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COOL SPACES

TACKLING HOMELESSNESS
BUSINESS INS & OUTS: PART 2
JACK EVANS TO RUN FOR OLD SEAT
HAUTE & COOL: FAUX FABULOUS FUR
STREETCAR TO GEORGETOWN DENIED

Quebec City to New York on Queen Mary 2

BY MARY ANN TREGER

My husband and I needed a recharge. Not for our computers, for ourselves. Our Rx? An eight-day Queen Mary 2 luxury ocean-liner voyage from Quebec City to New York.

Pre-departure, we spend a few days at Quebec City's iconic Le Château Frontenac. The castle-like hotel dominates the skyline, high above the St. Lawrence River and Dufferin Terrace. Rich in history, this Canadian version of Hogwarts, with a myriad of towers and turrets, has welcomed countless celebs from Queen Elizabeth to Celine Dion. It is said to be the most photographed hotel in the world.

Even after 400 years, Old Quebec, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is amazingly well-preserved and ideal for strolling. We meander cobblestone streets lined with shops and cafes à la a romantic European town, only this one is easily accessible from D.C. — no need to endure a long flight or jet lag.

While the city boasts dozens of historic sites and world-class museums devoted to every taste, being a foodie I gravitate to the “tasty” Erico Chocolaterie Pâtisserie museum, and learn the history of my favorite indulgence. My husband's curiosity

is piqued at the fascinating medical museum at Le Monastère des Augustines, housing thousands of medical artifacts. This former convent — dating to 1639 and once the first hospital on the continent north of Mexico — is now a beautifully restored and redesigned health-and-wellness retreat.

Each day we roam, we sightsee, we dine at epicurean restaurants. Restaurant Champlain sates us with scallops from the St. Lawrence, caribou from Lapland and Iceland cod. A short ride down the city's fun funicular, the elegant yet rustic **Chez Muffy at the Auberge Saint-Antoine** offers farmhouse-inspired choices. (Please, do not leave without savoring the chocolate soufflé with fresh mint ice cream.)

Delectable dining continues on Queen Mary 2, docked minutes from our hotel. While we are excited about visiting several Nova Scotia towns, we are equally excited about exploring the ship, considered the grandest liner ever built.

Our days on board are long and languorous. We are never bored. The ship boasts a Canyon Ranch Spa with a full menu of services, including fitness classes, the world's only onboard planetarium, a 9,000-volume library (the largest of any at



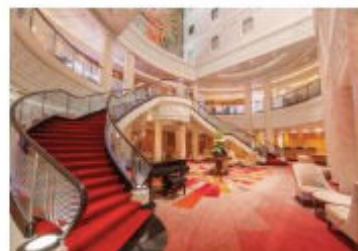
Courtesy Cunard.

sea), a Laurent-Perrier Champagne bar with fine caviar offerings, a two-level grand staircase made for photo ops, the world's largest ballroom at sea and a selection of well-edited shops. And, since there is one staff member for every two guests, we don't want for attention.

A wide variety of accommodations is available, from a two-level 9,000-square-foot suite to inside cabins. We opt for a Princess Grill Suite with a large balcony, a walk-in closet and a spacious bathroom. The best thing about a Grill Suite is access to a tony private dining room with our own table for two for the entire trip. If we decide to dine at 7 or 8 — or whatever time we choose during serving hours — no problem, the table is waiting!

The ship's size is a paradox. Even though it's carrying over 2,600 passengers, it feels intimate. We easily set into the rhythm of the place. Most nights we dine in the Grill restaurant, but occasionally we sample the Kings Court's pan-Asian, Indian or Italian fare before taking in a show or enjoying a spin (or two) around the dance floor.

While the ship is a destination unto itself, we enjoy new sights during shore excursions at each port stop: glass blowers working in Saguenay, a walking tour of Sydney and a charming fishing village near Halifax.



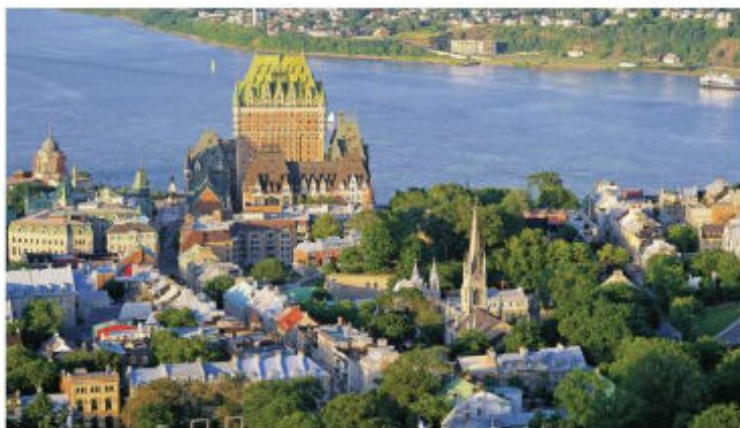
Courtesy Cunard.

Crazy as it sounds, the trip's end is a high point: our early morning arrival into New York. At 4 a.m., wrapped in thick, warm bathrobes, we wind our way to the top of the ship, where we gladly trade a few hours' sleep for the exhilaration of seeing the first glimmer of the city against a pitch-black horizon.

We remain silent in the cold, dark morning along with a handful of other romantics as the ship glides under the Verrazano Bridge. Soon after, the Statue of Liberty, ablaze in light, welcomes us just as she did my grandparents. Straight ahead, New York awakens. No words are necessary. The moment is sublime.



Courtesy Quebec City.



Courtesy Quebec City.



Courtesy Cunard.