

Travel

Get Screeched In!

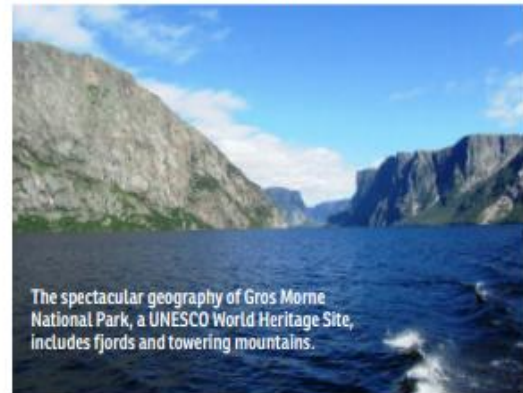
Let Newfoundland change you

Story and Photography by KYM WOLFE

Having met many a Newfoundlander over the years, I've long had an interest in visiting "The Rock." I envisioned myself immersed in a warm and friendly culture, drinking in amazing scenery and colourful fishing villages, and experiencing conversation steeped in a charming but sometimes indecipherable accent. This past summer I was finally able to make my way to Canada's eastern-most province, and I was not disappointed.

If a trip to Newfoundland is on your bucket list, 2017 might be an ideal year to go. To celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary visitors to all national parks and historic sites will enjoy free admission, and the province has a wealth of them, as well as other interesting things to see and do.

We started our adventure in Gros Morne National Park, sampling the rugged beauty and diverse terrain of Newfoundland's west coast. Each day of hiking revealed breathtaking vistas, and based on the different types of rocks that we saw there I suspect that this part of Canada must be a geologist's dream. The brown, barren Tablelands is one of the few places where a large stretch of the earth's mantle has been



The spectacular geography of Gros Morne National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, includes fjords and towering mountains.

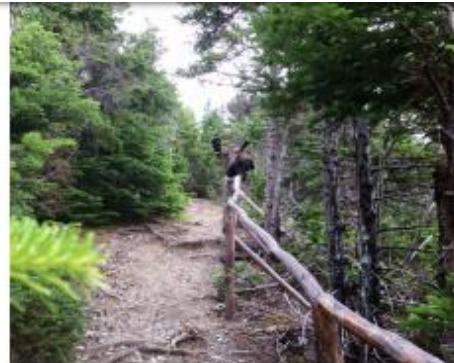


Parks Canada has placed pairs of red chairs around Gros Morne, for visitors to enjoy some of the country's prime vistas. These are at Red Point.

pushed to the surface (described as "a slice of ancient ocean floor"). Hike through and eventually you arrive at Old Man Cove and the lush Green Gardens along the Gulf of St. Lawrence, which are full of volcanic rock.

Gros Morne offered a different experience every day. We hiked through bog land and took the boat tour in Western Brook Pond (a former fiord carved by glaciers out of the massive rock cliffs — absolutely gorgeous); to the base of Gros Morne mountain (a challenging trail that rewarded us with spectacular views); around Lobster Cove Lighthouse and into the family home of the former lighthouse keeper; to Bakers Brook Falls (a fairly easy trail that leads to picturesque waterfalls); and one evening we watched the sunset from Green Point. It became a bit of a game to find the red chairs that Parks Canada has placed strategically at points where you can have a seat and enjoy the panorama.

We were warned not to drive between dusk and dawn because of



You never know who — or what — you might meet on the hiking trail. The author was surprised by this moose.

the danger posed by moose, but only saw one, and that one not on the road. When a planned afternoon of kayaking at Norris Point was cancelled due to choppy water we decided to climb a hill that promised scenic views. Signage warned that there was an aggressive moose on the trail, but locals told us that the animal was simply responding to a tourist who invaded its space while trying to take a selfie with it. "If you see it, just quietly back up and walk away," they advised. As we rounded a bend we were



treated to an up-close rear-view of the massive animal. I managed to snap a picture of it before backtracking...quickly and quietly. Our only other encounter with moose was at meal time; you can find moose burger on most menus.

Another highlight of our time in Gros Morne was being "screeched in" at a pub kitchen party in Rocky Harbour. We dutifully kissed the cod, danced a jig, played a musical instrument (mine was an "ugly stick"), sang a song, recited a pledge including a promise to "honour and respect me codfadders and me codmudders," and downed a shot of Screech (40% proof rum). We walked back to our hostel singing east coast songs and enjoying our new status as Honorary Newfoundlanders.

We were lucky enough to head out of town just ahead of the rain clouds, making our way to the northern coast's New World Island and the picturesque village of Twillingate. On our first night we enjoyed fresh lobster and entertainment at the NWI Twillingate Dinner Theatre. It is run by a talented and hilarious



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ABOVE: Auk Island Winery in Twillingate produces wines made from local wild berries.

LEFT: Some hiking trails, like this one near Twillingate, are more challenging than others.

BELOW: House construction on Battery Hill

group of men and women who both prepare the meal and perform on stage. The evening was filled with songs, skits, jokes and humorous stories. Over the next two days we enjoyed more hiking, more spectacular views, a shed party (very much like a kitchen party, but held in a garage), and our first glimpse of an iceberg.

Before leaving Twillingate we stopped for a tour and tasting at Auk Island, one of two Newfoundland wineries that produce unique wines crafted with wild berries, locally grown fruits, and some with iceberg water. We loved Auk Island's eye-catching labels and clever names, from Moose Joose to 3 Sheets to the Wind. On our way to St. John's we stopped at Rodrigues Winery and Distillery in Whitbourne and sampled some award-winning wines. As Newfoundland's only commercial distillery, Rodrigues also produces liqueurs, schnapps, brandies and vodka. It's in a former hospital, and many of the rooms, like the nursery, still have the original names on the doors.

By the time we got to St. John's, we had switched our mind-set from trekker to "townie." We took in tourist staples like Signal Hill and Cape Spear (the most eastern place in North America), and walked past colourful "jelly-bean" rowhouses on our way to the shops on Duckworth and Water Streets. We visited Battery Hill and wondered at the homes built into the rocks where everything — from building materials to appliances — would have had to be hand-bombed.

We drove a little of the Irish Loop when we went to Bay Bulls for Gatherall's puffin and whale watch boat tour. The fog was too thick to see any whales but we enjoyed the



A kitchen party at the QuidiVidi brewery.

playful puffins, and the sheer volume of birds on Baccalieu Island was mind-boggling.

The Rooms, which houses the provincial museum, art gallery and archives, is well worth a visit. The exhibit about WWI and its impact on Newfoundland, particularly the battle of Beaumont-Hamel, was heart-wrenching.

We discovered the Newman Wine Vaults quite by accident when we decided to take the hop-on/hop-off trolley (just \$5 for a day pass). One of the oldest structures in St. John's, the massive brick and stone wine cellars were built to age port wine — possibly the only place outside of Portugal that has ever done so. We enjoyed the tour and the building so much, we returned the next night to see a play performed there by the Shakespeare by the Sea Festival theatre group.

Our entry fee to the wine vaults also got us into the Commissariat, which was built in the early 1800s as the home of the supply officer for the British military. The clever exhibits in the carriage house give you a good grasp of Newfoundland's back story as one of the first independent dominions in the British Empire, and of the roots of the fierce pride that Newfoundlanders have in their history and heritage.

There are so many good restaurants in St. John's, it is impossible to try them all. We particularly enjoyed the Bernard & Stanley Gastropub on Duckworth Street which bills itself as the spot for rustic comfort food, and the Yellow Belly Brewery and Public House at the foot of George Street. The Yellow Belly is located in a heritage building, and bills the basement UnderBelly as one of the oldest rooms in Canada, and St. John's only speakeasy.

We happened to be in St. John's during the George Street Festival. For six nights the two-block street becomes a concert venue and one big street party. We found a place to sit with a great view of the stage on the night that the Trews and Our Lady Peace were performing,



Yellow Belly Brewery and Public House at the foot of George Street.

and the weather was perfect for an outdoor evening concert. Outside of the festival, this is a great street to visit anytime, as it is packed with side-by-side pubs, bars and restaurants where you can enjoy live music every night.

We also enjoyed live music at our last kitchen party before leaving Newfoundland, which took place at the QuidiVidi brewery. We had enjoyed a tour and tasting earlier in the day, as well as a visit to the neighbouring Quidi Vidi Village Plantation. The Plantation houses artisan studios where you can see artists at work creating a range of handmade items, from woodcut prints and textiles to unique jewellery made with Viking wireknitting.

Far too soon we were heading to Argentina to catch the ferry back to Nova Scotia. We made a quick side trip to Cupids, the site of the first English settlement in Canada dating back to 1610. Our tour guide was quite enthusiastic about the different artefacts that she had been involved in unearthing at the archeological dig.

Overall we felt that same enthusiasm and friendliness wherever we went in Newfoundland. It is a province that has a unique sense of place and culture, and it was lovely to immerse myself in it for a short time. I would definitely visit again ... although, sadly, I don't think I'll make it back in 2017. 🍷

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