

Quebec City: A Travel Feature

by Julia Elzie, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Quebec City has been described as a little bit of Europe in North America. Its French heritage is evident on every corner, from the gabled buildings to the cobblestone streets to the magnificent cathedrals. French is the primary language of business and of Quebec City's residents, but Quebec is distinctly French and Canadian, and fiercely proud of its heritage and independence.

Quebec City is located along the **St. Lawrence River** and was first founded by the Iroquois, followed by French explorer Jacques Cartier in 1535. It became a fur-trading post around 1608 with Samuel Champlain's arrival to the area. The fur trade made Quebec City into a major trading center and control was sought by the French and English. The quest for control led to several military battles at the Plains of Abraham and the Citadel, located around Quebec City. Finally, French Canada fell under English control in 1759 after the conflict at the Plains of Abraham, became an independent colony and ultimately, a part of the sovereign nation of Canada.

Quebec City is a pedestrian-friendly city and with good shoes, it can easily be toured on foot. The old fur-trading city, Basse Ville, is along the river, and offers a **beautiful tour of the history and development of Quebec City**. The oldest buildings are closest to the river and as the fur trade expanded, the city was built and expanded back from the river. The architecture changes in style and sophistication as one moves back and away from the river. The rooftops are at a steep slant to allow Quebec's snowfall to slide off in the winter. Window panes are smaller than usual, reflecting the practical need to avoid breakage during the transatlantic crossing from France. The people of Quebec City are proud of their history and cultural diversity, reflected in a stunning mural on the side of one of the buildings near the main shopping area of Quartier Petit Champlain. The fur trade, influence of the Catholic faith, the four distinct seasons and the French, English and First Nations residents are depicted in the mural. Walking through the streets of Basse Ville is a journey through history.

After Basse Ville had expanded to the Cliffside, the residents began to build into the upper city of Quebec (Haute Ville). Guarded by tall, stone walls, Haute Ville is the only European-style fortified city in North America. Quebec City has stunning views and one of the best ways to enjoy them is by riding the funicular elevator from the Basse Ville up the steep side of the cliff, arriving to the Terrasse Dufferin, outside of the castle-like Chateau Frontenac - one of the hotels the Chateau in the

Canada Pavilion at Epcot is designed to resemble. The hill is steep, so take the funicular up the hillside and take the very steep, but manageable "Breakneck Stairs" on the way back down to Basse Ville. The Chateau Frontenac is arguably the most photographed landmark in Quebec City and most people see its picture in their mind's eye at the mention of Quebec City. With its gables and turrets, the Chateau Frontenac is spectacular. It is worth a visit to see its breathtaking magnificence and to have lunch or afternoon tea at the very least.

For the best introduction to Quebec City, splurge and enjoy a carriage tour with a friendly, knowledgeable driver and guide. The drivers are warm and outgoing and a wealth of information about Quebec City. While these tours are somewhat pricey, it is an once-in-a-lifetime experience and the best way to get to know the main areas of the city. Afterwards, consider a guided walking tour or simply pick up a **self-guided walking tour brochure from the Visitors Center.**

Quebec City has some of the best museums in Canada. There is Quebecois history at the Musee de la Civilisation, regional art at Musee National des Beaux-Arts du Quebec, a historical show with sounds and light at Musee du Fort and French culture at the Musee de l'Amerique Francaise. Children will enjoy the three-dimensional history lessons at the Quebec Experience. The Citadel, overlooking the river, was built by the British Army and holds military memorabilia from the various battles for control over Quebec City. In addition, spectacular cathedrals, especially the Notre Dame du Quebec, are tributes to the influential clergy members who contributed to the growth of Quebec City. Historical museums are also available as tributes to the nuns and priests who have spent generations educating First Nations and French Canadian children. After time inside museums, children and adults will enjoy outside time at the Cartier-Breueuf National Historic Site, which was the location of explorer Jacques Cartier's 1535 winter camp. It is close to the main areas of Quebec City and offers a glimpse of an Iroquoian longhouse, plenty of grassy and open space to stretch legs or burn energy and wonderful storytelling sessions. Another fresh air alternative is taking the ferry from Quebec City to the town of Levis, directly across the St. Lawrence River, for spectacular views of the city and especially, Chateau Frontenac.

All of this learning and sightseeing can build an appetite and Quebec City has a myriad of restaurants and cuisine to suit every taste. It has some of the **best and most sophisticated food in North America.** Be sure to try as many French Canadian dishes as possible, such as wild fowl or game (try cipaille, a pie with meat and vegetables or toutiere, a meat pie), and poutine (French fries with cheese curds and gravy). Seafood is also delicious, with choices such as seafood bisque or

pot-en-pot, a dish with seafood and potatoes. For dessert, try maple pie, also known as sugar pie or tarte au sucre or trempette, which is maple syrup soaked bread, topped with whipped cream or crême fraiche. Of course, quiche, crepes and croissants with a cafe au lait are also delicious and widely available at cafes and bistros throughout the city. [Editors Note: Summertime visitors shouldn't miss the fresh strawberries when in season. They're grown just miles away, and are quite delectable.] A leisurely meal provides the opportunity to sit, enjoy the beautiful scenery and European ambiance and watch people throughout both Haute Ville and Basse Ville.

Shopping is wonderful and plentiful in Quebec City. After leaving behind the more "touristy" shops, visit the local boutiques and art galleries for memoirs of Quebec City. Some of the most authentic handicrafts will be available at the farmer's market at Marche du Vieux Port along with beautiful produce. The Quartier Petit Champlain in Vieux Quebec is among the oldest shopping districts in North America. Vieux Quebec's Rue (Street) St. Paul and Rue St. Jean offer art galleries, many filled with First Nations handicrafts. In addition to the gorgeous handicrafts and arts, maple syrup and maple syrup products are sold, along with Inuit (Eskimo) carvings. All will bring back happy memories of Quebec City.

With its history, cultural sights, magnificent food and French language, Quebec City is a beautiful taste of Europe in North America.

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