



# CANADA CRUISING

Kat Brown discovers a heartbreakingly beautiful, and yet utterly bonkers, landscape



MS Veendam and (above) the Greenhouse Spa

I've always longed to go on a cruise. Visiting new places, eating all the food, and sitting on deck waving martinis about in sparkly frocks – that's pretty much my ideal holiday. My obstacle was other people. The idea of being trapped on a boat with an unknown quantity of them was too much to bear, so I resigned myself to sitting in my flat with rugs over my knees and the windows open to get the same on-deck effect.

Sheer joy, then, to be squirrelled across the Atlantic to Canada for a 10-day Holland-America jaunt down through Quebec to Boston. One 'other person', a pre-vetted friend Elizabeth, brought important knowledge like 'counting money' and 'telling the time'. I was banned from the latter when the clocks went back at Prince Edward Island and we missed our longed-for Anne of Green Gables excursion to actual Green Gables because I hadn't changed my clock. Luckily, as with everything else on our holiday, it was fixable. We booked in to a later trip. LM Montgomery is a hero and we had a bit of a weep. We spent the morning wandering around Charlottetown's





**Left: Take tea at Le Château Frontenac in Quebec or simply order cabin service on board (above)**

gorgeous bookstores and old houses, and sampling the local snack, cow chips – crisps covered in chocolate, delicious – from the Anne of Green Gables shop.

Quebec was perfect: a balancing act between heartbreakingly beautiful and utterly bonkers. Perched on a series of hills, looking out over mountains at sunset you can fool yourself that you're in LA, before turning around and disappearing through cobbled streets to what may as well be an ancient French series of *ruelles*, topped off by the insanity project that is Le Château Frontenac hotel. Everyone speaks French, which makes it even more like being immersed somewhere dreamlike, and I spent delightful hours at Le Clocher Penché restaurant on rue Saint-

71-year-old professional storyteller from New York, whom we met while dancing up a storm in the nightclub, became a red-lipsticked glamazon fixture whenever we ventured out. In fact, the only remotely disagreeable person I met, a grumpy woman from Boston, gave me one of her teabags to try, so hardly a monster at all.

I made one trip to the gym to try running on a treadmill at sea, but mostly we took advantage of the sauna and huge gym showers, particularly as ship bathrooms tend to be so small. We soon got into a routine of enormous breakfast, exploring on shore, hot tub, dinner and dancing. We loved the Lido deck for breakfast and lunch, brimming with seven sorts of eggs Benedict,

immigration museum, and took a tour bus around the city with a host who could have fallen out of a game show.

Caught out by a monsoon in Bar Harbor, we spent two hours in a tiny tea shop on Main Street, with the shop owner Linda gravely explaining the ways of the tea ceremony and giving us a tea egg to try as a treat. Back on board, the weather made no difference to our favourite activity: ordering large drinks and sitting in the on-deck hot tub until pruned.

We disembarked in Boston and ate the local delicacies (more lobster and doughnuts) before getting a beer at the Cheers bar. Elizabeth found an amazing place for views at the Custom House Tower, but we arrived at the wrong time. Still, kind American staff of the sort you are told exist but never really believe in, let us sneak up anyway.

As a zippy introduction to a lot of different places, this was marvellous. As a first cruise, it was exactly what I'd hoped for. ■

◆ *The Canada and New England Discovery* cruise costs from £754 per person based on two sharing an inside stateroom. Departs on 12 October 2013 and 10 May 2014: 0843-374 2300, [www.hollandandamerica.co.uk](http://www.hollandandamerica.co.uk)

## *'Built in the mid-1990s, our ship, the MS Veendam, has had so many facelifts it could pass for Joan Rivers'*

Joseph Est, perched at the bar, eating elk and chatting to the bar staff.

Having collected Elizabeth en route, we loaded up on maple biscuits before spending a gleeful hour touring our ship – the MS Veendam. Built in the mid-1990s, it's had so many facelifts it could pass for Joan Rivers. I adored the dining room, a 1930s-themed feast of red and gold. The library was cheerfully modern and rammed with everything from Scrabble to drugs compendiums.

While the Texas oil billionaires we had hoped to befriend didn't make themselves known to us, the guests we did meet were charming. I had a terrific gossip with two American women who were taking their sister on her first trip out of her home state. And Linda, the

lovely salads and endless assortments of miraculously prepared food. We skipped the Italian restaurant in favour of a slovenly feast of ice cream in our room with a Mad Men box set from the library, but every dinner in the gorgeous red dining room was a treat – more so than the Pinnacle Grill fine dining restaurant, which lacked atmosphere.

Quebec aside, the weather was largely atrocious, but the answer was diving into nearby stores whenever on shore and finding treasures. When drizzled on in Sydney, we went to a coffee-shop fudge emporium and eavesdropped on three women all called Heather. In Halifax we ate our body weight in lobster at the Waterfront Warehouse, visited the Pier 21

