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With the St. Lawrence River in the foreground, the Historic District of Old Quebec features the 126-year-old Fairmont Le Château Frontenac and the 210-foot Funiculaire du Vieux-Québec.



Québec

This bastion of French Canadian culture is a ticket to summer love.

BY BEKAH WRIGHT

Charming cobblestone streets. Dreamy river vistas. A metropolis with a happening arts, culture and festival scene. Zip line-friendly waterfalls. Idyllic farmlands for miles. Turns out, all the elements from this summer vacation fantasy list exist in one location: Quebec City, the 400-year-old birthplace of French North America. Plan a summer getaway to Quebec's bilingual-speaking (French/English) capital city and what awaits? *Amour d'été*: summer love.

The place to begin this amour: within the ancient stone walls of the Historic District of Old Quebec, the only fortified city north of Mexico and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Holding sway above the city is the regal, 126-year-old Fairmont Le Château Frontenac (fairmont.com/frontenac-quebec), the most photographed hotel in the world. This grande dame, located on the Promenade des Gouverneurs and the boardwalk known as Terrasse Dufferin, is romance epitomized.

"Enchanting" best describes Château Frontenac's 611 rooms and suites, which are both elegant and cozy. Several specialty rooms

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are named after famous guests who fell in love with the towering icon over the years, among them Justin Trudeau, Queen Elizabeth II and Céline Dion. Yes, the history here is rich (there's even a historic exhibition to peruse), and there are equally resplendent views, featuring the city's distinctive skyline and the St. Lawrence River. You'll find windows on unforgettable landscapes at the hotel's Bistro Le Sam, where a table overlooking the St. Lawrence at sunset comes with a view of dazzling colors reflected on the water.

Twilight strolls along the Terrasse Dufferin boardwalk with its green-and-white-canopied gazebos are magical. Grab an ice cream cone and canoodle on a bench near the river.

Wander farther and it's not uncommon to encounter street performances, from fire jugglers on unicycles to chanteuses charming couples into dancing cheek-to-cheek.

Québécois (pronounced kebekwa) are passionate about music, something they share with visitors through their annual *Le Festival d'été de Québec* (FEQ), Canada's largest music festival. This 11-day event in July (this year July 4–14) has been going strong since 1968. During FEQ, a party-like atmosphere prevails, with pop-up presentations, art installations and concerts.

FEQ provides a great excuse for nosing at sidewalk cafes, as certain streets become pedestrian-only at night. One great place for kicking back and watching grooving concertgoers is Chez Boulay – Bistro Boréal (chezboulay.com) on Rue St-Jean. The Nordic-based fare by chefs Jean Luc Boulay and Arnaud Marchand is seasonally inspired, with flavors specific to the region.

Soon, though, music will find even lingering diners gravitating toward stages. Jazz, blues, hip-hop, rock — with 10 different venues and 2,500 performances by both emerging and established artists, there's something for everyone. The crown jewel is the Bell Stage, where the likes of Lady Gaga, Paul McCartney, the Rolling Stones and Bruno Mars have rocked out on the historic Plains of Abraham (ccbn-nbc.gc.ca/en) battlefield.

If You Go

GETTING THERE

Connecting flights from San Francisco International Airport (SFO) to Quebec City Jean Lesage International Airport (YQB) are available on Air Canada, United and Delta.

GETTING AROUND

Lyft, Uber and taxis are available in Quebec City; from the airport to the Historic District of Old Quebec takes about 40 minutes.

Once you're in town, many attractions can be reached on foot or the Quebec City Double-Decker Hop On/Hop Off Bus (toursvieux.quebec.com/en/forfait/double-decker). Extremely useful for getting from areas like Old Port to Historic Old Quebec is the Funiculaire du Vieux-Québec (funiculaire.ca). Note: During FEQ, street closures make routes unpredictable, and hailing a taxi or ride-share is more difficult right after a big concert ends.

For venturing out to Montmorency Falls Park or Île d'Orléans, consider renting a car from Enterprise, Hertz or Avis. Many hotel concierges can book a rental convenient to where you're staying.

Clockwise from top left: Taking the stage at Le Festival d'été de Québec; shopping at Rue de Petit Champlain; enjoy wines and liqueurs at Cassis Monna & Filles; the historic Auberge Saint-Antoine.

From the Plains of Abraham you can explore other Quebec City attractions, including the museums and gardens on the Plains themselves and the nearby 1899-constructed La Citadelle de Québec (lacitydelle.qc.ca/en) atop Cap-aux-Diamants. For further exposure to local arts and culture, the Funiculaire du Vieux-Québec (funiculaire.ca) can whisk you to spots that reveal even more.

You can also learn through immersion by staying in a museum hotel, such as the Auberge Saint-Antoine (saint-antoine.com) in the city's Old Port. The Relais & Châteaux property's three historic buildings, built on an archaeological site, contain displays of recovered rare artifacts, both in an exhibition space and right outside all 95 rooms and suites. For dinner, head to Chez Muffy, set inside an 1822 maritime warehouse. The stone walls and wooden beams will appeal to history buffs, while the terrace is for farm-to-fork dining and reveling in the sun.

Just steps from the Auberge's front door, the Musée de la Civilisation (mcq.org/en) has natural history knowledge to offer. A new exhibition to catch is *Curiosities of the Natural World*, which, in addition to 200 pieces on loan from the Natural History Museum in London, has some objects unique to Quebec: a beluga skeleton, fossils from the Miguasha Heritage Site and Mont Saint-Hilaire minerals.

Just outside, you'll be walking in the footsteps of Quebec's founder Samuel de Champlain, past Place Royale and its Notre-Dame-des-Victoires (North America's oldest stone church; ndvsf.weconnect.com), along with a mural depicting four centuries of local history. Quartier Petit-Champlain's shops and galleries are fun to investigate, too.

At Old Port, hop aboard the AML *Louis Jolliet* (croisieresaml.com), where you can see endless panoramas and hear stories about Quebec from a guide in historic garb. On summer nights (Wednesdays and Saturdays, July 31–August 24) the sky comes alive as fireworks light up “La Vieille Capitale.”

The boat ride also reveals two nearby places to explore the outdoors: At Montmorency Falls Park (sepaq.com), minutes from downtown, you can take in the majestic 272-foot waterfall by cable car, suspended bridge, hiking, three different ferrata (protected climbing) routes, or even by soaring past on a 985-foot zip line. And a quick drive over the Pont de l'Île suspension bridge leads to Île d'Orléans (tourisme.iledorleans.com/en), the city's agricultural mainstay. Here, indulging in fresh-from-the-fields produce is a must. Cassis Monna & Filles (cassismonna.com/en), a 40-acre farm renowned for black currants, produces 50,000 bottles of black currant wines and liqueurs each year; at lunch on the terrace of its restaurant La Monnaguette, you can imbibe a crème de cassis-flavored Monsieur Martini created by mixologist Patrice Plante. Afterward, get a black currant-vanilla ice cream “softie” to go.

It's easy to feel swept away by Île d'Orléans' sweet country lanes, particularly where they sidle up to the St. Lawrence with its hypnotically bobbing kayaks and sailboats. Then your gaze falls on Quebec City, and its staggering beauty elicits a gasp. *Oui, c'est l'amour d'été.* **M**

