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36 Hours in Quebec City

By INGRID K. WILLIAMS JAN. 14, 2016

In Quebec's capital, hip and historic exist side by side, with cultural and culinary enticements for all manner of visitors.



Quebec City has long drawn admirers to its historic district — the famed ramparts, quaint cobblestone lanes and handsome stone houses. Get swept up in this squint-and-you're-in-Europe charm, however, and you risk missing out on the Canadian city's most compelling attractions. Over the last few years, a gradual revival has spread from one outlying neighborhood to the next, ushering in a wave of new boutiques, bars, bistros and more. But can hip and historic coexist? Quebec's capital, now alive with cultural and culinary enticements for all demographics, says, *mais oui!*



Friday

1. MEMORABLE SOUVENIRS, 3 P.M.

The most exciting district to explore right now is revitalized St.-Roch (san-ROCK), a once-seedy neighborhood northwest of the historic center where a bunch of cool secondhand and design shops have bloomed. The souvenir hunt starts at Si Les Objets Pouvaient Parler, a curios shop filled with vintage finds and conversation starters ranging from old typewriters to Polaroid cameras. Next browse nearby *Rétro Bordello*, a narrow boutique that recently stocked zany mushroom lamps and hockey pennants for the former hometown Nordiques team. Then visit Bois & Cuir, a sleek year-old home-furnishings store selling unconventional pieces like metal trunk desks and birdcage chandeliers.

2. SAVORING SAUVEUR, 6:30 P.M.

The gentrification of St.-Roch has begun spreading westward into the St.-Sauveur neighborhood, where a two-block stretch is now home to some of the city's most interesting dining establishments. Begin at Kraken Cru, a raw seafood bar that opened in June with nautical décor and a seashell-studded counter. The best order here is a dozen oysters chosen from the chalkboard menu's lengthy list of fresh, mostly Canadian bivalves (25 Canadian dollars, or \$18.35 at 1.35 Canadian dollars to the United States dollar). Then proceed up the block for a proper dinner at *Patente et Machin*, a convivial bistro with a few tables and an inventive menu, which recently included a spectacular croquette de chèvre, a ball of meltingly tender goat meat drizzled with syrup on a bed of tomato sauce (11 dollars).

3. ROCH THE NIGHT, 10:30 P.M.

No DeLorean is needed to transport you back to the '80s if you head back to St.-Roch and into the Macfly Bar Arcade. This two-room bar, which actually opened in 2014, has an electrifying orange color scheme, craft beers and vintage arcade games that are all free to play. Order a bottle of citrusy Saison Du Tracteur from the outstanding Québécois brewery Le Trou Du Diable to sip between games of Ms. Pac-Man and Double Dragon. Later, sidle up to the bar at the nearby Brasserie Artisanale La Korrigane for an only-in-Quebec nightcap: a pint of the microbrewery's Croquemitaine, a seasonal beer made with maple syrup.



Saturday

4. POUTINE PARTY, 2 A.M.

A late-night debate with a Quebecker about the best poutine is akin to arguing about cheese steaks with a Philly native, so bite your tongue and try the faithful rendition prepared at *Chez Gaston*. This St.-Roch hole in the wall is no-frills, but the piping-hot poutine is spot on: crisp fries with crunch and curds with squeak, all doused in gravy (5.65 dollars). For more comfort with your comfort food, try the city's first location of the small Canadian franchise *Poutineville*, which opened in an airy, brick-walled space last summer. Here all ingredients are customizable, but the house specialty (10 dollars) substitutes crushed potato chunks for fries and adds a pile of braised beef to Canada's so-called "national dish."

5. OUTSIDE WALL ART, 11 A.M.

The wonderfully preserved Basse-Ville (Lower Town), between the fortifications and the waterfront, dates back over 400 years and is not where you'd expect to find daring artwork. But for the last two years, the Exmuro Arts Publics organization has enlivened this historic area during warmer months with outdoor art installations. This temporary "Quartier Création" has previously featured neon-hued, tactile works and playful sculptures like three giant pigeons inspecting a huge Campbell's Soup can by Cooke-Sasseville, the moniker of two stars of the local art scene. If your visit doesn't coincide with another series of installations, instead stroll these quaint streets until you encounter the area's two massive trompe l'oeil murals — *Fresque des Québécois* and *Fresque du Petit-Champlain* — whose depictions of prominent Quebecers and life in the Cap-Blanc harbor district double as local history lessons.

6. ST.-JEAN SNACK, 1 P.M.

On bustling Rue St.-Jean, a delicious, light lunch can be cobbled together along the street's less-trafficked western end. Begin at *Le Paingrüel*, a tiny artisanal boulangerie where the fresh-baked goods — buttery croissants (1.85 dollars), spiral orange-flavored pastries (2.60) — are among the tastiest in the city. Then head northeast two blocks to *Cantook Micro-Torréfaction*, a micro-roastery and third-wave coffee shop. The gorgeously designed interior has a vaguely Pacific-Northwestern atmosphere (dark wood ceiling, decorative antlers) in which to savor a single-origin espresso.



7. LIMOILLOU LOOT. 3 P.M.

The northern working-class neighborhood of Limoilou, with its tree-lined blocks of three-story, multiunit houses fronted by curving staircases, is nowhere near the typical tourist trail. But it's worth the trek across the St.-Charles River to explore 3e Avenue, one of Limoilou's main arteries. Start at Article 721, a funky boutique stocked with an eclectic mix of jewelry, clothing and design objects, many from Québécois artisans and designers, like adorable onesies with kangaroo-like pouches from Elektrik Kidz and T-shirts emblazoned with colorful pockets from Poches & Fils. Continue to the kitchenware shop La Folle Fourchette, if only to admire the handmade ash-wood pepper mills from Pierre Chayer Artisan. Then dip in to Le Lièvre & La Tortue, a serene teahouse that opened in September, to join hip patrons alternating MacBook clicks and sips.

8. NEW OLD WORLD. 8 P.M.

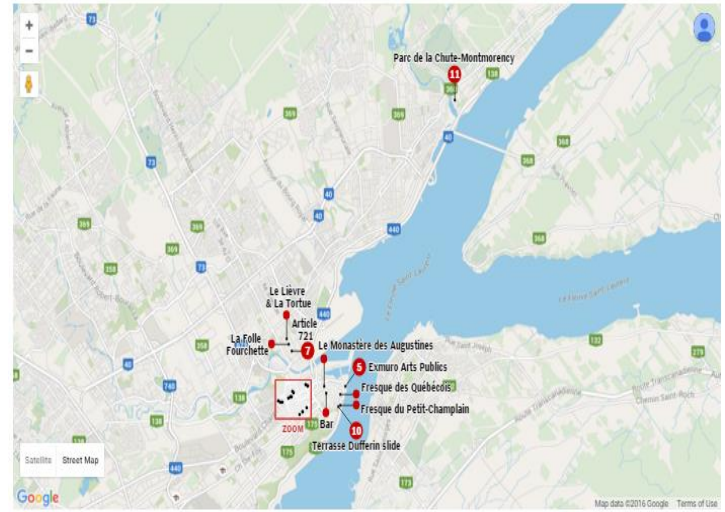
Quebec's Old World culinary ties are being spun today into creative new directions. For a dinner that riffs on the tastes of southern Italy, head to the two-year-old Nina Pizza Napolitaine, a stylishly minimalist pizzeria that pulls chewy, perfectly blistered pies from its black-and-white wood-fired oven. Don't miss the salsiccia e pistachio pizza (17.50 dollars), featuring a creamy pistachio base topped with fine rabbit sausage, hazelnuts, Parmesan and mozzarella. Or savor the flavors of France at nearby Le Renard et La Chouette, a cheery, unfussy buvette that opened in 2014. Expect groups of friends laughing over glasses of Beaujolais and Gallic-inflected small plates like torchon de foie gras adorned with diced ginger and sea buckthorn berries (16 dollars).

9. RUE OF STRANGE BREW. 11 P.M.

You'd be hard-pressed to find a better street for surveying the province's craft ciders and beers than Rue St.-Jean. For apple-based tipples, visit Le Projet Spécialité Microbrasseries, a bustling bar with an elegant interior. Try the Citron Sunrise from Les Vergers de la Colline — an appealingly tart, lemony cider — or the winelike rosé "ice cider" from La Face Cachée de la Pomme. There are also about 20 area craft beers on tap, but serious beer connoisseurs should instead ascend the foreboding stairs toward the metal-heavy soundtrack reverberating from Bateau de Nuit. This dimly lit bar, which occasionally hosts improv comedy nights, has 10 rotating taps from Quebec's best microbreweries, like Les Trois Mousquetaires and Le Castor. For more soothing tunes, follow the street into historic Vieux-Québec, where an alleyway leads to Bar Les Yeux Bleus, a cave-like bar with (gentler) live music.

36 Hours in Quebec City

Explore street view, find things to do in Quebec City and sign in to your Google account to save your map.



Sunday

10. SHOUTS AND MURMURS. 11 A.M.

Start the day with a scream while whizzing down the toboggan slide, 200 feet high and 800 feet long, that runs along Terrasse Dufferin toward the magnificent castlelike Fairmont Le Château Frontenac hotel (3 dollars). Then follow the charming cobblestone lanes of Vieux-Québec to the peaceful Monastère des Augustines, a former monastery dating from the 17th century that served as one of the first hospitals in Canada. Reopened recently as a wellness hotel and spa, the building also has an on-site museum that is a contemplative space arrayed with curious artifacts from the sisters' healing efforts (10 dollars).

11. FALLS AND CLIMBS. 2 P.M.

Thirsty for the outdoors? Ride bus 800 to the Parc de la Chute-Montmorency, about seven miles from downtown, to explore the park's majestic 272-foot-high waterfalls — taller than Niagara's. Organized climbs up the cliff face adjacent to the falls and a new zip line that shoots nearly a thousand feet across the cascades were introduced last summer. Those adrenaline-pumping adventures are limited to warmer months, but the waterfalls are breathtaking in every season. For proof, cross the suspension bridge spanning the falls to the north side, which is also the best vantage point for sweeping vistas of Île d'Orléans and beautiful Quebec City beyond.

Lodging

Outside the historic center, Hôtel Le Vincent (295, rue St.-Vallier Est; hotellévincent.com; from 149 Canadian dollars) is a 10-room hideaway with comfortable rooms featuring bare brick walls, generous breakfasts and a convenient location for exploring St.-Roch and beyond. The historic Vieux-Québec, a Unesco World Heritage site, has several hotels in old structures with modern amenities. Beyond the famed 611-room Fairmont Le Château Frontenac (1, rue des Carrières; fairmont.com/frontenac-quebec; from 139 dollars) in Haute-Ville, two options in Basse-Ville with elegant, stylish interiors are the 28-room Hôtel Le Prieur (15, rue du Sault au Matelot; hotelléprieur.com; from 139 dollars) and the 60-room Le Germain Hôtel Québec (126, rue St.-Pierre; legermainhotels.com/en/quebec; from 199 dollars).