Additionally, I would like to interview some of these nomads to gather information about the same topic, as conducting qualitative interviews can be an exceptionally valuable tool for reaping deep knowledge on a subject. If I were to do this, I would contact a number of nomads (probably at least 20-30, if not more) from around the world from diverse backgrounds and conduct open-ended interviews with them. The bulk of these interviews would likely take place online. I would then transcribe these interviews, read them over multiple times, and then code them, with the eventual objective of extracting key themes and subthemes from them. This could take a considerable amount of time, but this process would be immensely valuable for gaining a better understanding of who nomads are and what specifically motivates them to choose to reside in certain places over others.

Conclusion(s): It is evident that the digital nomad phenomenon is increasing in popularity. In the past decade or so, this movement was primarily being propelled by improvements in digital technologies that enabled location-independent work. More recently, it is also being impelled by the COVID-19 pandemic, as innumerable workers that reside in urban areas around the globe are becoming increasingly disgruntled with the situations they find themselves in (mainly due to

incessant restrictions being imposed upon them and the fact that viral transmission is higher in cities) and are seeking to live and work elsewhere. Countless digital nomads will make their way to islands around the world, mainly because these places have the reputation of being isolated, natural, beautiful and safe places. PEI fits the mould and therefore has the potential to become a leading digital nomad hub, both domestically and internationally, so long as it well-equipped with proper coworking spaces, comfortable and well-designed coliving spaces, an affordable and intuitive visa program, fast, reliable and extensive Wi-Fi and an intelligently planned and conveniently situated digital nomad village. The relevant authorities *must* act expeditiously to ensure that PEI does not fail to capitalize on this wonderful opportunity to transform its tourism sector for the better, to bolster its economy and to acquire tremendous human capital in the form of young, intelligent and tech-savvy individuals.

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