

The island frozen in time

A trip to Battle Harbour is a must-do

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DALE DUNLOP

One adventure on many Atlantic Canadians' bucket lists is a visit to a true Newfoundland and Labrador outpost, before they all disappear. Fortunately, there is one in Labrador that is being preserved and rapidly becoming one of the province's top travel destinations. Battle Harbour was once the unofficial capital of Labrador; it's now a National Historic Site with its own Historic District where visitors are welcome to stay for a night or more and immerse themselves in the outpost experience.

Planning your visit

Battle Harbour is not the type of place where you just show up and expect to be accommodated. It is located on an island 14.5 kms. from the village of Mary's Harbour, on the southeast coast of Labrador, and is only accessible by boat. Mary's Harbour is more than a two-hour drive from Blanc Sablon, Quebec, where the

ferry from St. Barbe, Newfoundland lands. St. Barbe in turn is a six-hour drive from Port aux Basques, or over three hours from Deer Lake airport.

There is only one boat departure a day to Battle Harbour. The *Trinity Pride* departs at 11am and it is impossible to connect with it on the same day as you arrive in Labrador, so you must stay at least one night in Labrador before arriving at Mary's Harbour. The upside is that there are a lot of things to see and do in this part of Labrador, so plan on making this at least a four-day trip.

Before leaving home, you must visit the website listed below and make reservations for your accommodations, select the activities you wish to participate in and save your spot on the *Trinity Pride*. There are a wide variety of places to stay, from the semi-luxurious Earle Suite to an old-fashioned bunkhouse. It's not easy getting to Battle Harbour—but trust me, it's absolutely worth the effort.



The Battle Harbour experience

The trip from Mary's Harbour takes over an hour and is the start of a great adventure as you look for whales, dolphins, seals and a variety of sea birds. The arrival in Battle





Clockwise from left: Merchant House with wood teepees; the main street of the community; the *Trinity Pride* is the ferry from the mainland to the islands.



Harbour is something you will never forget. The boat passes alongside Great Caribou Island where there are both seasonal homes in a few spots and abandoned ones in others. It then rounds a cape and enters the tickle between Great Caribou and Battle Island. Suddenly almost out of nowhere an entire community comes into view.

You disembark at the wharf, and your luggage will be transported to whatever type of accommodation you have selected. Check-in is done at the General Store, which is just up from the wharf. This is also where you will find the only telephone on the island. There is a lounge on the top floor that does have WIFI—but it's very spotty. You come to Battle Harbour to get away from the nagging necessities of everyday life like email and Netflix.

After 20 minutes to stow your gear, lunch is served at 12:30pm in the communal dining hall. Three meals a day are served, and you

are assigned a table for the duration of your stay. The first thing you see on entering the dining hall is perhaps the most iconic photo ever taken at Battle Harbour. This is three-year-old Victor Crowley standing beside two of the biggest codfish you can imagine. The meals at Battle Harbour are unpretentious, delicious and hearty, using local seafood and interesting berries like bakeapples, aka cloudberrries.

After lunch there is a guided tour of the historic district, led by one of the few remaining people who grew up here until the resettlement program moved their families to Mary's Harbour. This is one of the highlights of Battle Harbour, as you visit buildings dating as far back as 1775 and really get a sense of what it was like living in coastal Labrador in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The merchant's credit system in place made sure that despite back-breaking work, either on the fishing

boats or in the processing plants, almost everyone was desperately poor. However, our guide makes it clear that people were happy and now there is sense of nostalgia that pervades Battle Harbour.

After the guided tour you will be on your own to explore Battle Harbour, which has a footpath that circles it. Walking this is a must as there are some amazing scenic vistas of the Labrador coast from the highest parts of the island. There are two old cemeteries, remains of a Marconi tower and the site of a tragic plane crash to explore. There are also addictive bakeapples to pick.

There are a great variety of other experiences available during your visit including hiking on Great Caribou Island, jigging for cod or learning traditional Labrador arts and crafts. As the website states, "There's off the beaten path. Then there's this place." 🍷

www.battleharbour.com