

# Newfoundland is a foodie's haven

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Lori McCarthy is on a mission to preserve the cultural foods of Newfoundland and Felicity R... expert on lichens

It's not often that you can find common fare, upscale dining, traditional foods, and meals that reflect history

## and culture — all in one city or region. But it does exist. Join Sandra Phinney as she scouts the food scene in St. John's, NL.

Margo MacGregor and I strut out of the airport at 2:45 p.m. in St. John's, NL, it is -16 C and the wind is picking up.

We each have work to do on the Rock for three days, but decided to come two days early to have extra time together. Waiting to pick up the rental car, we hear that a major winter storm is heading towards Newfoundland. "Whatever will be, will be," says I, rather philosophically. Margo just grins.

I've already mapped out things for us to do for the next 36 hours, including a visit to the St. John's Farmers' Market, as I've heard so much about it. With just an hour to closing time, Margo consults her trusty Google Maps app; we're at the market in minutes.

As we haven't had anything to eat since breakfast, we head straight to the food section and chow down on Jamaican patties and East Indian samosas at the Multi Ethnic Food Kitchen before moving on to discover what the market has to offer.

Although it only started in 2007 (when a farmer invited a few friends to sell produce and products in a makeshift market space in the city) the farmers' market now operates as a co-op with over 100 vendors. It also recently moved to the former Metrobus depot on Freshwater Road and features a community kitchen, public square, and playground.

With names like Wild Mother Provisions, The Blue Box Pantry and Lost My Marbles Monster Adoption, I simply fall in love with Newfoundland products and blow my budget.

Eventually Margo and I check into Murray Premises Hotel smack downtown. Bonus: it's located in a National Historic Site and oozes charm.

We have dinner at The Merchant Tavern, mere footsteps away. Highlights include the Spanish Marinated Mussels (plump and juicy) as well as beef tartare which is different in texture (but more flavourful) than what I'm used to.

Margo and I share a piece of vinegar pie for desert. We learn that it originated in the Great Depression, and, in some places in Newfoundland, is still served on Good Friday.

Another night, we went to Mallard Cottage in Quidi Vidi, about a four-minute drive from downtown. Located in an 18th Century Irish-Newfoundland vernacular style cottage, it's one of the oldest wooden buildings in North America.

Because it was Sunday, Margo and I lucked into what's called the Sunday Public House which includes live local entertainment from 5-7 p.m.

While waiting for our appetizers to arrive, I ventured over to the open kitchen and asked if I could take photos. "As long as you don't put them on Facebook," Chef pipes up with a grin, "I'm supposed to be at work." Turns out he was the owner.

Mid-week found us at Chinchéd Restaurant and Deli for dinner. We shared (and savoured) several small plates, starting with chef's choice charcuteri. Margo's eyes lit up with every bite.

We then enjoyed a round of crispy pig ears — crunchy skinny strips of real pig ears. One fellow at the bar was on his third serving. Next dish? Kung pao Brussels sprouts (with peanuts, tofu, cilantro and green onion.) Think charred veggies that actually taste good rather than just burned.

At some point we ate grilled squid spaghetti. The house-made pasta—made from squid ink—was the colour of charcoal. This was my least favourite dish, only because I had a negative experience many moons ago with squid, and memory kicked in. But it was Margo's favourite of the night.

In case you're wondering why the restaurant is called Chinchéd — it's a Newfoundland word meaning stogged or stuffed. By the time we left, we were right chinchéd.

What about more common fare like fish and chips? Aha! I asked the same question and ended up at the Captain's Table in Mobile (about 30 km south of the city). This restaurant was named the best fish and chips in the world, by an editor of a London journal (reported in an interview on NTV on Dec. 2, 2018). Although the batter was a bit heavy for my taste, the cod was thick, moist and flaky.

My favourite rendition of fish and chips was at By the Beach restaurant in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's. It's a no-frills place, so bring cash (or use the ATM in front of the counter.) I had three pieces of cod cocooned in the lightest, crispiest coating you can imagine. Perfection.

If you're in the city on a Tuesday, drop into the Rocket Bakery and Fresh Food on Water Street between 12:30 and 1:30 p.m. for lunch and a kitchen party. When I arrived, four musicians were hard at it and the tables were jiggling.

Housed in a grand old building riddled with character, it features a bakery (the cakes and pastries look like they belong in a Parisian bakery); a food service section (thumbs up to fish cakes and toutons); and a general store (with everything from moose spice and iceberg water to bakeapple jam).

At the risk of sounding as if I did nothing but eat for five days, let it be known that Margo and I attended a splendid concert with Newfoundland's own tenor, David Pomeroy, along with the Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra and the Quintessential Vocal Ensemble.

We also hiked around Signal Hill, enjoyed a fun workshop about mummers at The Rooms, and checked out the artist's incubator at Quidi Vidi Village Plantation.

Check out Lori McCarthy at Cod Sounds ([www.codsounds.ca](http://www.codsounds.ca)). McCarthy is on a mission to preserve the cultural foods of Newfoundland and to introduce people to a traditional way of life. She often teams up with Felicity Roberts who's an expert on lichens.

After a snowy foraging hike on a hillside in Quidi Vidi, we returned to McCarthy's workshop where she demonstrated the fine art of making teas from the wild, while Roberts boiled up a brew of lichens and dyed some wool. We were then treated to strips of sizzling moose graced with alder tips, cod chowder made the old-fashioned way (no milk), and hand-pulled taffy that her mother and son made.

Of course a visit to St. John's would not be complete without visiting Bidgood's Fresh Food Market in Goulds, only 15 minutes south of the city. Famous for its traditional food section, the store has products such as bottled moose, bottled rabbit and bottled pork tongues.

Meals are prepared and packaged there, including cod-au-gratin, rabbit pie and moose lasagne. Margo and I got a kick out of labels that read "experience the joy of not cooking."

On display at Bidgood's are also scads of Purity products, a Newfoundland company that's famous for everything from peppermint nobs and bull's eyes candies to hard bread which is used to make fish and brewis.

Alas, our final day in St. John's arrived too soon. And yes, that rumoured blizzard we heard about five days earlier was no longer a rumour. St. John's was about to get hammered with fierce winds and 30 cm of snow.

Our flight left on cue; later flights were cancelled. One part of me was relieved while another part of me wished we'd been stranded in St. John's. A return visit is in the works.

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