

# 9 Reasons Why My New Found Travel Love is Newfoundland, Canada

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Part 1  
St. John's





**W**hen people find out I'm a travel writer, they invariably ask me what my favorite place is. I usually answer, "That depends on what I'm in the mood for. My favorite exotic place would be Papua New Guinea. Favorite country might be Turkey. Favorite city is Buenos Aires. But the minute I returned from my last trip, Kauai, which had been holding firm as my favorite island for ages, got kicked to the curb by my new found love: Newfoundland."

**Before my trip**

My interest was first piqued after I canvassed numerous friends and travel writers and found that none of them had been to (or barely heard of) Newfoundland, Canada's easternmost province. Then I really got excited when I typed "Newfoundland" into the search box of Afar, one of my favorite travel magazines (right after Luxe Beat Magazine) and found zilch. Not one single, solitary mention! Wow, talk about flying-under-the-radar. Then I wondered if it was because there really isn't that much to see or do? Would there be enough to keep me busy for a week?

**After my trip**

Quick answer: you could easily plan a month for a visit to this breathtakingly gorgeous (we're talking Angelina Jolie pretty), marvelously quirky province. The day I returned from my "Cliff Notes" overview trip, I wrote to book a return visit to better explore this vast wilderness perched on the eastern most tip of North America.

**Quicky background info**

The province is actually named Newfoundland and Labrador incorporating the island of Newfoundland and mainland Labrador to the northwest, but most locals refer to them separately.

Even quicker history lesson: In 1949, Newfoundland (originally England's oldest overseas colony, said to be discovered by explorer, John Cabot, in 1497) joined Canada as its youngest province. Previously known as the "Grand Cod Fishery of the Universe" it fell upon hard times when the cod fishing ended. Due to a booming oil and gas industry it is now coming back with a vengeance.

Since I only had one week to visit, I was wisely advised to split my time between "in town" at the historic capital city of St. John's and "out of town" where I explored the spectacular coastal towns dotted along the Avalon Peninsula.

**Here are my top finds in St. John's**

**Where to Sleep?**

1. Leaside Manor- Even though you're at the edge of the world, there is no need to rough it. Pamper yourself with a stay at Leaside Manor, an impeccably maintained 1920's merchants home transformed into a charmingly eclectic B & B, located about a 20 minute stroll from downtown. If it's full, the Compton House, their lovely sister property, is next door, tucked away in an English garden. Both share the sweetest, most helpful staff imaginable.

**Pssst: They are happy to bring you breakfast in bed or if you're feeling truly decadent, you can light a fire and enjoy your meal while luxuriating in your double-size Jacuzzi.**

**Where to Eat?**

St. John's restaurant scene offers a full range of culinary adventures- from casual pubs serving traditional favorites to fine dining establishments that proudly feature locally sourced ingredients (imagine an endless array of fresh seafood including cod, lobster and snow crab, wild game, organic root vegetables and native berries such as bakeapple, partridge and marsh berries) creatively presented by passionate chefs who take great pride in their authentic cuisine. Some homey favorites to sample are moose pie, fishcakes, cod tongues, bakeapple cheesecake, toutons (fried bread) with molasses, and a classic Jiggs dinner that consists of salt beef, turnip, cabbage, potato, carrot, and peas pudding.

**Standout meals include:**

2. The quaint, yet oh-so-cool, 18th century Mallard Cottage (one of the oldest wooden buildings in North America) was purchased in 2011 by culinary trio, Chef Todd Perrin (a fan-favorite, Top Chef Canada competitor) his wife Kim Doyle and Sommelier Stephen Lee. The team was recently awarded the Southcott Award for excellence in their painstaking preservation of this marvelous cottage. They bring the same level of superior quality to their food, with a daily changing menu featuring Perrin's spin on Newfoundland classics using freshly

foraged, nose-to-testicle food from the area's finest purveyors (seriously, there was a thinly sliced pork testicle in my beautifully presented offal appetizer). Nabbing a stool in front of the action-packed open kitchen is like getting a free cooking class.

**Pssst: Afterwards, cross the street to the Inn of Olde (aka Linda's) one of St. John's most unique pubs. Linda could have a starring role on "The Hoarders" since every inch of the place is jammed-packed with her collection of spoons, army helmets, photos, biz cards and other fun memorabilia. No false advertising here- the owner, Linda will leave you spellbound with her fascinating stories.**

3. Bacalao- once you get settled in this intimate bungalow which is a covey of comfy, rambling dining rooms, order the "Iceberg Growler" which pairs perfectly with menu perusing. The hardworking owner, Andrea Maunder, is happy to share the recipe, because this is one cocktail you won't be able to duplicate at home--It's made with iceberg gin and served over 10,000+ year old iceberg ice cubes!

Maunder chose the name Bacalao, which means salt cod, for Newfoundlands time-honored main ingredient. She realized there was a niche in the local food scene so she and her hubbie chef-partner, were one of the first to cast a modern, innovative spin on old classics showcasing the area's finest sustainable ingredients. Bacalao's "soon-to-be-famous Seafood Chowder", a cornucopia of NL

seafood: cod, salmon, bay scallops, shrimp and snow crab in a refreshingly light cream broth, Jigg's Dinner Cabbage Roll, a sophisticated re-do of an old standard (salt beef, turnip, potato, and carrot rolled into a cabbage leaf) cleverly served with a pot liquor "shooter" & homemade mustard pickles, and Tongues and Cake, Bacalao's ode to the cod, a duo of lightly crisped cod tongues (similar to tender calamari) with a pan-fried salt cod cake are all delicious examples of their homegrown, nouvelle cuisine.

**Pssst: Maunder's inspired desserts are top-notch, so it's best order a few for sharesies. Be sure to include the spicy Honey Brown Ginger Cake made with local artisanal Quidi Vidi Honey Brown beer.**

4. Chinched Bistro is the perfect name for this cozy restaurant since "chinched" means stuffed to the max, which I certainly was after enthusiastically chowing down on the contemporary cuisine. The tag-line here is "Come for the food and stay for the... food" which certainly worked for me! Yet another talented culinary husband and wife team, Chef Shaun Hussey and Michelle LeBlanc, are racking up a loyal fan base for their imaginative, international cuisine based on traditional methods and local products. Exciting palate-pleasing entrees include spicy Korean Fried Octopus, Cod Tongue Tacos and Chicken & Waffles. The mussels were plump and juicy with a delectable Asian inspired miso broth, perfect for bread dunking.

**Pssst: One must-order is the house made Charcuterie Plate. Chef Shaun deserves a serious shout-out for the many months he spends handcrafting a variety of sausages, patés, and terrines. My still-life beauty included a chunky duck terrine, headcheese, cured seal, pickled eggplant, figs, semi-sweet IPA beer nuts etc. served with a bowl of assorted homemade crackers.**

### What to Do

5. Although downtown is quite compact I highly recommend that you kick- start your visit with an escorted van tour by McCarthy's Party. Not only will you get your bearings but you'll also have three-hours of Newfoundland 101- which brings to life the colorful history (starting with pirates all the way to how NFL became Canada's youngest province), culture and current events



that make this area so unique. Our informative leader, John Calver, also works in radio (great voice) patiently answered my many questions and if it weren't for his sharp eyes, we would have missed the spouting humpback whales. We started at Cape Spear, the most Easterly point in North America. Then off to a 360 degree killer view from the vantage point of Signal Hill while John regaled us with historic tales of North America's oldest colony. Other stops included Quidi Vidi Village, Government House, the Roman Catholic Cathedral and an orientation of the shops and restaurants of downtown St. John.

**Pssst: If you're looking for a good meal or where to hear the best music, John has some great suggestions.**

6. Quidi Vidi Village is a picturesque, old-timey, fishing village located on the outskirts of town. Plan on a good five minutes to walk from one end of this iconic village to the other. A photographer's dream spot, Quidi Vidi (there are many pronunciations but the easiest one is "Kiddy Viddy") was used after World War II for the construction of a United States' Air Force Base. It now boasts a population of 599. Check out the new Quidi Vidi Plantation, a craft incubation facility and home to a talented bunch of emerging artists. Visit, shop and connect with local artisans in their private studio space. I was particularly impressed by textile



artist, Megan Jackman, who handprints, sews and cobbles together leather and metal pieces for the one-of-a-kind handbags.

When you're done shopping, cross the street for a tasting tour (check the times first) at Quidi Vidi Brewery, Newfoundlanders beloved microbrewery. You'll be able to sample a slew of lip-smacking, award-winning brews, such as Eric's Red Cream Ale, named after Leif Ericson for his journey to North America 1000 years ago. But for sheer bragging rights, the winner has to be their pure Iceberg Beer made from 12,000-year-old iceberg water.

**Pssst: If you are here the first Wednesday in August (weather permitting) Q.V. holds the Royal St. John's Regatta, the oldest continuing sporting event in North**

**America. The first record of the event was in 1816, but rowing matches between ships crews have been held here since the 1700's.**

7. The Rooms - this huge, multi-faceted cultural space has it all going on: museum exhibits, art galleries highlighting local artists, archives, performance theatre, a restaurant and sweeping views of historic St. John's Harbour. While many locals delight in the uber-modern architecture, a distinguished blend of glass and steel designed to represent historic "fishing rooms" where Newfoundland families processed their catch, it also has its share of naysayers who say, "The Rooms looks like the box that the Basilica came in."

**Pssst: Make reservations at the popular Rooms Café before taking in the art exhibits. Specializing in**

**Newfoundland comfort food, this is a good spot to try Cod Tongues with scrunchions (fried pork bits) with a side order of the best view of the city.**

8. For something slightly less cerebral and the ultimate in barhopping, head to George Street. AKA "the biggest little street in the world" George Street claims to have more bars per square foot than any street in North America. Every night is party night here so pick a club, any club, to try. It's the pub version of channel surfing--if you don't like the scene, flip over to the next one. Some suggestions to get you started are: Lotties Place, kind of a dive but known for their cheap White Russians, drinks on the patio at Green Sleeves, or O'Reilly's Irish Newfoundland Pub which has some of the best live music.

**Pssst: If you want to get "screeched-in" the best place is said to be at Christian's Bar. The ceremony involves a shot of screech (cheap rum), a sentimental speech about what it means to be a Newfoundlander and the kissing of a cod.**

9. There's a good reason why Iceberg Quest Ocean Tours has been firmly entrenched in the #1 spot for Tripadvisor's activities in St John... because it's so freakin' amazing! Iceberg Quest is owned and operated by Captain Barry Rogers and his wildly enthusiastic wife, Carol Anne Hayes. She capably handles all the business transactions and everything else "on land" while Barry is

responsible for everything "on sea", a job he was seemingly born to having come from a long line of Newfoundland fishermen. The mission of this dynamic duo is to do everything in their power to ensure the most memorable experience imaginable.

After a run of chilly grey days, the sun shone brightly as I eagerly boarded the M.V. Cetacean Quest. I had seen a few icebergs the day before, at Cape Spear, but they looked like little white cotton balls from that far away. I was invited to join Capt. Barry in the wheelhouse where I peppered him with iceberg questions while he steered the ship through "The Narrows", past Cabot Tower, en route to Cape Spear.

My anticipation grew ten-fold when Captain Barry told me, "We're having the most phenomenal iceberg season. There has to be hundreds of icebergs around the island. This is the best season I've ever experienced."



I was completely blown away when I saw my first majestic frozen beauty sparkling white with neon bright turquoise highlights.

I asked him if he thought it was as big as our ship? He stifled a smile and politely informed me, "It's actually much bigger. Only about 10 per cent of an iceberg is visible while the rest is hiding below the surface of the ocean." Ah ha, so that's where the expression "tip of the iceberg" expression comes from.

Rogers told me, "These icebergs have broken off of 12,000 year old glaciers that cover much of Greenland. It might take them up to three years to float down here."

We were lucky because that was just the first of many bergs we saw that afternoon. Each one had a different shape, coloration and personality. I thought they'd make a wonderful cast for the next animated Disney film.

**Pssst: For more iceberg fun facts, check out the Iceberg Finder map at [icebergfinder.com](http://icebergfinder.com) for updates on the latest sightings.**

\* For more great itinerary ideas check out: Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism

