

Spectacular Québec City: A Whole New Experience

Some travel destinations just seize the imagination. Their beauty is breathtaking. They evoke wonder and excitement. They're vibrant and alive. They're warm and welcoming. But few do it all as effortlessly and as naturally as Québec, the unique walled city on the St. Lawrence River. No other destination in the world offers Québec's compelling mix of features and attractions.

Location

Nature has been a generous contributor to Québec City's appeal. The very heart of the Québec City region is the St. Lawrence River, which arrives in a flourish from Montréal, squeezes through the Québec-Lévis narrows under the cliffs of Upper Town, then rushes on to the Atlantic in a widening expanse of water and nature. This unique combination of geography adds to the region's scenic appeal. Located in the St. Lawrence River Valley, the city is divided into two distinct parts - one perched high on the promontory overlooking the river, the other down by the shoreline where the first settlement was built.



Old Québec

The city itself also abounds in attractions. Historic Old Québec is the best known of all. This lively walled part of the city, with its winding streets and quaint town squares, traces its roots nearly 400 years back to the founding of the city in 1608, and is the cradle of French civilization in America. Today, Old Québec is renowned for its European charm and unique architectural beauty. Boutiques

and cafés line the streets, horse-drawn calèches clip-clopping past stately heritage homes, musicians serenade passers-by, and strollers stop for a view of the river from the cliffside boardwalk. This pedestrian-friendly and thoroughly enjoyable district is like a living history book, with a story to tell at every turn. In 1985, UNESCO recognized its immense historical value by declaring it a "World Heritage Treasure."

Popular Destination

Québec City attracts over five million tourists a year, including over one million from outside Canada. Americans are the largest group of foreign visitors, followed by Europeans and Asians. Whatever their origins, all comment favorably on the affordable accommodations, restaurants, and attractions offering visitors great value for their travel dollar - even those from other parts of Canada who do not enjoy the added benefit of favourable exchange rates.

Four Periods of History

In total, four great periods have marked Québec City's development. The first period precedes the arrival of European settlers, when the Québec City region was peopled by proud and independent native nations. Still today, a Huron reservation exists right within the city limits, drawing visitors for a taste of Amerindian cuisine and the opportunity to learn about native culture.

The second period began with the arrival of settlers from France in 1608, at about the same time that British pilgrims were making their way to Virginia. Here they carved a new colony out of the surrounding wilderness, learning from the natives, clearing woodland for farms, and raising families in their bountiful new homeland. Québec was the capital of New France and the administrative center of an empire stretching all the way to Louisiana.

In 1759, the British laid siege to Québec, eventually capturing the town with a surprise attack via the Plains of Abraham—today a magnificent urban park. Eager to secure the support of their new French-speaking subjects against the rebellious colonies to the south, the British, rather than assimilating the habitants, decided to guarantee their right to the Catholic religion, the French civil code of law, and the French language. It was under British rule that the Québec fortifications were built, to protect the city against attack by the Americans. Today it is the only walled city in North America.

The fourth and most recent chapter of Québec history began with Canadian Confederation in 1867. Québec City became the provincial capital and was gradually to grow into the confident, outward-looking, modern center of trade and culture crossroads it has become today.

Each of these four periods has left its own legacy in the city—and each is recounted in fascinating and easy-to-follow detail in the city's many museums and interpretation centers.



Restaurants & Shopping

However, visitors flock to Québec for more than a glimpse of its remarkable past. This is a city where every activity seems designed to enhance travel enjoyment, and visitors take full advantage of the fact.

Québec is particularly noted as a gourmet destination. No other city its size boasts such a selection of fine restaurants and bistros. Whether visitors prefer fine French cuisine, a simple “steak frites” on a sun-drenched patio, the flavorful and innovative offerings of Québec's new generation of gourmet chefs, or the hearty stews and meat pies of Québec country cooking, the choice is so appetizing they may be tempted to extend their stay an extra day or two. Québec City also features a very generous selection of ethnic restaurants to suit every taste.

And after a lingering meal, nothing beats browsing through Québec's countless shops and boutiques!

Rue Petit-Champlain, tucked quaintly at the foot of the cliff beneath the city's landmark Château Frontenac, is North America's oldest shopping street. It's great for unearthing Amerindian crafts, local designer fashions, jewellery, decorative objects and much more. Nearby rue Saint-Paul is brimming with antique shops - the ideal place for whiling the day away. Visitors can also stop by one of the city's many art galleries to pick out a work by an up-and-coming Québec artist or a stunning piece of Inuit sculpture. And for those colder winter nights, perhaps a warm leather or fur coat from a local boutique would be just the thing!

Visitors should also be sure to venture outside the city's walls for more discoveries. Rue Saint-Jean in picturesque Faubourg Saint-Jean-Baptiste offers a tempting selection of gift items and fine foods. Rue Cartier in Québec City's chic Montcalm district is another must on any shopping circuit. The trendy rue Saint-Joseph in Saint-Roch district attracts many shoppers in this section of Lower Town because of the unique shops, restaurants and boutiques that recently opened. And for truly astounding selection, travel to Laurier Québec, Place Sainte-Foy, Place de la Cité or Galeries de la

Capitale, four suburban malls featuring hundreds of stores, many of them unique to Québec City.



Festivals & Events

Another great thing about visiting Québec City is the never-ending succession of events and activities the region offers throughout the year. The premier summer event is without question the Québec City Summer Festival, an incredible musical happening that turns Old Québec into a crazy quilt of people, places, and performances. For 11 days, world beat and French song take to the streets as the city becomes one giant outdoor stage. Also on the bill is a fine sampling of other musical styles along with children's theatre and a diverse roster of street and circus entertainers.

A host of other events add to the summer enjoyment in Québec, including Les Grands Feux Loto-Québec, a musical fireworks competition in the natural amphitheatre of the Montmorency Falls; the SAQ New France Festival, an annual tribute to the city's French heritage; the International Festival of Military Bands; and the Québec/Saint-Malo Transat, an international sailing race held every four years.

Québec City Tourism 2008

For the tourist industry, 2008 was a tremendous success with Québec City's 400th anniversary activities:

+10.1% in hotel occupancy (target: 6.5%)

+73.6% in person-nights (target: 54%)

-7.9% in outdoor attractions attendance (target: 5%, bad weather and 400th anniversary shows)

+7% in indoor attractions attendance (target: 4%)

+14.7% in businesses and boutiques (target: 5%)

+2.6% in restaurants (target: 7%, residents traveling downtown)

+35% in requests for information in tourist information centers

+35.8% in conventions and conferences

Ice Canoe Racing in Quebec City

Ice canoeing started as a grueling, dangerous, necessary means of transportation to cross the frozen Saint Lawrence River during the winter. The legend is that the racing began as a competition between families for the contract to deliver the mail. Now there's an association (the Association de Canot a Glace de Quebec - ACCGQ) and several regular annual races, including at Quebec City's Carnaval de Quebec, the biggest Winter Carnival in the World. More than 40 teams compete, struggling with the powerful current, great chunks of ice and numbing water.

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