

Finding Newfoundland

My husband and I had no trouble getting to Newfoundland. One Air Canada flight took us to Toronto and another delivered us to St. John's, the capital of the easternmost Canadian province.

The Vikings had a considerably more difficult time. More than 1,000 years before, Leif Erikson and his followers rowed their wooden boats across the North Atlantic from Greenland and set up a sturdy encampment of turf-walled buildings.

With no offense intended to Christopher Columbus — this was definitely the first European settlement in North America. Now called L'Anse aux Meadows, it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978.

Our visit was thrilling. Walking in the Vikings' footsteps is right

up there with my top most memorable travel experiences. It was a sunny, but blustery, day and the wild sea churned all around us as the interpretive guide explained that successive expeditions of Norsemen had traveled to the site they called "Vinland" to gather hardwood lumber for their Greenland colony. Very convincing Viking re-enactors enhanced our encounter by telling Norse tales around an open fire inside a re-constructed sod hut.

In this remote and windswept spot, I hardly expected to find a great option for a late lunch, but was pleasantly surprised to happen upon The Norseman Restaurant. At a table overlooking the water, I enjoyed rocket (arugula) salad with candied pecans, blue cheese, and green apple followed by lobster gnocchi.

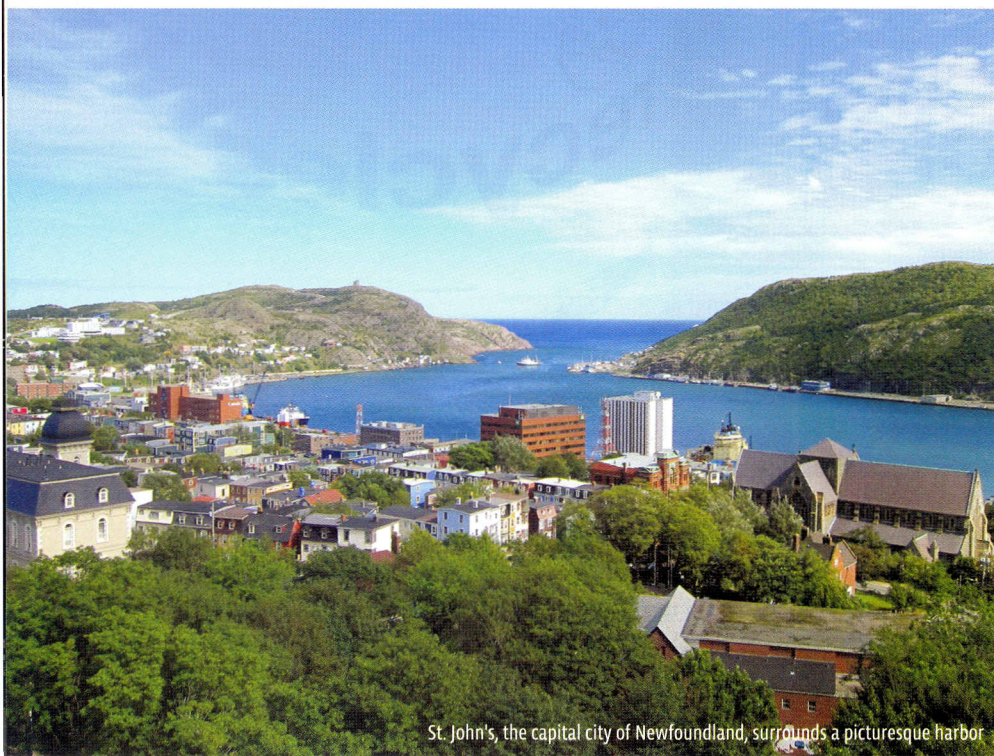
Re-enactors at L'Anse aux Meadows tell the story of the first European settlement in North America



Richard opted for the warm salad of seared scallops and a caribou burger. (www.valhalla-lodge.com/restaurant)

Since we hadn't been overwhelmed by great food since arriving in Newfoundland, I inquired about the chef and learned that Adrian Noordhof is from Calgary. Wife Gina grew up near L'Anse aux Meadows and bought two restored houses from another local — author Annie Proulx (*The Shipping News*). These are now vacation rentals and, in addition, Gina's mother owns the nearby Valhalla Lodge B&B.

Newfoundland's other UNESCO World Heritage site — Gros Morne National Park — is known for its unique geology and beautiful landscapes. We enjoyed our stay at the charming Neddies Harbour Inn right on the water in Norris Point. Owners Bettina Lori and Herbert Schuhmacher are natives of St. Moritz, Switzerland.



St. John's, the capital city of Newfoundland, surrounds a picturesque harbor

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In 1994, they visited friends in Gros Morne and knew this was the place for them. The best water views are from rooms 104 and 108. (www.grosmorne.info.pc.gc.ca, www.theinn.ca)

Who else has found their way to Newfoundland? Well, apparently Prince Charles and his wife Camilla because our room at the lovely Ryan Mansion in St. John's was furnished with a framed photo of them standing next to the front door. (www.ryanmansion.com)

This delightful boutique hotel is located in a leafy suburb within walking distance of central St. John's. Owners Kevin Nolan and Robert Hall restored and joined two neighboring houses built by a wealthy merchant and his brother

Ferryland Lighthouse picnics include a gourmet lunch, a cozy blanket, and a blue water panorama



in 1909 and 1911. All eleven rooms come with fireplaces, antique four-poster beds, high-thread-count linens, spacious bathrooms with heated marble floors, and signed and numbered etchings. (Marc Chagall was in our room.) A spa, fitness center, and library are available to guests and a gourmet breakfast is included in the tariff. The staircase, with its pineapple finials, was made by the craftsman who built the one on the *Titanic*, and Ryan Mansion offers *Titanic* dinners on request — same menu, replica china. The ship sunk 350 miles off the Newfoundland coast on April 15, 1912.

The Johnson Geo Centre in St. John's also has an extensive *Titanic* exhibit, but every new arrival should start their sightseeing at The Rooms, a state-of-the-art museum and gallery where exhibits make clear the importance of cod fishing in this area, explain why half the current population of

Newfoundland is of Irish descent, and introduce the legendary Sir Wilfred Grenfell. (www.geocentre.ca, www.therooms.ca)

If you have time for only one daytrip from St. John's, head to the Avalon Peninsula, where you can watch the Colony of Avalon, an early 17th-century English settlement, being excavated at Ferryland and, if you pre-book, enjoy a Lighthouse Picnic. These gourmet picnics are served on the grounds of the picturesque red and white Ferryland Head Lighthouse. In addition to a hamper full of goodies, guests are given a blanket to sit on while enjoying the surrounding water view. (www.lighthousepicnics.ca)

The Vikings never had it this good.

For more info on Newfoundland, see www.ranchandcoast.net. You can also access my "Luxury Travel" and "Inside La Jolla" blogs on our Web site. ELIZABETH HANSEN

More than 1,000 years ago, the Vikings built sod and timber structures like this one at L'Anse aux Meadows

Gros Morne Adventures offers sea kayaking excursions on Bonne Bay, where it's common to see whales, bald eagles, and mink