

Quebec City: Living history

By LINDA FASTESON For The Sun Chronicle Sep 6, 2019 5 min to read



The extraordinary tasting menu at Chez Muffy began with salted herb mussels, frilled focaccia, leek, marinère foam and stuffed pierogi.
ROGER FASTESON / For The Sun Chronicle

Take a stroll down Grand Allée, Québec City's Champs Elysées and you might think you're in Paris.

As the most European and oldest colonial city in North America, the capital of the province of Québec exudes an Old World charm and a continental flair that attracts 4 to 5 million visitors a year.

Surrounded by the French language, history and culture you'll feel worlds away. People in this tourist-friendly city are, however, fluent in English, making the cultural transition an easy one. And the exchange rate of \$1.33 Canadian dollars for a U.S. dollar makes this a top vacation value.

Although English is spoken, it's polite and appreciated to learn a few French words or phrases, if only *bonjour* (hello) and *merci* (thank you).



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Québec City, on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, is the only fortified city in North America. In the '70s the government bought and restored the buildings in Vieux-Québec, the Old Town, which is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and continues to preserve its history, heritage and architecture.

There are celebrations and festivals throughout the year, from the the summer Comedy Festival to the largest winter carnival in the world.

It all started with a hat

Ever wonder why a beaver is on the back of the Canadian nickel? Fur trading was a lucrative business when the French established Place Royale back in 1608, making Québec City the cradle of French civilization in North America. Beaver pelts were used for felt in the most fashionable and prestigious European hats. The trappers were so successful that the beaver nearly became extinct.

The many cannons around the city are remnants of the struggles between the French and British for control of this strategic location and capital of New France. The British won the battle on the Plains of Abraham in 1759 that gave them control of a vast territory and changed the fate of Canada. That usually meant British culture, language and religion.

So why is everyone still speaking French here?

With American events like the Boston Tea Party (1773) and Revolutionary War (1775-1783), the British Parliament needed allegiance to the king here and sought a practical solution.

They cut a deal, the Québec Act of 1774, with the Québec elites that preserved the French language and religion and restored French civil law. The clergy was allowed to continue to collect tithes and the feudal lords known as seigneurs continued to collect their rent from tenants.

The architecture

Paris has the Eiffel Tower and Québec City has the iconic Château Frontenac. It towers over the skyline and is the most photographed hotel in the world.

Notre Dame Basilica has the only Holy Door outside Europe. Only the Pope can authorize that it be opened for special events like the Jubilee. Look around and you'll see the French stone buildings, the neoclassical style popular with the British and the Art Deco Price Tower, which soars to heights no longer allowed within the walls.

Right next door, the Musée de l'Amérique Francophone is filled with treasures from the Seminar de Québec collection. The Québec Seminary was founded in 1608 to train priests to convert the local people. The museum contains one of the largest collections of relics in North America.

Here, even ordinary architecture become works of art. The port's grain silos' kinetic illuminations of the Aurora Borealis were inspired by the Northern Lights.

Quebecois cuisine



La Création du Pâtissier at Chex Muffy was green peas, strawberries, thyme, ordeal syrup ice cream.
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Québec City is also top foodie destination. Options range from simple traditional Québécois cuisine like poutine and tourtière at Aux Anciens Canadiens, in the Maison Jacquet, built 1675-76 to the sophisticated farm-to-fork cuisine at Chez Muffy, in a former maritime warehouse dating to 1822. Chez Muffy is part of Auberge Saint-Antoine, a luxurious Relais and Chateau museum hotel. Its innovative and creatively presented cuisine is based on Québec bistronomie, which incorporates fresh organic ingredients from the hotel's farm on Île d'Orleans



Enjoy a variety of products made with black currants and relax on the terrace of Monnaguet restaurant at Cassis Monna & Filles.
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You could easily spend the day on Île d'Orléans — “Québec City's Market Garden.” Follow the Gourmet Route to meet the producers, sample cheeses, jams, wine and more, and bring home some edible souvenirs. Don't miss Cassis Monna & Filles, an économusée, a concept originating in Québec to keep the cultural heritage alive through authentic local crafts and foods. The boutique features their black currant liquors and other delicacies. There is also a dairy bar and popular restaurant overlooking the Île d'Orléans bridge.

The stylish new Farmers' Market, Le Grand Marché de Québec, opened in June, 2019 in the entertainment complex ExpoCité. The city runs a free shuttle from the Château Frontenac every hour.



The lampshades on the lampposts on rue Cartier were originally intended to be temporary to celebrate the opening of the nearby new Fine Arts Museum. ROGER FASTESON / For The Sun Chronicle

Restaurants abound along busy Grande Allée and rue Saint-Jean. Rue Cartier, in a neighborhood off Grand Allée, is but one of the streets to explore. Lampposts are adorned with gigantic lamp shades, originally intended as temporary to celebrate the opening of the nearby new Fine Arts Museum. Here you'll find Moréna Épicerie Traiteur, a neighborhood restaurant and grocery store where you can relax with a breakfast of cappuccino and the Cocottes Garnies. Graffiti is a best bet for dinner.

Légende, part of the La Tanière group on rue Saint-Paul, is a top choice for a sensory experience of imaginatively presented cuisine inspired by history. It was voted one of Canada's best 100 Restaurants in 2014.

See historic houses and savor traditional cuisine just outside the city along avenue Royale, one of the first roads in North America. Stop for lunch at Auberge Baker, a bed and breakfast in a house built for the Lefrançois/Baker family in 1840. Nearly a century later, Alvin Baker opened it as a charming inn now owned by Gaston Cloutier.

Add in a stop at Basilique Sainte Anne de Beaupré, said to be the site of miracles, and Montmorency Falls, at nearly 100 feet, higher than Niagara Falls.

Looking to the future

The "City of Many Steeples" is steeped in Catholic traditions that are evolving. With the decline of church attendance since the 1960s Quiet Revolution, churches are being repurposed as apartments, condos, libraries, concert venues, even a circus school. It is not just a restored fort but a living city.

Now you can immerse yourself in Québec City's history with a unique and authentic accommodations. Book a stay at Le Monastère des Augustines, restored and redesigned to continue to serve the body and soul. The holistic health program includes yoga and meditation, dance therapy, and massage.



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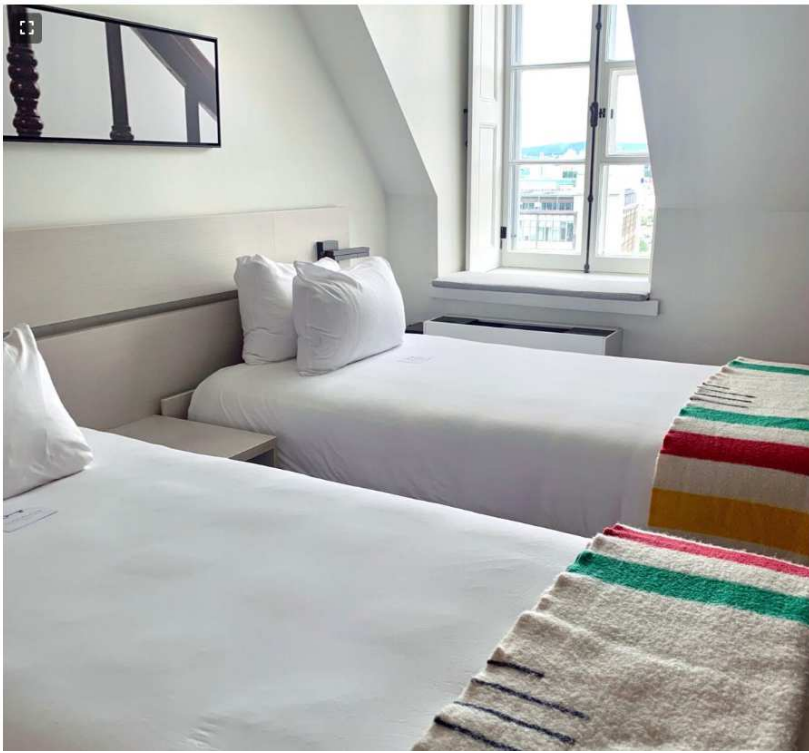
The Augustinian nuns arrived in 1639 to establish a hospital, Hôtel Dieu. This cloistered community grew their own medicinal plants until 1962 when both their healthcare and the Ursuline nuns' educational programs, became the responsibility of the government.

With so few nuns now, the property has been transformed to preserve its heritage and collections and continue its legacy of healing with holistic health programs. You'll sense the calm and, if you choose that option, silence, in this a haven of wellness and culture.

White walls are lined museum-style with paintings collected by the Augustinians over nearly 400 years. Priceless artifacts are exhibited in the museum.

The hotel has a five Green Key certification for its sustainable practices, which includes a geothermal system. The restaurant's healthy organic food is grown onsite or sourced from local producers. Waste is composted.

Plans begin with the monastic overnight stay in a room formerly for a nun, shared bath, restaurant breakfast in silence, and access to museum and heritage site for \$80 Canadian (\$60 U.S.) per person, double occupancy, or \$114 Canadian (\$86 U.S.), single occupancy.



The Augustinian Monastery's ultimate regeneration package includes 5-7 nights in a larger room with private bath, three healthy meals a day, green juices, a holistic health consultation, specialized services and private massage, reflexology, and breathing and posture sessions, etc., access to the movement and wellness activities and an end-of-stay consultation.

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