



Eh-Pic #5: Pure Ice

ESCAPE SUMMER'S HEAT AND
KAYAK AROUND NEWFOUNDLAND'S
ICE CATHEDRALS

Newfoundland

Kayak around the northern tip of Newfoundland during the summertime and you'll see icebergs as big as 15-story buildings drifting along the coast, melting, rolling and crumbling as they go. A calving berg can let loose an avalanche of ice chunks the size of pianos and small houses.

Paddle closer and you may see blue streaks running through the white ice (formed when melt-water refreezes in cracks), waterfalls pouring off the top and thousands of divots forming across the surface as the iceberg slowly dissolves. Listen closely and you can hear it melting: It crackles and fizzes, as millions of bubbles release air that's been trapped within since the Stone Age some 12,000 years ago.

Newfoundland's icebergs come from the west coast of Greenland, where the world's fastest-moving glacier dumps five cubic miles of ice into the ocean each year (that's equivalent to a one-foot-deep lake covering the surface of West Virginia). As these ice cathedrals travel south with the Labrador Current—along a water route dubbed Iceberg Alley—they're carved into fantastic shapes by the winds and the waves: giant horseshoes, mountain peaks, domes and wedges.

Quirpon Island, off Newfoundland's northernmost point, has the longest iceberg-viewing season. From May to August, hundreds of bergs drift past this island, many grounding in shallow bays along the mainland, within a mile from shore. These sheltered inlets, often accessible only by boat, typically offer calm conditions that are ideal for beginner and intermediate paddlers. Areas more exposed to the North Atlantic and the region's strong winds and currents, can dish up considerable chop and impressive swells, making them more suitable for expert kayakers.

On a 10-mile trip around Quirpon or a day-paddle along the main coast, it's not unusual to spot a few dozen migrating humpbacks, minke and orcas. Falcons, puffins, gannets and kittiwakes are also common. What you won't see: many other people or boats.

— Kari Bodnarchuk

IF YOU GO:

Camp for free on Quirpon Island or stay in the Quirpon Lighthouse Inn, an authentic renovated light-keeper's home, and enjoy fresh cod, homemade apple pie and iceberg vodka (the real deal, made locally from pure iceberg water). Gear rental, guides and customized sea-kayaking trips can be arranged through Explore Newfoundland (877-497-5673; www.explorenewfoundland.com). A three-day, two-night trip with a guide, lodging, food and kayak gear costs \$96-128 per person, per day.