

*Although most people in North America believe Saint-Pierre and Miquelon are part of Canada, the islands are actually an integral part of the French Republic.*

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHE MARCINIAK

# SAINT-PIERRE and Miquelon



FOR THE FLAVOR OF FRANCE,  
WITHOUT EVER HAVING TO  
CROSS THE ATLANTIC

by Glenn Swift

Located just 10 miles off the Newfoundland coast lies a vacation secret to all but a few Americans – the islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. Particularly intriguing about these little-known islands is that they do not belong to Canada, but rather France. Here, the tricolor flies proudly over the last remnant of the once extensive French Empire in North America. Not mere colonies or dependencies, Saint-Pierre et Miquelon is officially classified as a territorial collectivity (territoriale collectivite) of the French Republic, with

representation in the French Senate and National Assembly.

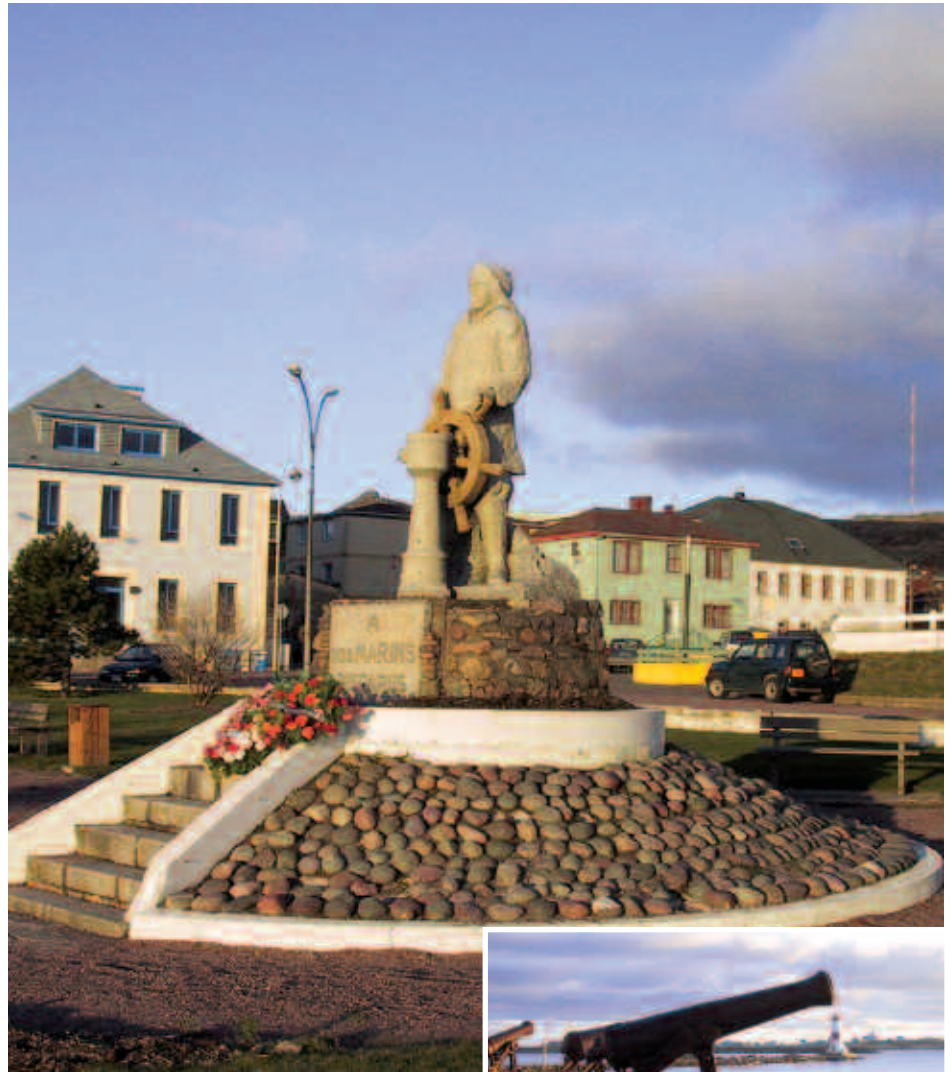
First inhabited nearly 1,000 years before Christ by an Arctic people known as the Beothuks, the islands were “discovered” in 1521 by Portuguese explorer, Joao Alvarez Fagundes, who promptly named the islands the Archipelago of the Eleven Thousand Virgins. Despite the enticing name, the Portuguese didn’t stay for long. Fifteen years later, Jacques Cartier took possession of the islands on behalf of France. They have remained French ever since.

Lacking precious metals and natural resources, the islands held little economic value and hardly figured in the global geopolitical arena. The islands’ chief importance soon became tied to their proximity to the cod fisheries of

the Grand Banks. Consequently, for centuries, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon have served primarily as a “service station” for sailors and fishermen. Today, the majority of the islanders still maintain their traditional lifestyles, although the fisheries of the Grand Banks have become sharply depleted. In recent years, however, the French government has invested heavily in its former “outpost,” making tourism an ever-increasing part of the local economy.

On Saint-Pierre, where over 6,000 of the nearly 7,000 islanders reside, young women shop at upscale boutiques for the latest in Paris fashions, while wine connoisseurs froth over the more than 800 (mostly French) varieties from which to choose. The island’s cobblestone streets are immaculately clean and filled with the aroma of fresh-baked croissants. Sidewalk cafés and lace-curtained patisseries offer the finest in delicious French pastries, breads and cheeses. As many know, the sea air makes for quite an appetite! And Saint-Pierre has several fine restaurants offering traditional French recipes. Without a doubt, seafood is the specialty of most. For sightseers, the Saint-Pierre Bus Tour will help you discover the island’s hidden charms, complete with shipwreck stories, ghost legends and a whole lot more of local lore.

Although Saint-Pierre is clearly the social and commercial hub of island life, a trip here would not be complete without a visit to its sister island, Miquelon. A three-mile strait whose fierce currents inspired fishermen of long ago to name it the “Mouth of Hell,” separates the islands from each other. (Don’t worry! That was in the days of leaky wooden



ships.) A quick glance reveals that Miquelon is far more rustic than its neighbor. Despite being over three times the size of Saint-Pierre, Miquelon has just 800 inhabitants, and in many ways, is reminiscent of a small Breton village. With miles of emerald-like dunes and pristine beaches, the island’s spectacular natural beauty features everything from breathtaking rock formations to wild horses. A guided walking tour is available, with visits to the old stone church and historical museum, providing an intimate view of the tiny community’s simple but rich heritage.

So, if you’re considering doing some-



*Even though France has granted autonomy to the islands, they are now, and will remain, a French territory.*



thing a bit different – and if magnificent seascapes accompanied by the rich and glorious culture of La Grande Nation appeal to you – Saint-Pierre and Miquelon might be just what you’re looking for. No, you won’t get to see Paris, but you won’t have to cross the Atlantic either.

### GETTING THERE

The only way to reach the islands by air is via connecting flights from a Canadian airport. Regular flights from Canada to the airport in Saint-Pierre are available on Air Canada out of Montreal, Halifax and Moncton.

Ferry boats run periodically from Fortune and St. John’s, Newfoundland.

### WHERE TO STAY/HELPFUL HINTS

There are several quaint hotels and

bed-and-breakfasts featuring modern, comfortable accommodations. Maxxim Vacations in nearby St. John’s is the region’s leading tour wholesaler, and specializes in both individual and group travel to the islands. They have a well-trained staff and can assist you in booking your entire trip. They can be reached by phone at (800) 567-6666 or by e-mail at [request@maxximvacations.com](mailto:request@maxximvacations.com). The company has its own Web site, [www.maxximvacations.com](http://www.maxximvacations.com), which can provide you with additional information.

### TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Remember, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon are not a part of Canada, but are a French territory. All U.S. citizens must have a valid passport when entering and departing the islands.

### CURRENCY/CREDIT CARDS

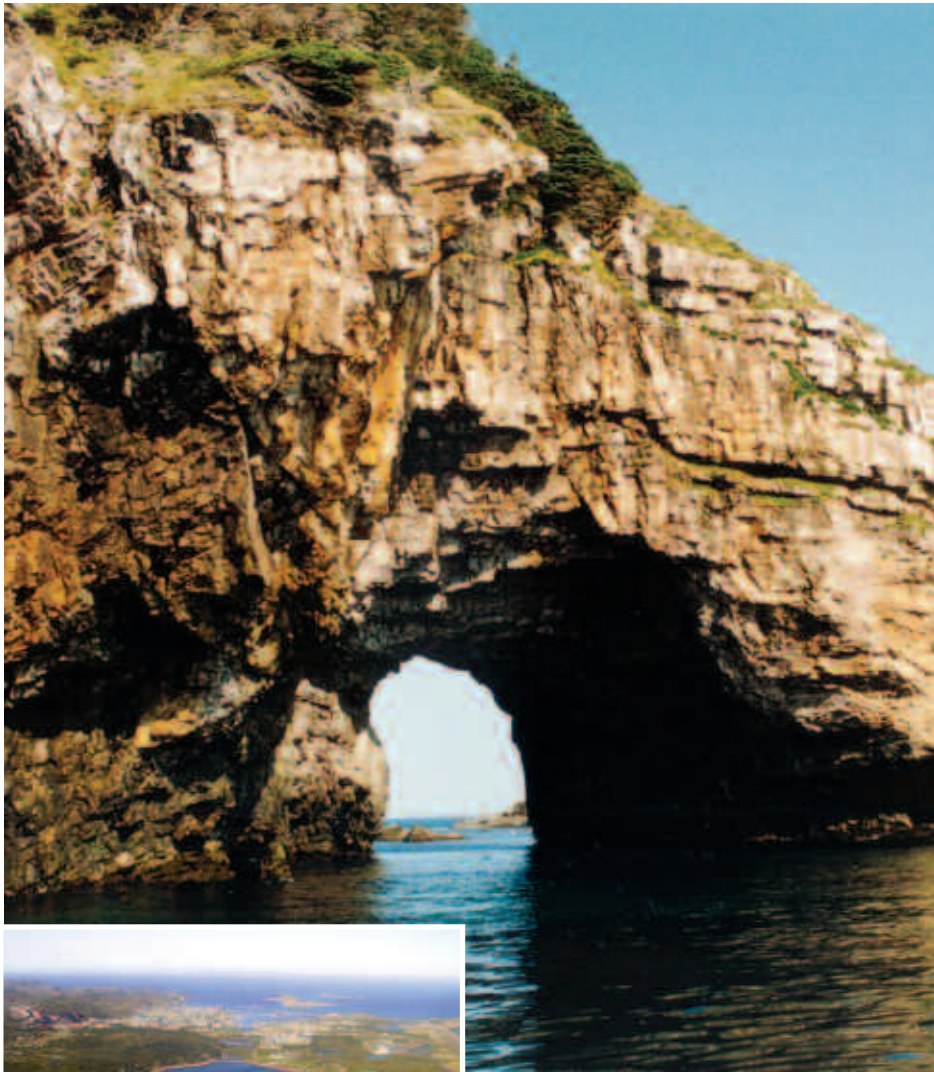
Although the “official” currency is the euro, U.S. and Canadian dollars are accepted everywhere throughout the islands. In addition, major credit cards (MasterCard and Visa) and traveler’s checks are commonly accepted.

### BANKS

There are four banks on the islands (two on Saint-Pierre and two on Miquelon) with several ATMs on Saint-Pierre as well.

### DUTIES

Because all air travel must go through Canada to get to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, you will be subject to Canadian duties upon returning from the islands. You will not have to pay further duties when returning to the United



*With the recent dispute with Canada over fishing rights, the rustic islands have turned to tourism to boost their economy.*



than seven days, you are allowed to bring back goods duty-free, provided they have a value of less than \$750 in Canadian currency (including alcohol and tobacco).

**TELEPHONES**

Not that many years ago, all calls to the islands from the United States and Canada had to be redirected through France. Nowadays, one only needs to dial 011-508 and the six-digit local number. **NOTE: Cell phones do not work on the islands.**

**TIME**

The islands are one hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST).

**GOVERNMENT**

The islanders elect by popular vote a 19-member (15 from Saint-Pierre and four from Miquelon) unicameral General Council. The body provides the islands with a measured level of autonomy on local affairs. As a territorial collectivity of the French Republic, the islands elect one seat to both the French Senate and French National Assembly in Paris.

**DEFENSE**

As a French territory, the French Armed Forces are responsible for the defense of the islands.

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Although relations are harmonious with neighboring Canada, they have at times been strained over the years with regard to a territorial dispute over fishing rights. In 1992, an international board of arbitration awarded Saint-



*Originating in the Basque regions of France and Spain, many locals play a game that is very much like jai alai, played on a fronton or "big wall," such as this one that is believed to be the oldest court in North America.*

Pierre and Miquelon an exclusive zone of 7,500 square miles around the islands. The award was just 25 percent of what the French government had sought, however, and the issue remains a course of disenchantment among many of the islanders.

### LANGUAGE

The official language of the islands is French, although the vast majority of islanders also speak English.

### NATIONAL HOLIDAY

Bastille Day: July 14 (1789)

### AREA

The islands combined are 93 square miles, or roughly 1.5 times the size of Washington, D.C.

### HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

900 B.C.–A.D. 100: A southern Arctic people known as the Beothuks routinely visit the islands to hunt seals.

100–1500: Beothuks establish permanent settlements on the islands.

1521: Portuguese explorer, Joao Alvarez Fagundes, discovers the islands and names them the Archipelago of the Eleven Thousand Virgins.

1536: Jacques Cartier takes possession of the islands on behalf of France.

1670: Official recognition by the Great Powers gives French sovereignty over the islands.

1763: Following its victory over the French in the Seven Years' War (1756–63), Great Britain reaffirms French sovereignty over the islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon.

1940: After the collapse of the French Army in June, the islands proclaim their



allegiance to the newly-established Vichy Republic.

1943: French forces, under the command of Gen. Charles de Gaulle, liberate the islands without bloodshed.

1976: Saint-Pierre and Miquelon are declared an Overseas Department of the French Republic with representation in the French Senate and National Assembly in Paris.

1985: Due to conflicts arising from the tariff structure of the European Economic Community (currently known as the European Union), of which France is also a member, the islands are reclassi-

*Historically, the principal source of revenue for the residents of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon has been the fishing industry.*

fied as a territorial collectivity of the French Republic.

1992: An international board of arbitration rules against Canada and awards Saint-Pierre and Miquelon a 7,500-square-mile economic exclusionary zone around the islands. ↴