

## Newfoundland, Canada: Avalon Peninsula

by Erin Martin, PassPorter Guest Contributor

It's been said that Newfoundland Canada is as close to heaven as you can get here on earth. Whether you agree or not, this island's natural beauty will certainly leave you breathless. Located on the eastern coast of Canada, and just a four hour plane ride from New York, Newfoundland is a whole new world for the senses.

Since there is so much land to cover in one trip, the focus of our visit was the Avalon Peninsula. This area to the far east of the island is home to half of the entire population of Newfoundland. As is the case for most of Newfoundland, nature is the highlight. Everywhere you look are vast expanses of untouched land filled with trees, mountains, and cliffs. Be on the lookout for wildlife as well, even where you least expect it. The locals will tell you that the biggest danger on the highway here is not crazy drivers, but moose! If you are driving, be mindful that they can appear anywhere, even on the Trans-Canada Highway.

Although, you can attempt to see wildlife anywhere, Newfoundland has created wildlife reserves for those who want to focus on seeing animals. We chose to take a tour of the [Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve](#) located on the Cape Shore. After a drive to this coastal point, we walked out to the edge of the cliffs to find over 350 species of birds everywhere. These birds are in their natural environment and are free to come and go as they please. The reserve is so much a part of nature that you can walk right over a cliff if you're not careful! Neither you nor the birds are contained, but the end result is a place where people and birds can meet naturally. If the birds don't amaze you, then the view of the cliffs and ocean certainly will. While this was the only reserve we visited, there are others. Boat tours are also popular here and can take you out to see the native wildlife, which includes whales and puffins.

Even though nature lovers will be at home in Newfoundland, rest assured that those with a passion for history will not be far behind. History buffs will love a stop at [Signal Hill National Historic Site](#), located in St. John's Newfoundland. Signal Hill is where Marconi received the first transatlantic radio signal in 1901 and it also provided harbor defenses for the city from the 18th century up until World War II. The drive up this steep and windy hill takes you first to the Visitor's Center where tours can be had for a fee. Also located directly outside the Visitor's Center is the area where the Signal Hill Tattoo performs 19th century military drills. We unfortunately missed the last drill of the day,

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so we headed further up the hill to see the fortifications that remained. You will find remains of the fortresses as well as plenty of cannons for prime photo opportunities. You can also find a fantastic view of the city of St. John's on one side, and the vast ocean on the other. Even if history doesn't interest you, the view from Signal Hill is worth the trip. You might even see some wildlife. On our visit, we could actually see a whale shooting water up out of the ocean. It was another amazing moment.

Signal Hill isn't the only place for history. St. John's, the capital of Newfoundland, is one of the oldest cities in North America, having had people living in it since the 1620s. Here history meets current culture, with everything from historical churches to Starbucks. Just driving through the city is a tour in itself. This city provides something for everyone and we tried to do a little of everything.

We made a stop at [The Rooms](#), which is a museum/art gallery. The Rooms is housed in a beautiful building, consisting of several floors. Each floor holds different rooms, with different themes from history to art. In one room we learned about the history of Newfoundland and in another room we learned about native animals. We also were able to see local artists' work as well as more famous paintings and photographs. One of my favorite "rooms" was filled with Newfoundland artifacts with everything from old hand washers to carriages to bikes.

From here we made a quick drive over to the Basilica of St. John the Baptist. This Roman Catholic Church was built in the mid-1850s and is a sight to see. The architecture and stained glass outside as well as the detail inside are worth seeing. Tours are available from June to September, but you can choose to explore the church on your own.

In the heart of St. John's you can find other entertainment. Shopping can be had on Water Street, with everything from local crafters to kitschy souvenirs. This is the place to shop for all the "Newfoundland" memorabilia you could want! One place you definitely have to stop is the Downhomer. This large store has a whole section of books written about Newfoundland or by Newfoundlanders. There is even a children's section, which houses some interesting titles. Don't forget to check upstairs, where you can buy a variety of prints of photographs and paintings done by locals.

Once the shopping is done we headed a block over to world-famous George Street. This street is said to have the most bars per square foot in North America. Whether that's true or not, there are quite a few crammed into the street. The street only allows foot traffic and people stumble from one bar to the next. We visited on a Friday night and found quite a few of the bars to have live entertainment. We enjoyed a

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few beers and a local guitarist/singer at Greensleeves Pub. We then made our way to [Trapper John's](#) to be "screeched in."

To truly be one of the locals, all visitors to this island need to partake in this ritual. It involves taking a shot of screech (which is a strong Jamaican rum sold in Newfoundland) and then kissing a cod fish on the lips. At Trapper John's you take the shot, but kiss the bottom of a stuffed penguin. After that they give you a certificate stating that you have been officially "screeched in." It sounds strange, but it's certainly a lot of fun and not to be missed on your trip!

Being "screeched in" on George Street was the last hurrah to a fabulous trip. Our week spent seeing the sights was a whirlwind of activity and there was really much more to see and do. If you ever have the chance to venture that far north, definitely make a stop in Newfoundland. No matter what part of the island you visit, you certainly won't regret it!

*About The Author: Erin Martin is a first time contributor to PassPorter News, as well as a Disney addict who loves to travel to Walt Disney World and on the Disney Cruise Line.*

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