

Newfoundland 2017

This trip report is our Newfoundland summer visit that was planned by my Canadian cousins.

The first thing I learned about Newfoundland was that their time zone was 1½ hours out of sync with London, Ontario where my cousins live. I had only ever been to places that required multiples of whole hours to correct to their time zone. When Keeb and I discussed it, he felt that some South American countries may also fall in that time zone.

On the first day of the holiday, we arrived at Deer Lake airport and settled into the Marble Resort – a ski resort during the winter. The next morning, I made the supreme sacrifice of getting up at the crack of dawn to join my cousins, Helen and Ty, on the Four Seasons Boat Tour at the Bay of Islands. The guide caught fish and threw them into the water so we could see the eagles swooping down to get the catch. This form of baiting is not done in the national parks, but I must say it afforded us some great views of the eagles. After the tour, the guide took us to his cabin and boiled up fresh mussels in seawater that were delicious. He also gave us three cod fish that he caught which we had for dinner that night.

After the tour, we had breakfast at a tiny diner, and we mentioned to the owner that we had seen a house with a “big fresh scallops” sign. She immediately called her neighbours to say her customers were coming over to buy scallops. When we knocked on the door, a lady in a house coat let us into her kitchen and dived into her fridge pulling out a parcel of scallops, while her husband entered the room bare back. If this was their attire having being warned strangers were coming, one can only guess at what they look like for surprise visits.

When we got back to Marble Resort, Keeb had booked Helen, her daughter Jade and me for a ziplining tour that afternoon which was awesome. This was the highest zipline in Canada at the time – the guides drove us up the mountain in a van and then we ziplined down in stages, crossing a gorge, trees and a waterfall.

The next day we headed for Woody Point, stopping on the way to visit the Gros Morne National Park Tablelands Discovery Centre. The park features a mesa of red rock that is the earth’s mantle – this is one of the few places one can see the mantle. Ty and Jade took the most challenging hike to the top and the rest of us did smaller walks near the centre. Helen and I came across two small cemeteries within feet of each other – one Catholic (fenced off) and the other Protestant. The separation made me imagine that spending eternity with each other was unconscionable.

Newfoundland 2017 continued

We took a picturesque walk at Trout River and I was charmed by the wildflowers everywhere. People in this area knitted colourful socks and hung them on their clothes lines as advertisements. We ate at a restaurant overlooking the bay. This bay was where a blue whale had washed up many years ago and its skeleton was part of a whale exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum at the time.

Now our accommodations that day was called The Rooms and they were beautifully outfitted. I vaguely noted that Keeb's and my view looked out onto a cemetery but did not give it much thought. When we returned that afternoon, a full-blown burial was in progress, so we tried to be as inconspicuous as possible..

The next day we then made our way to the dock where we were to be taken to Quirpon (pronounced Carpoon) Island. Now the weather was not optimal, so we were given a choice to get to the island. I took a larger boat and when we alighted on the island, the rest of our journey was made in an all-terrain vehicle (ATV). The rest of the party took the smaller Zodiac boat to the island braving the rough seas but dropping off at the boathouse near where we would be staying. Now I thought I had chosen the more sedate mode of transport to the island; however, the ATV driver swivelled his head around to us, like an owl, to chat with us while going at breakneck speed over disjointed planks. I held on grimly to the railings between me and the front seat and agreed to everything he said. Forty-five minutes later, I wobbled out of the ATV swearing to myself that I would take the Zodiac on the return trip to the mainland, whatever the weather.

Quirpon Island was our home for three days. There were four buildings: a light house, two cabins and a boathouse. We settled into our cabin and saw humpback whales in the surrounding waters through the windows.

We took the Zodiac whale watching tour one day and I was thrilled at how close we were to the whales. At one point a whale flapped its fin at us, and it felt like a greeting. We saw several whales on that tour including one that was sleeping. We also saw icebergs on the horizon.

The people looking after us were warm and friendly. We had set meals each day and the ladies in the kitchen made sure Keeb and I had alternatives if meat was the main course for everyone else. One day they made macaroni pie for Keeb and me for lunch and when I mentioned not eating cheese, without missing a beat the lady serving said she will make me "heg sandwich". This was fine once I worked out that I was getting egg.

Newfoundland 2017 continued

We were completely unplugged on the island and after dinner played board games with the other guests. Keeb was particularly amused with all the wheeling and dealing that Jade was doing in a monopoly game. Such a shark!

When we departed Quirpon Island, we hit the road and stopped at various points of interest including a mural in a hospital done in large ceramic tiles. The artist, Jordi Bonet, also did a mural for JFK Airport. We stayed at the Tuckermore Country Inn and I remarked to Helen that there were so many stuffed animals on the walls of the dining room including a polar bear stretched across one of the walls. I felt like I was being glared at reproachfully. She explained the Inn mentioned their taxidermy on their website. I would not have thought that would be an attraction...

Our next stop was Cow Head – I am not making that name up. That night Helen and I went to a dinner theatre show called the "S.S. Ethie" that told the 1919 story of a ship. This ship was purposely beached in bad weather to save those on board and the good news is everyone survived. The unusual thing about this performance was that the actors were also our wait staff. So, during the intermission, they brought out our dinners. It felt kind of cheeky to me to be making food requests to the guy who was the captain on stage.

The next day we made a few stops to sites of interest and we made sure to go to the site of the S.S. Ethie. There were a few bits of rusted debris on the beach and in the water. Keeb wickedly suggested that since we were none the wiser, the good people running Gros Mourné Park could just as well be topping up the site with contemporary rusty pieces as the authentic ones disintegrated, in an effort to keep this historic site alive.

That day we also took the Western Brook Pond Boat tour and the scenery leading to this land locked fjord was beautiful. On the return trip to the dock the boat played sea shanties for us including "What shall we do with a drunken sailor" and I surprised Keeb by singing along with the others. My Dad, who learned it as a sea scout, taught that song to us as children.

Fun fact on "Mumming" – you may have heard Loreena McKennitt's song "The Mummer's Dance". It turns out mumming is a tradition in Newfoundland started by settlers from Great Britain in the 1800s. People disguised themselves at Christmas by covering their faces with cloth and went to neighbours' houses where they danced a jig. The neighbours would then guess their identity.