



Ontario Konkani Association

e-Samachar (July 2023)

www.ontariokonkanis.com

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President's Message

Namaskar OKA Family,

We hope you are thoroughly enjoying the vibrant summer!

In this month's e-Samachar, Niranjana Kamath has contributed part 2 of his article series on the Puri Jagannath Temple, Lord Krishna's Heart. In this month's Senior's corner, Sadanand Mankikar has written about the superbly successful SVBF/OKA Senior's Day 2023 held on June 25, 2023, as well as provided great information on other useful events and relevant information for seniors. Anjana Pai has written about her recent exciting travel adventures to the beautiful province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We do hope you enjoy this edition of e-Samachar. Please write to okapresidents@gmail.com with articles or suggestions.

It is time for us to bid adieu as the OKA 2022-23 year has come to an end! Leading the OKA Executive Committee in serving the Ontario Konkani community has been a wonderful experience. This amazing organization has been an important part of our lives since 1999 when we moved to Canada as a young family. We are very thankful for all the support we and our team received from the community and OKA members during our tenure. Our EC team worked very hard to ensure that OKA continues to fulfill its mission and make strides forward, while meeting the challenge of holding a full year of in-person events after the Covid-19 pandemic to a community whose needs had changed in many ways.

We would like to thank each and every one of the sponsors, volunteers, program participants, as well as everyone who supported in many different ways towards various events and initiatives. Integral to these successes were very hard-working, dedicated and talented Executive Committee members who went above and beyond in ensuring each event and initiative was successful. In this, we were cohesively and strongly supported by our Joint Committee. We are tremendously thankful to all the EC and joint EC members for their hard work and support.

The baton now passes to our new Presidents, the passionate and talented Rachana Kamath and Vikram Prabhu. We wish them and their team all the very best in OKA's 35th Coral Year!

Anjana and Pravin Pai

Lord Krishna's Heart

By Niranjan Kamath

In my last article on the fascinating temple of Jaganath Puri I had mentioned some of astonishing facts that till today stands unexplainable. I had written about Nabakalebara a very ancient ritual that is still followed to the letter even now. While Nabakalebara talks more about the rituals and the process of changing the idols every 8, 12, 19 year. But why are they doing this and what are they really transferring. To get more details about Brahma Padartha (divine material) read on. This will fascinate and mesmerize you.



The Living Heart

Hindu scriptures state that Lord Krishna lived 5249 years ago, thus it is amazing to learn that his heart is still present in Puri. One of the “Chardhams”, the Jagannath Temple, is in Puri, Odisha. It is devoted to Jagannath (the lord of the universe), Balabhadra, and their sister Subhadra.

An extremely sacred ritual takes place in Puri's Jagannath Temple every 8 /12/19 year. As part of this ritual, electricity is shut down not only in the temple area but in the entire town of Puri. It is believed that Lord Krishna's heart is taken from the centre of the Jagannath temple and placed in another idol. According to the Skanda Puranas this has been happening here for centuries. To understand this better let us go back to how this happened.

Although many people today are unaware of this fact, Lord Krishna was killed by a hunter in a jungle around 3102 BC or roughly 5000 years ago. Since the hunter was

attempting to shoot a deer, this was an accident. Krishna's body was ritually burned when it was incinerated by the hunter, but even though it was burned, Krishna's heart did not burn at all; instead, it appeared to be a solid piece of metal with no damage.

The hunter attempted to burn the heart but was unsuccessful; instead, it began to vibrate. He repeatedly failed to sell it, so he gave up and placed the heart on a piece of wood before throwing it into a river. According to our Puranas, King Indradimna the ruler of Puri had a dream about walking down the beach and seeing something unusual. Later, when he actually went there, he saw this wooden log. It is believed that Lord Vishwakarma (God of Architecture) in the disguise of an old man told him this unusual object is Lord Krishna's Heart.

Lord Vishwakarma requested to have a room for himself where he would work for 21 days without food or water to install this heart (Brahma Padatra) in the wood and after which it can be installed in the Puri Temple. The only other condition was that he should not be disturbed. On the 14th day the guards told the King that they could not hear any noise of the chiselling inside the room. The reluctant King fearing the worst, opened the door. Lord Vishwakarma was very disappointed and told the King the idols are unfinished and disappeared. That is why these idols made up of wood are like this. Now you know.

The principal idols in any Hindu temples are typically made of stone or metal, but this statue is made of wood because wood conducts electricity feebly and it is thought that Krishna's heart may still electrocute you. The heart is preserved inside the statue in a fist-shaped chamber, and the priest is required to replace the idol every 12 years because the heart gradually erodes the statue's wood and weakens it. It is believed that his heart has the ability to generate power. And when exposed to light – not just sunshine, but any kind of light – it begins to vibrate, which is why electricity is turned off. To prevent them from catching a glimpse of the heart, anyone who touched it had to put on thick, heavy gloves and blindfolds.

This temple is shrouded in numerous mysteries and holds many unknown secrets. The entire process of installing the Brahma Padatra is called Nabakalebra. I had written about this in my last E Samachar article on this. So here I will briefly mention this. The Nabakalebara of Lord Jagannath is an important festival in Jagannath Temple of Odisha as per Jagannath Sanskruti. **Naba** means **new** and **Kalebara** means **body**. So, in Nabakalebara, the four deities of Jagannath temple relinquish their old bodies. Then contain a new body. Nabakalebara means the rebirth of the deities as per the rituals of Sri Mandir Puri. The Soul (Brahma Padartha) of the deities transferred from the old idols to the new idols.

The Nabakalebara rituals are performed in a year when the full moon occurs twice on a month of Asada (Joda Asada). As per the Hindu calendar, it falls in the month from June to July. This period is called Adhimasa or Malamasa. This Adhimasa or Malamasa is occurring once in every **08 or 12 or 19** years. That year is considered the most auspicious year for the rebirth of deities. Most time Joda Adhimasa falls in a 19-year interval. In some cases, it falls under 08 year or 12-year interval. The last Nabakalebara celebration started with Bana Jaga yatra on 29th March 2015. It is completed at midnight on 15th June 2015. It is celebrated after a 19-year interval. As per Jagannath Sanskruti **researchers and historians**, the exact starting year is not clear.

Although the Nabakalebara rituals of Lord Jagannath have been done for over thousands of years, historical records are available only since 1575. **As per Madala Panji and other Grantha**, The Nabakalebara is celebrated during the Bhoi dynasty king Gajapati Ramachandradeva (First). He is well known as Abhinaba Indradyumna. He is the founder of the Bhoi Dynasty. During his ruling period in the year, 1575 Nabakalebara started at Khordha Gada. From this time to date 25 times Nabakalebara rituals celebrated. The next Nabakalebara will fall in the year 2034.

Nabakalebara Celebration year List (Period 1975-2015)		
01 st -1575	10 th -1733	19 th -1912
02 nd -1593	11 th -1749	20 th -1931
03 rd -1608	12 th -1768	21 st -1950
04 th -1627	13 th -1790	22 nd -1969
05 th -1646	14 th -1809	23 rd -1977
06 th -1665	15 th -1828	24 th -1996
07 th -1698	16 th -1855	25 th -2015
08 th -1714	17 th -1874	Next on 2034
09 th -1730	18 th -1893	

Please have a look at an amazing documentary on Krishna's Heart by Praveen Mohan. He refers to it as a Reactor.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OAn6BmDBRU>

Ref: a) Jaganath Sanskruti. b) The Stateman. c) India Today

Seniors Forum

By Sadanand Mankikar

UPDATES

SVBF/OKA Senior's Day 2023 organized by SVBF and cosponsored by Jeevan Niwas Retirement Village and Lotus Funeral and Cremation Centre was a great success.

The event was planned and executed by 13 Planning Teams of over 40 volunteers from OKA and SVBF. The program was made up of four elements namely Food, Fun and Games, Performances, and Vendors. Over 290 people had registered. SVBF had arranged sumptuous breakfast and lunch.

Karaoke, BINGO, Raffles, Stretch Break by Rashmi Jayaram and Laughter Yoga by Carlos Gongora of Risalegria provided heaps of fun and games.

Vendor tables were set up by Crime & Fraud Prevention by Officer Sardana, Diabetes Canada, Estate/Will Info by Raghunath Kamath, Eyestyle Optical, Indus Community Services, Jeevan Niwas South Asian Seniors Village, Lotus Funeral and Cremation Centre, Opticals On The Go, Punjabi Community Health Centre and Van Rehab Physiotherapy. It is noteworthy to remember that Opticals On The Go and Van Rehab bring their services to your home.

Entertainment included Invocation by Students of Gaanvasrshini, Devotional Songs by Sangeet Bharati Seniors, Fashion Show by Seniors, Percussion Ensemble led by Kishore Kulkarni and Culture Criminals – Bollywood Orchestra. The gifts for the performers and choreographers were provided by Shwetha Bhat of Eyestyle Opticals, Dr. Smita Bendre of Homeohealing Holistic Clinic and EPP kits by Raghunath Kanmath and OKA Seniors Forum. Beautiful rich embroidered shawls for the cosponsors were provided by SVBF.

The entire program was superbly emceed by Anjana Pai of OKA and Sreeram Ganesan of SVBF. The program was photographed and videographed by Nandita Yedery and Divakar Shenoy of OKA and Anup Hegde of SVBF. Please check the OKA Facebook page for the photos and videos of the event: <https://www.facebook.com/ontariokonkaniassociation/>

The event was free and supported by cosponsors and a few generous donors.

OKA SENIORS' FORUM (JULY 2016 TO JUNE 2023)

STRUCTURE:

Following a seminar “I am a senior now, what next?” at the Konkani Sammelan in Atlanta, Georgia in July 2016, a brainstorming session was held on October 22, 2016 under the umbrella of OKA. This session was attended by over 80 seniors and soon to be seniors. At the following Focus Group meeting held on April 23, 2017 attended by over 30 members, a number of areas of focus were highlighted.

Over a period of time, always working under the umbrella of OKA, the following nine Teams consisting of over 25 volunteers have been established:

1. OKA Aadhar Chat - Interactive forum for seniors and support
2. Resource page on OKA website:
3. Information sessions/workshops/seminars/webinars:
4. Social and Cultural Activities:
5. Technical Support
6. Carpool: Coordinator
7. Buddy System
8. Emergency Preparedness Program
 - Eventuality/Survivor's Kits/End of Life Planning
 - Emergency Preparedness:
 - East End Support
 - West End Support
 - Medical and Non-medical Information Access

- Youth/Young Adult Communication/ Coordination

9. Retirement Community

For the OKA activities, after review and approval by incumbent OKA Presidents and Vice Presidents, appropriate Teams are set up to plan and execute. For the combined OKA and SVBF activities, following the review and approval by SVBF Chairman, Dr. Lakshmanan, Vice President Param Bhat, incumbent OKA Presidents and Vice Presidents, appropriate Teams with members from both organizations are set up to plan and execute.

ACTIVITIES:

Thus far, as listed in the following table, we have organized or participated in over 50 Focus Groups, Information Sessions, Workshops, Seminars, Webinars on various health, social and cultural issues.

AREA	IN PERSON	WEBINARS	TOPICS
Health Awareness	4	15	Diabetes, Alzheimer's, Dementia, Mental Health, Heart & Stroke, Digestive System, COVID 19, Arthritis and Osteoporosis
Sociocultural	5	6	Emergency Preparedness, Estate/Will, Home Care/Assisted Living/Long Term Care, Retirement Communities, Human Trafficking, Seniors' Day, Seniors' Get Together
Technical Support	6	3	Emerging communication Systems
Planning etc.	8		Brainstorming, Focus Group, Fundraiser, OKA AGM, OKA EC, Planning Meetings
TOTAL	23	24	47

In addition, some of the members actively participated in various external initiatives/activities including

- Asti Visarjan Project, Ontario Seniors' Affairs Minister's initiative (4 meetings)
- Healthy Aging in Diverse Ontario, Ontario Seniors' Affairs Minister's initiative (3 meetings)
- Liberal Caucus – Indian Friendship Group Meeting.
- Indus Community Services' South Asian Housing Needs discussion.
- GTA RetCom Project (a number of meetings and updates including initial feasibility studies and readiness discussions.)
- Jeevan Niwas South Asian Retirement Village (Information Session and Groundbreaking Ceremonies)

FINANCIAL STATUS:

A detailed account of revenue and expenses is maintained on file and available for review.

Except for OKA Seniors' Group Lunch June 25, 2017, OKA Senior's Get Together and Update Session December 9, 2017 and Timeless Culture Criminals Fundraiser February 9, 2019 all other events were organized at no cost to the attendees. Most of the activities were financially supported by sponsors, generous donors and SVBF.

OKA Seniors' Forum has an account in the First Ontario Credit Union, Burlington Branch with Ashok Bhatt, Sadanand Mankikar and Muralidhar Nayak as signing authorities.

MODE OF COMMUNICATION

OKA members are kept informed of the Forum activities through OKA website, e-Samachar and OKA Seniors email group.

USEFUL INFORMATION

OKA EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM: Estate, Will and Power of Attorney and End of Life Planning are two major elements of this OKA Seniors Forum Program.

For **preparing Wills and Powers of Attorney** you may contact Marvin Talksby (905) 405-0199 ext. 257 or Mary Bojkovski (905) 405-0199 ext. 276 of Nanda & Associate Lawyers. For additional information or assistance, you may also contact Raghunath Kamath or Ashok Bhatt.

For **End of Life Planning** one may contact Harjinder Bilku of Chapel Ridge Funeral Home at (905) 305-8128 or (647) 966-0093.

OKA AADHAR CHAT: This interactive web-based chat was established in 2017 as a part of the OKA Seniors Forum to facilitate communication amongst seniors and soon to be seniors. Since then, we have started posting upcoming events and relevant information on this chat. Members can post any questions and we will attempt to get answers. We invite everyone, young and old, seniors or not, to join this chat and share information including their experiences and expertise. To join this chat group, please send an email to shraddhapai.home@gmail.com

Additional information about OKA Seniors' Forum is posted on www.ontariokonkanis.com

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

INDUS COMMUNITY SERVICES: This organization provides very helpful service to South Asian seniors.

- Boost wellness for South Asian youth (Ages 16-18) virtual and in-person sessions in Mississauga and Brampton.
- Toy library and Parenting. Every Tuesday and Thursday 1:00 to 3:00 PM.

For the presentations, please visit <https://www.induscs.ca/seniorstownhall/> If you want to stay connected with Indus, you may sign up for their newsletter.

C.A.R.P. Are you a member of C.A.R.P. – previously known as Canadian Association of Retired Persons? If you are over 45, you may want to consider becoming a member of C.A.R.P. It is a national organization with chapters all over the country. Its mission is to “Promote and protect the interests, rights and quality of life of Canadians as we age”

C.A.R.P. is an advocacy group and from time to time they arrange interesting and informative seminars and workshops. Their monthly magazine Zoomer consists of useful articles and provide information on topics related to insurance, travel, health, entertainment and lifestyle.

For additional information, you may contact them by email: support@carp.ca
Phone: 1-833-211-2277 Website: www.carp.ca

ONTARIO GUIDE TO PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR SENIORS: Please click on the following link for the latest upgraded guide. [A guide to programs and services for seniors.](#)

SENIORS HOUSING AND HOME CARE DIRECTORY: Help for Mom has developed this very helpful publication which is about 130 pages, softcover and Readers Digest size. To get a copy send an email to helpformom.com or call Mary (647) 967-9821.

The following organizations disseminate very useful information either through regular news release and/or seminars, webinars and workshops:

Canada India Foundation www.canadaindiafoundation.com

C.A.R.P. Canadian Association of Retired People) www.carp.ca

Diabetes Canada www.diabetes.ca

Indus Community Services www.induscs.ca

UHNF (University Network Foundation) www.uhnfoundatiom.ca

(ARTICLES BY AND FOR SENIORS FOR THIS SECTION ARE ALWAYS WELCOME)

My Rockin' Newfie Adventure - from St. John's to Saint Anthony!

By Anjana Pai

A spur of the moment trip was planned to visit Newfoundland and Labrador!

Why Newfoundland, they asked; isn't it just a big rock, they added! My main reasons to visit Newfoundland were to see the impressive icebergs, the magnificent fjords and the cute Atlantic puffins! It also didn't hurt that Newfoundland has a reputation for being friendly, warm and welcoming! I found this to be absolutely true. Even their license plates say, "COME HOME". Not only are Newfies fun loving and funny, they have unique phrases and language as well as a great knack for storytelling. For example, "Who knit ya?"; this is a popular Newfie expression that is basically asking one what their background is or who their parents are.

But, did I meet my travel objectives, you ask? Please keep reading to find out. It can take up to four weeks or more to do justice to the stunning Newfoundland! But, I was able to cover an impressive number of the highlights of Newfoundland in an 8-day road trip from St. John's to St. Anthony!

Day 1: St. John's

On Day 1, an early morning flight from the Toronto Islands saw us in St. John's, the capital city of Newfoundland by mid-day. After picking up the car and a befitting "fishy" lunch, the day was spent exploring St. John's. It is the oldest city in Canada, founded in 1583 by explorer Sir Humphrey Gilbert. Some of the highlights of St. John's were:

- **Signal hill and the battery** - The views here are simply breathtaking. Hiking one or two of the many trails here is a must to take in the visual treats.



- **Jellybean Row** - It may have only been one row or street a long time ago; but, now there is an entire side of the town housing vibrantly colored row houses or “jelly beans” that help give the city its distinctive character. Jelly Bean houses are not only found in St. John's, but also in many towns across Newfoundland.
- **Quidi Vidi village** - The neighborhood of Quidi Vidi (pronounced “kiddy vidi”) is a very Picturesque and quaint fishing village known for its cute coastal homes as well as a namesake brewery. The food scene in St. John's in general is filled with fresh seafood and a "farm to table" philosophy. At Mallard Cottage in Quidi Vidi, we found world-class food with flavours that were unique yet classic, delicious and highly memorable!

Day 2: Cape Spear, Bay Bulls and Witless Bay Ecological Reserve

- **Cape Spear** - This is the easternmost point in North America providing for the most stunning views, especially at sunrise and sunset. Being here guarantees that you are one of the first people to see the sunrise or sunset in North America!! Even though it was a cloudy day and we could not see the round shape of the sun God, the colours of the sunrise were incredibly beautiful.



- **Witless Bay Ecological Reserve** - Boat tour from Bay Bulls to spot Puffins and many other seabirds in the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve. The largest puffin colony in the western Atlantic is found at the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve. It was an incredible treat to not only see countless Atlantic puffins but also many more varieties such as the common murre, black-legged kittiwake etc.
- **First Iceberg sighting!** We drove around and sighted a small iceberg at Ferryland. While this sighting was magical, this iceberg was miniscule in size and beauty as compared to the ones seen later in the trip. **Tip:** Use the iceberg tracker app to find icebergs: <https://icebergfinder.com/>.

Day 3: Bonavista Peninsula

The Bonavista Peninsula is absolutely beautiful and houses many beautiful small fishing villages. The drive is stunning and we stopped often to take in the views. Some highlights were:

- **Trinity** - The charming coastal Town of Trinity can trace its history back to the 16th and 17th centuries as a migratory then permanent fishing station. It feels like one is in a fairy tale while walking around and admiring the architecture of Trinity.
- **Tickle Cove** - On the way to Bonavista, the **Tickle Cove Sea Arch** is a must visit, it is a beautiful natural rock wonder carved by the force of ocean and moderate hike.



- **Bonavista** - John Cabot discovered the Western World when he arrived at Bonavista in 1497. Cabot set sail from Bristol, England in his ship the Matthew in 1497. When Cabot first saw land he reputedly said "O Buon Vista" ("Oh, Happy Sight!") giving the name of the town and nearby Cape Bonavista. The Cape Bonavista lighthouse and Cape Bonavista are a must see for the stunning views of the coastline.

Day 4: Twillingate

Having heard reports of several iceberg sightings in Twillingate from fellow travelers, we decided to pivot the itinerary to squeeze in Twillingate on a whim. Typically, you see icebergs between mid-April and mid-July. However, every year is different than the one before; so, it's a good idea to do your research before planning a trip! Some cool facts about icebergs:

- These stunning marvels are 10,000 years old! No videos or photos do justice to their magnificence and beauty. You must see them in person!
- The glacial ice that creates icebergs was formed during the last ice age. Mammoths may have walked on the very icebergs that you behold!
- 90% of Newfoundland's icebergs are born in Greenland while some may come from the glaciers in Canada's arctic. It may take up to 3-years for icebergs to reach Newfoundland.

- By the time icebergs reach Newfoundland they have already lost about 85% of their original size.
- The most mind-boggling fact to me, especially when seeing a massive iceberg is knowing that "85-90% of it is underwater". This is where the phrase “tip of the iceberg” comes from!! Isn't that interesting?

One of the best ways to see icebergs in Newfoundland is on a **zodiac boat tour** and that is just what we did!



I was lucky enough to find the last seats on a Zodiac Boat Tour with a renowned boat tour company and even more lucky to get a sunny and still, i.e., a not-so-windy day for the tour. Weather plays a large part in the kind of experience you have in Newfoundland, even more so than in Ontario. The almost 2.5-hour boat tour got us up and personal with many icebergs including a massive ice island. The beautiful weather and perfect Northerly wind the previous days had blown in a lot of unique and large icebergs in the route of the boat tour. The captain stretched out the boat tour longer than planned and provided an incredible experience. Towards the end of the tour, holding a piece of an iceberg, which is actually a piece of history in hand, was an overwhelming and humbling experience.



Day 5: Gros Morne National Park

The drive to Gros Morne National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was long yet incredibly scenic. Mother Nature took an impressive 485 million years to create a place that is unlike any other on earth. It is a never-ending series of wonders and delights, with spectacularly raw and incredible beauty. One could spend weeks here, exploring the new and wondrous landscapes. Where else can one hike on the earth's mantle, or travel along the water through fjords carved by glaciers, feel insignificant amongst towering cliffs and thunderous waterfalls? The sunsets here are incredible too!

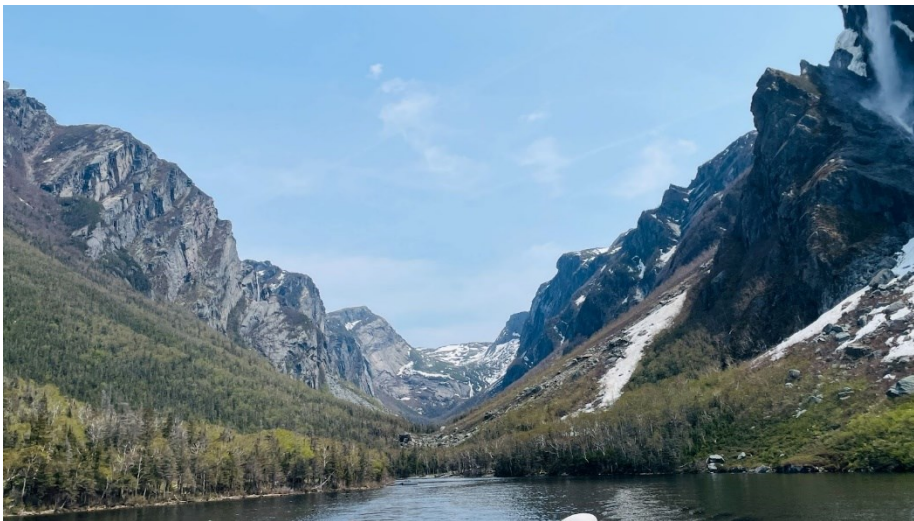


We hiked the Tablelands Trail here, exploring the otherworldly landscape. The mantle from beneath the Earth's crust was pushed to the surface by colliding continents millions of years ago, creating unusual plants and stunning vistas. It was a grounding experience, to say the least!

Day 6: Gros Morne National Park

This day was spent exploring more of the park. The highlights were:

- **Western Brook Pond Fjord** - This is one of the most breathtaking places I have been to, no photograph can convey its beauty and scale. There are a few different ways to explore this stunning Fjord; we chose the Boat Tour. The Western Brook Pond Trail brings one to the boat dock where you can soak in the beautiful views. A two-hour boat tour provides an incredible experience of the spectacular glacier-carved, land-locked fjord, including waterfalls cascading 2,000 feet down the staggering cliffs! Truly a memorable experience.



- **Loxton Cove Head Lighthouse** - This historical lighthouse has a great exhibit / museum as well as trails surrounding the lighthouse which feature the amazing views of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.
- **Green point Geological Site** - This is a world geological benchmark! Green Point's seaside cliffs are formed from a beautiful and intriguing sequence of

layered rocks. Almost 500 million years ago, these rocks formed on the bottom of an ancient ocean. Here geologists discovered fossils that define the boundary between the Cambrian and Ordovician periods and makes This place must be visited at low tide for safety.



Day 7: Drive to St. Anthony

This day saw us driving further north to St. Lunaire-Griquet, a scenic Fishing Community that is just about 20 minutes from the port town of St. Anthony, the very tip of the Great Northern Peninsula. St. Lunaire was the perfect spot to stay while exploring the peninsula.

- **Iceberg Festival** - Our visit coincided with the Iceberg Festival that starts on the first Friday in June to celebrate the annual arrival of these floating ice castles. The festival features music, food, Viking history, culture, and great hospitality. We were lucky to sample some of this, including a great drink chilled with ice from the berg! The appetite for icebergs was definitely quenched by the countless number of icebergs we saw as we drove along the water's edge, including a few from the front window of our Airbnb!!

Day 8: L'Anse aux Meadows

The last day was dedicated to visiting **L'Anse aux Meadows**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is the only authenticated Viking site in North America. The Meadows offers tours of the restored sod buildings from the Viking era, great hiking trails, and sweeping coastal and bay views. It is some of the most amazing scenery you'll find anywhere in Canada. The untouched, natural beauty of this area is truly remarkable.

As I hope you gathered, it was an incredible trip and I am glad that all my travel objectives were met! I will leave you with a quote about Newfoundland and Labrador that I read in the Deerlake Airport on the way back to Toronto: "In a world oddly bent on conformity, there's something strangely encouraging about a place that's anything but."