

In cod's country

A generation after the collapse of one of the world's great fisheries, Newfoundland is thriving, as the Canadian island has begun to share its secrets: icebergs in summer, breaching humpback whales, and the most charming seaside villages on this side of the Atlantic

WORDS **TARAS GRESCOE** @grescoe
PHOTOGRAPHS **LUCY HEWETT** @lucyhewett

CANADA'S ICEBERG ALLEY



On a beach draped with seaweed, on Eastern Canada's Bonavista Peninsula, Duane and Renee Collins are hosting their version of the 'Screech In', the rite of passage that welcomes newcomers to Newfoundland. In the rowdy pubs of George Street in the capital, St John's, CFAs – or Come From Aways, the local name for those not lucky enough to be born on 'the Rock', as Newfoundland is known – are made to down a shot, or three, of a dark rum called Screech and then plant a kiss on the clammy lips of a frozen cod.

Beside a campfire, Duane pours healthy slugs of Screech into enamel mugs. He has just oared his 16-foot rowing boat over four nautical miles of swelling North Atlantic, all the while teasing his passengers with yarns of close encounters with 40-ton humpback whales. Meanwhile, his wife and business partner, Renee, has laid out a fisherman's feast: salmon steaks, salt-cured cod, smoked capelin and pan-seared sea trout, to be followed by rectangles of bangbelly, a dense cake made with salt pork, stuffed with tart red partridge berries and slathered with butter-cream sauce. 'That's what Newfoundlanders do,' says Duane, who

runs Hare Bay Adventures with Renee. 'At the end of the day, we like to have a chat, tell stories, and share some good food. It's like fishing off the dock, having a boil-up on the beach, or rowing in the ocean – a quintessential Newfoundland experience.'

Then a real-life 'screech' rends the air. An osprey, after plucking its own meal from the waves, wings triumphantly inland. The iridescent fish wriggling in its talons is a capelin, the oily bait-fish whose ups and downs map the rise, fall and gentle rebirth of rural Newfoundland.

For 400 years, the cod that feasted on North Atlantic capelin meant survival, and even prosperity, for Newfoundlanders. Small boats, setting out from hundreds of outports – small coastal communities, most unserved by roads – couldn't dent the vast biomass that turned the Grand Banks, the fishing ground on Newfoundland's continental shelf, into one of the planet's most reliable sources of protein. By 1968, ruthlessly efficient factory trawlers from Europe and Asia were landing enough cod to stretch head-to-tailfin three times around the world. Then the catch nose dived, and in 1992 the Canadian government declared a moratorium. Overnight, 30,000 Newfoundlanders ➡

Below: Heritage buildings of Artisan Inn, overlooking the bay in the village of Trinity



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Views out over the Atlantic Ocean from Signal Hill, an historic fortification and landmark of St John's.

Opposite: Bryan Oram and his tattoo

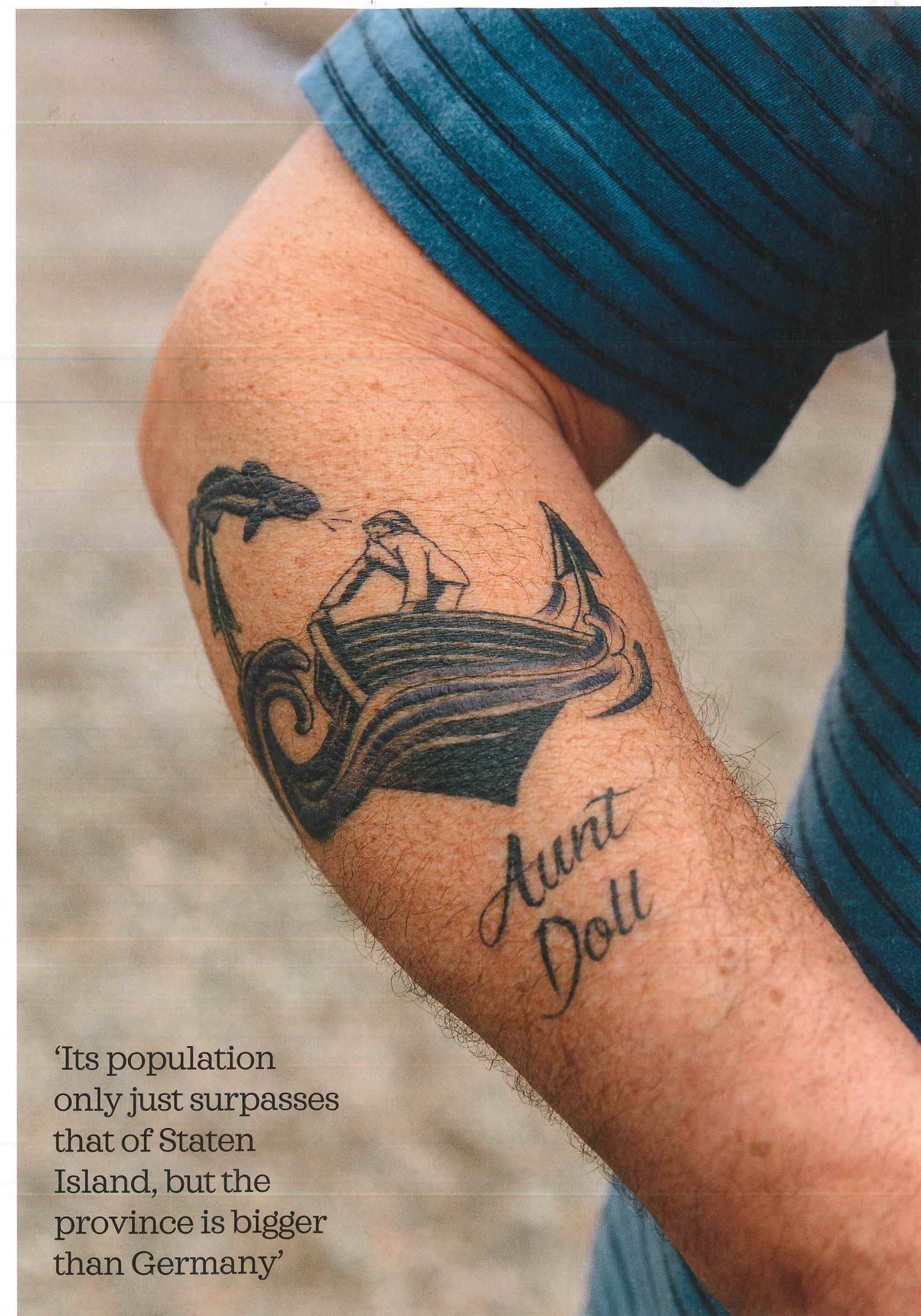
were put out of work. One in eight would leave their birthplace, many for high-paying jobs in the tar sands of Alberta. Over a quarter of a century later, the cod show no signs of recovering. Even the capelin, whose massive migrations lured whales inshore and marked the beginning of summer, have become rarer in the water.

But Newfoundlanders are nothing if not resourceful. While Renee and Duane joined the exodus to the Canadian mainland, not a day went by that they didn't pine for their old life. Now the couple are back in Hare Bay, leading richly narrated hikes and water adventures that bring visitors up close to the local geology, ecology and culture. Two local fishermen have joined the circle around the campfire. Bryan, whose forearm sports a tattoo of a fisherman spearing a cod – adapted from the logo on the Screech label – has taken to catching bigger fish. With his son Alec, he takes visitors offshore to chum for sharks on his 38-foot-long liner. At time, they can bring up half a dozen, including

porbeagles and 800-pound tiger sharks. It's strictly catch-and-release and the season, from July to October, is short, but they make a good living at it.

'The thing about Newfoundland', says Alec, 'is that it's still undeveloped, as far as tourism is concerned – all of this vast beautiful country we have. Now we and people like Duane and Renee are starting to tap into it. And people love what they see.'

There's a lot of Newfoundland to see. Though its population only just surpasses that of New York's Staten Island, the province, which includes Labrador on the Canadian mainland, is geographically larger than Germany. Its history is equally impressive. When Sir Humphrey Gilbert arrived in 1583 to claim the 'Newe Founde Land' in the name of Queen Elizabeth I, St John's harbour was already packed with Portuguese, French and Basque fishing vessels. (Archaeological evidence in L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern coast suggests Vikings may have settled here as early as 1000 AD.) Permanent settlers, discouraged by early ➔



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administrations that viewed Newfoundland foremost as a source of fish and fur, stubbornly made homes for themselves. Eventually they studded 6,000 miles of coastline with such gloriously named communities as Come by Chance, Dildo and Trepassy, where an estimated 66 distinct dialects were spoken.

One of the grandest communities was Trinity, north of St John's on the Bonavista peninsula. Settled by Dorsetmen who made fortunes building ships for the cod fishery, Trinity claims to be the site of North America's first court case, its first fire engine and its first smallpox inoculations. When Tineke Gow came here, Trinity's year-round population had fallen from a peak of 2,000 to 300. Handsome homes, some brought stone-by-stone from England's West Country, lay scattered over a grassy headland, paint peeling.

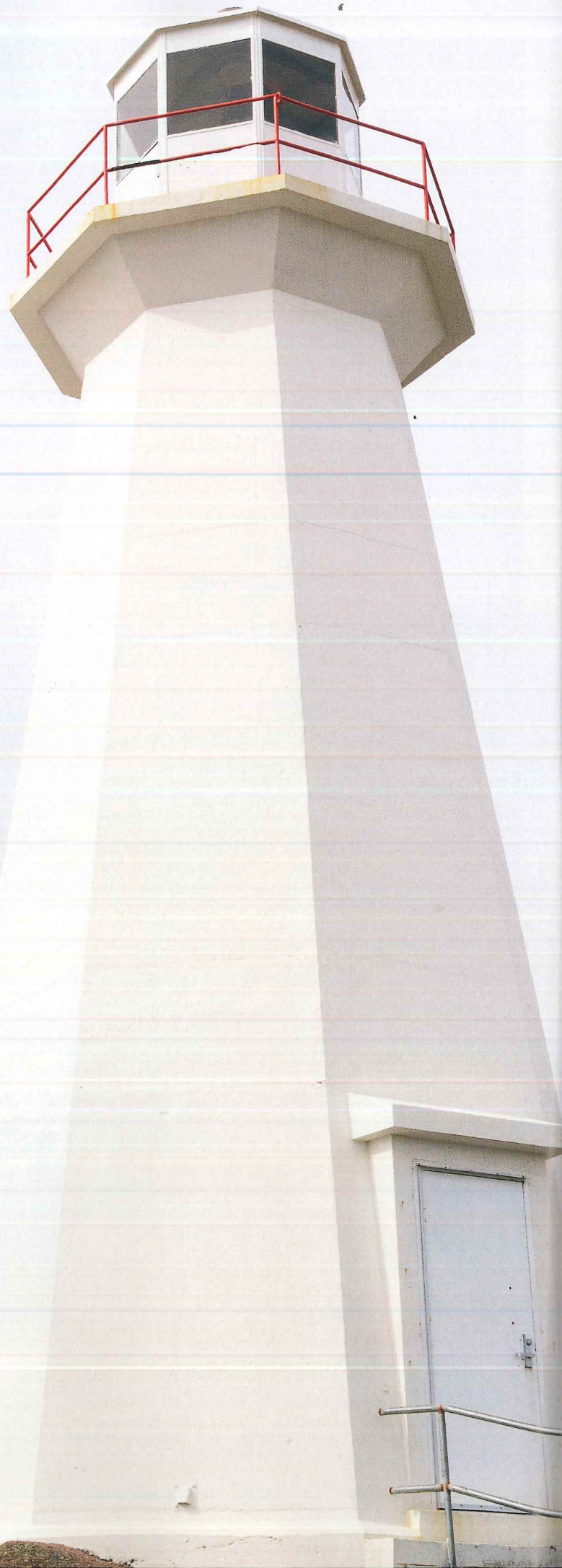
'We bought a little place here for \$4,000,' recalls Gow, whose English still retains traces of her upbringing in Holland. 'The locals thought I'd been taken, paying that much for a derelict house.' She turned the 1840 schoolmaster's home into Trinity's first B&B, which had the town's first queen-sized bed. An old fishing shed on the bay became the Twine Loft, now a sought-after dining destination serving locally sourced seafood with European flair. With her daughter Marieke, Gow now rents out six restored heritage homes to visitors.

Trinity, following its near-death experience, now attracts young people in search of a simpler life outside the city; they staff a coffee roasting house, a cooperage and a community theatre called Rising Tide.

'The tourists are the fish now,' says Tineke with a chuckle, as she finishes a plate of maple blueberry chicken in the Twine Loft. Marieke shoots her mother a look, but agrees. 'Tourism has helped to preserve a lot of culture and heritage that would have disappeared otherwise. Our staff take pride in talking to guests about what life is like here in Trinity: where they go snowmobiling in winter, or how their husbands and wives go out fishing.'

But the transformation of rural Newfoundland was well under way even before the cod disappeared. After April Fool's Day 1949, when Britain's oldest colony became Canada's newest province, the new government encouraged fishing families to resettle from remote communities served by costly coastal steamers to growth centres reachable by road. By 1974, some 250 fishing villages had been abandoned and, with them, the small, strong worlds Newfoundlanders had proudly created in improbably desolate surroundings.

A lighthouse has operated on Cape Spear since 1836. This is the easternmost point on Canada's coast



Tineke Gow with her daughter, Marieke, innkeepers at Artisan Inn, Trinity. Right: lunch at Sansome & Sons Lobster Pool, Twillingate. Below right: Bruce Miller of Rugged Beauty Boat Tours, New Bonavista



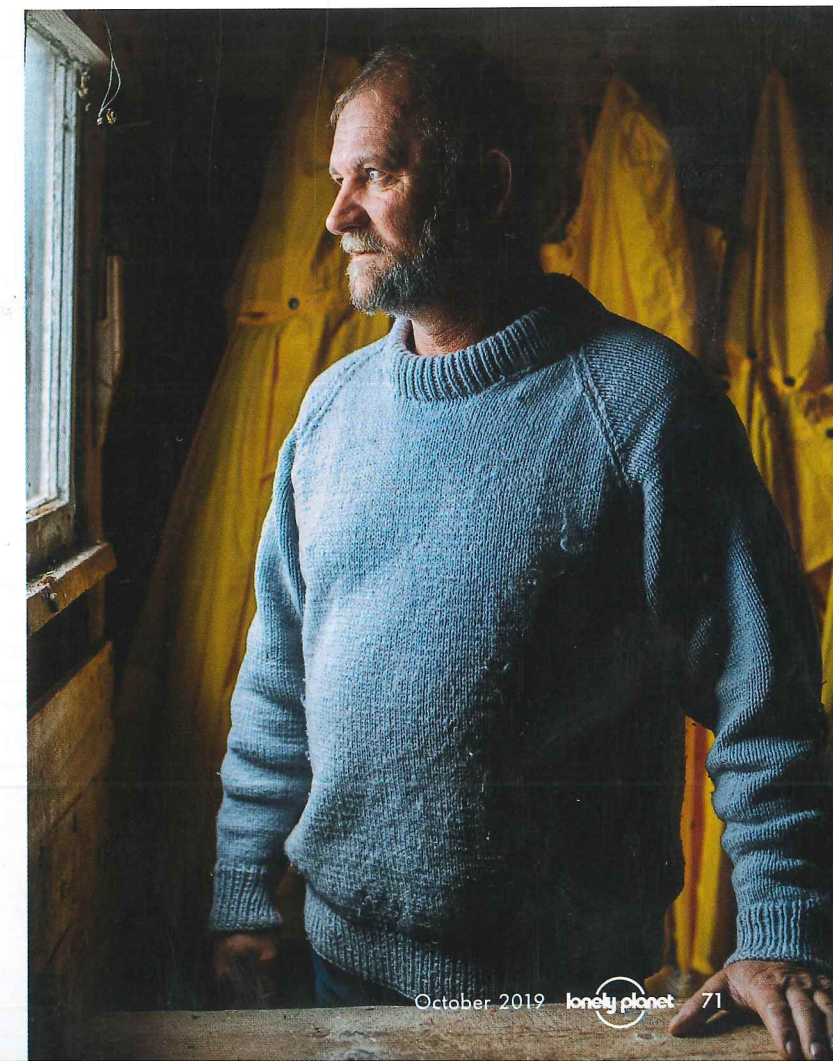
'God love the tourism industry. It's the only thing I ever saw grow around here'

'My uncle Joe said sailing out of Ireland's Eye was the hardest thing he'd ever done,' says Bruce Miller, a former crab fisherman who moors his 27-foot tour boat, *Rugged Beauty*, in the village of New Bonaventure. 'You're leaving your dead parents in the cemetery. Those communities were self-sufficient. You built your own house, and most everybody kept sheep and horses.'

Miller, who grew up in the outport village of Kerley's Harbor, now makes a living taking a dozen visitors at a time on tours of the uninhabited islands, where steeples lie in the grass and saltbox cottages are overgrown with weeds. 'Modern technology and greed killed the fishery. The cod didn't stand a chance. God love the tourism industry. It's the only thing I ever saw grow around here.'

While offshore oilrigs bring tax revenue to the province, they don't provide many jobs. Snow crab and northern shrimp, which have thrived since cod populations slumped, continue to bring in big money for fishermen and packers, but the seasons are measured in weeks, rather than months. Tourism is proving to be one of the most reliable employers in rural Newfoundland, which is good news for those young people who find its beauty irresistible.

Bonnie Stag is one of the returnees. After working in mines in the Yukon and Ontario, she's come back to her native Bonavista – named by the Venetian explorer John Cabot, said to have exclaimed 'O buona vista!' (Oh happy sight) about the view in 1497 – where she leads guided tours with her husband, Jordan. She reckons there's ➡






CANADA'S ICEBERG ALLEY

Close encounter
with an iceberg
on a boat tour with
Chuck Matchim
of the Inn at
Happy Adventure

wild-game-themed restaurant to say that the wind has died down enough to take a twilight excursion into Bonavista Bay.

'Pull on the life jackets,' he says. 'It's now or never.' Half an hour later, a dorsal fin on a gracefully arched back rears up next to a pontoon of the Zodiac, before plunging beneath the starboard bow. 'There's your whale!' Matchim shouts into the wind. 'A minke, chasing the capelin. We almost ran her over!'

Killing the engines, he drifts towards an apparition: an iceberg, big as a bungalow. As the setting sun pinks lichen-furred cliffs, the berg's sheer alabaster walls loom overhead, and it gurgles and lurches as it sheds torrents of fresh meltwater into the brine.

It's a sight that calls to mind a joke about the Rock. In heaven, how do you tell which ones are Newfoundlanders? They're the ones who want to go home. 



TARAS GRESCOE is a journalist and the author of books including *The Devil's Picnic* and *Bottomfeeder*, and lives in Montreal.

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rural community. The hardest part of being here is finding work. But we've created our own work.'

You can't go far in Newfoundland without striking on more proof of the native spirit of resilience and self-sufficiency. Near the wharf at Port Union, a union-built town whose former fish plant is set to become a massive growing operation for cannabis (legalised in Canada last year), a barge is moored; its owner, a former fisherman, transports icebergs inshore to be used in distilling vodka and beer. (In St John's, the Quidi Vidi brewery uses the 20,000-year-old water, frozen before humans started polluting, to make crisp Iceberg Beer, bottled in translucent blue longnecks.)

Whales, though, can prove more elusive. While 26 species make their home in Newfoundland waters



MAKE IT HAPPEN

Newfoundland



ESSENTIALS GETTING THERE

While direct flights from London to St John's are currently suspended, WestJet and Air Canada fly from the UK via Toronto, Montréal or Halifax (from £460; westjet.com). It's a 15-minute bus or taxi ride from the airport to St John's.

GETTING AROUND

Renting a car is highly recommended for sightseeing. All the usual firms operate out of St John's International Airport, and rates start at £10 per day (avis.com).

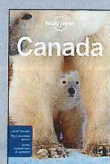
WHEN TO GO

Starting in March, a grand procession begins off

Newfoundland's coast. About 2,000 icebergs, calved, or split off from, western Greenland's ice cap, drift southward to the shores of Canada's easternmost province, Newfoundland and Labrador. Iceberg season runs from April to July, peaking in June. In July and August, whales, including humpbacks and minke whales and finbacks, cavort in the waters.

MORE INFO

See Lonely Planet's *Canada* guide (£16.99) and the tourist board's site at newfoundlandlabrador.com.



PLAN YOUR ITINERARY



1 ST JOHN'S Start in Newfoundland's biggest city (metro area population 206,000), whose residents are known as Townies (rural Newfoundlanders are called Baymen). Stay in the well-located Murray Premises Hotel, a complex of salt and coal warehouses that has been turned into a labyrinthine boutique hotel (from £108; murraypremiseshotel.com). Sample a flight of beer at the taproom of the Quidi Vidi Brewing Co. (pictured above; quidividibrewery.ca) in The Gut, a tiny fishing port about a ten-minute drive from tower-topped Signal Hill, site of the first transatlantic radio transmission. After dinner at Raymonds (three-course dinner from £50; raymondsrestaurant.com), whose

top-notch kitchen highlights the province's game and seafood, enjoy traditional music at the Ship Pub, reached via a steep staircase from Solomon's Lane, off Duckworth Street (facebook.com/TheShipPubKitchen).

2 TRINITY A three-and-a-half-hour drive north of St John's, Trinity is a charming seafront village featured in movies *The Shipping News* and *The Grand Seduction*. Overnight at the Eriksen Premises (from £89; mytrinityexperience.com/eriksen-premises) or one of the heritage homes managed by the Artisan Inn (dinner pictured above; trinityvacations.com). In New Bonaventure, a 20-minute drive south, visit the abandoned fishing villages of



Kerley's Harbour and Ireland's Eye on the Rugged Beauty Boat Tour (£50; ruggedbeautyboattours.net).

3 BONAVISTA The Bonavista Peninsula is a playground for outdoor activities, including hiking and sea kayaking in Terra Nova, Canada's easternmost national park, and puffin viewing on spectacular cliffs near Elliston. In the town of Bonavista (pictured above), where a replica of the ship in which John Cabot made his 1497 trip to the New World is moored, stay at the Harbour Quarters Inn, a restored fish merchant's store (from £85; harbourquarters.com), and stop for chowder at the hip Boreal Diner (mains from £5; theborealdiner.com).

4 HARE BAY For a taste of small-town Newfoundland, and some authentic on-the-water adventure, stop in Hare Bay (pictured above), where Hare Bay Adventures can teach you how to pilot a rodney (a large flat-bottomed rowing boat) on the North Atlantic (£35; harebayadventures.com), and Shark Fishing Co. lead catch-and-release shark fishing excursions (from £350; 001 709 424 7278). Stay overlooking the bay at the small Freshwater Inn in Gambo (£77; freshwaterinn.com), and don't miss breakfast of fried bologna, figgy duff (steamed bread pudding) and wedgies (hash browns) at Cashin's Chestnut Tree Café (7A Station Road, Gambo).

5 HAPPY ADVENTURE Named after a pirate ship, Happy Adventure is an idyllic fishing community a 25-minute drive east of Terra Nova National Park (pictured above). Nobody tracks icebergs better than Chuck Matchim, the co-owner of the superior Inn at Happy Adventure (from £120; innathappyadventure.com), which is also home to one of Newfoundland's best seafood and wild-game restaurants: Chucky's, where Matchim's daughter, Sharl-lett, serves up snow crab, cod, and moose burgers.

6 TWILLINGATE & FOGO ISLAND

One of the best bets for viewing moose, icebergs and sea lions, the thriving island

community of Twillingate is linked to the mainland by a series of causeways. Be sure to stop for freshly caught squid and butter-dipped lobster lifted straight onto the dock at waterfront Sansome & Sons Lobster Pool (sansomeslobsterpool.com; seafood chowder pictured above), and finish off with original music by spirited storyteller Mike Sixonate at the Captain's Pub in the Anchor Inn (visittwillingate.com/anchorinnhotel). Twillingate is also where you catch the ferry to remote Fogo Island, which has recently embarked on an progressive arts-oriented sustainable tourism plan, and is home to the spectacularly located, high-design Fogo Inn (from £1,120; fogoislandinn.ca).