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inside: CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION CALENDAR

sail into fall

cruise along a leafy coastline of bright autumn colours
and historic Northeast Atlantic ports

BY CHRIS POTTER





A good cruise line can control just about everything—the standard of service, the quality of food, the level of entertainment—but it can't control the weather, or whether autumn leaves turn to resplendent reds and golds in time for a fall foliage tour.

The 950-passenger Crystal Symphony is a destination in itself, so had the leaves not turned along our Atlantic ports of call from Montreal to New York it would not have been a disaster. And sometimes, in early October, that can happen. But we were lucky in our ports and our choice of ship. (At 50,202 tons and with a crew of 545, Symphony offers one of the best guest/crew and guest/space ratios available.)

Celebrating a special anniversary, we splurged on the six-star luxury vessel, learning from friends that this cruise line never disappoints. O joy to find we'd been upgraded, thanks to a really early booking, to the Penthouse Floor. Our fabulous stateroom (for once, I can't call this a cabin) had a Jacuzzi tub, separate shower, walk-in closet, and even a butler who delivered a tray of canapés to our room each evening!

Our 11-day itinerary took us from Montreal to New York, calling at Québec City, cruising leisurely in the Gulf of St. Lawrence followed by a sailing day on the Atlantic before visiting Halifax, Nova Scotia. A day each in Saint John, New Brunswick; Bar Harbor, Maine; Boston, Massachusetts; and Newport, Rhode Island, rounded out our days before arriving in New York City.

The ship became our hotel in Montreal, where we had an

overnight stay, giving us time to enjoy the jazz scene in clubs along Rue Crescent. We had the next day to explore before our nine-p.m. sailing, so we took in the Old Quarter with its cobbled streets and tempting boutiques and cafés; strolled through Place des Armes, the 17th-century square where troops once trained; and paid our respects to Notre-Dame Basilica, where building began in 1656. (The church was raised to basilica status by Pope John-Paul II on his visit to Montreal in 1982.)

Montreal's fall leaves were lovely, but they didn't compare with Québec City where, at least during this particular October, they flamed from the river banks and formed a perfect frame for Fairmont's stately Chateau Frontenac.

The old city—the only one in North America with its original fortifications—invites exploration. Take the funicular from the lower village to the top or work off that exquisite cruise food by walking up and down. It's easy to feel like a time traveller strolling through these old streets. Take time to visit Montmorency Falls (which, locals crow, is 30 metres higher than Niagara) and the Ile d'Orléans, or the Côte-de-Beaupre. Or continue the religious heritage trail with a visit to the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupre.

Our two days in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Atlantic were overcast, and we sailed too far from shore to see any colour. But we did see Minky whales and puffins. These days allowed time to enjoy our surroundings, catch a lecture, watch a movie, take in the spa and fitness room, and then undo all the good exercise by indulging in afternoon tea.

PREVIOUS PAGE The Crystal Symphony in Québec City's harbour. TOP, FROM LEFT The lighthouse at Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia; Fall colours in Bar Harbor, Maine; Lobster bake on shore in Bar Harbor, Maine. BOTTOM, FROM LEFT Boston's colourful Quincy Market; The funicular in Québec City; The Halifax harbourfront.





One of Crystal's best features, which many newer ships have abandoned, is the Promenade Deck, and hotel manager Herbert Doppler assured me the company will keep this traditional element in any new ship they build.

"It's too popular to disregard, and it's a classic part of cruising," he said. Other pluses on board are free non-alcoholic drinks, bottled water in all rooms, and the Vintage Room, a boardroom-style restaurant featuring wine pairings and a special menu.

Approaching Nova Scotia and Halifax (the world's second-largest harbour after Sydney, Australia) we decided to shun organized shore excursions and rented a car for the 45-minute drive to Peggy's Cove, the picturesque fishing village with its famous lighthouse perched on the dramatic, rocky shore.

It was a good choice. The winding Lighthouse Route boasts a multitude of photogenic inlets with colourful boats and lobster traps, and we found our fall colours in bracken that hugs the landscape like an autumnal sweater.

Back in town we arrived at The Citadel in time for the historic noon gun firing. The star-shaped fort, finished in 1856, is now a national park and military aficionados can be a "soldier for half a day" on themed shore excursions. The Citadel also yields the best view of Halifax.

The Titanic display in the Maritime Museum was a poignant reminder that many Halifax residents took part in rescue operations. Poignant, too, is Canada's Immigration Museum at Pier 21, right in the cruise terminal. It was once the main entry point for immigrants

and refugees, and tells their stories in film and interactive exhibits. Few leave unmoved.

Next day, New Brunswick greeted us with its own variety of fall foliage—impressionistic pink splashes among crimson and gold.

Saint John is full of "oldests." It's Canada's oldest incorporated city with the oldest operating farmers' market and the oldest museum. The market is lively and fun and *the* place to try dulce, the crispy dried seaweed enjoyed like potato chips around the Atlantic Provinces. A six-p.m. departure limited sightseeing somewhat, but we made time to ride a jet-boat on the Saint John river, where the Reversing Falls, caused by the Bay of Fundy's phenomenal tides, creates whirlpools and rapids the envy of many adventure destinations.

By the next morning Crystal Symphony had anchored off Bar Harbor, Maine.

Some say the Vikings were here in the 11th century, but it is known that John Cabot landed here. It was John Smith (of Pocahontas fame) who mapped the rugged coastline, and today it's the gateway to Acadia National Park. Despite the fog and dampness, a walk along the pretty Shore Path, carved out in 1880, was invigorating, and what better reward than to ensconce ourselves in one of the many restaurants offering fresh-caught lobster? Yum! And quahog, a tasty giant clam introduced to early settlers by the Indians, proved to be a gastronomic runner-up.

Rainy days in Boston (if you want guaranteed sunshine, go to the Caribbean) didn't stop passengers walking the four-kilometre

TOP, FROM LEFT Citadel Hill in Halifax offers the best views of the city; The Old State House Museum in Boston; A classic, wind-swept east-coast beach in Bar Harbor, Maine. BOTTOM, FROM LEFT Rue Crescent in Montreal; Montreal's Notre-Dame Basilica; Old-fashioned tennis at the Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport, Rhode Island.

DESTINATION HALIFAX; C.F.B. POTTER, MAINE OFFICE OF TOURISM; NEWPORT RICV; TOURISME QUÉBEC (2)



Freedom Trail, a great way to understand the city and see its historic landmarks. The free shuttle dropped us off at Quincy Market (officially named Faneuil Hall) but we wisely saved our shopping until the next day (this was an overnight stop) just before our return to the ship.

If you're a beer fan, then a visit to Sam Adams' micro-brewery (also home to the Boston Beer Museum) is a must. It's in the Jamaica Plain neighbourhood, and you can tour the facilities as well as sample the product. A tourist trap with souvenirs galore and overpriced food is Cheers Boston, the former Bull & Finch Pub until it inspired *Cheers*, the long-running TV comedy. Fans say it's worth the hooplah.

Our final stop before disembarking in New York was Newport, Rhode Island. Tennis fans will love the International Tennis Hall of Fame, a charming museum on the 1881 site of the first US National Lawn Tennis Championships. Meandering through the charming little town brings you to St. Mary's Church, where Jackie and John Kennedy were married in 1953, and a trolley tour takes you to the fabled Newport mansions, built by wealthy families

(the Astors and the Vanderbilts to name two) as summer homes, each family striving to outdo the other in opulence and grandeur. This spectacular coastline is labelled the "sailing capital of the world," a fine setting for the long-time home of the America's Cup.

As lovely as it is, Crystal Symphony is not for everybody. If partying into the wee hours is for you, you'll be disappointed. The nightly shows are probably the best at sea, designed by Crystal at a cost of US \$1 million per, but the disco rarely goes until dawn, and karaoke in the piano bar and action in Caesar's Palace at Sea forms the main nightlife.

This cruise is all about relaxation. Even the usually dreaded debarkation is easygoing; Crystal Cruises handles this extremely well. The end of a cruise can be a huge letdown and many companies seem to hustle you off, anxious to get ready for the next load of passengers. There's no such atmosphere with Crystal, and we disembarked feeling that we could happily stay longer. We were certainly sorry to say goodbye, especially to our butler. Who would bring us our canapés now? ●

+ if you go

- WHEN >** Fall-foliage cruises begin in mid-September and can run as late as mid-November. The best bet for vibrant colour is early-to mid-October. **CHOOSING A CRUISE FOR FALL >** As well as Crystal (crystalcruises.com) the following lines offer Atlantic itineraries:
- > Carnival Cruise Lines; carnival.com
 - > Celebrity Cruises; celebrity.com
 - > Cunard; cunard.com
 - > Holland America; hollandamerica.com
 - > Norwegian Cruise Line; ncl.com
 - > Princess Cruises; princess.com
 - > Royal Caribbean; royalcaribbean.com
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