

# A trip to beautiful Quebec in the middle of winter — it's not so crazy!

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Place Royal in Quebec's old port is a postcard all year long.

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Whose brilliant idea was this?

Quebec may be among the most beautiful cities in the Western Hemisphere — but you try enjoying its vistas, food, culture, currency-aided discounts, and French-speaking populace when it's 5 degrees and the wind is whipping around at 20 miles per hour.

The "feels like" factor was this: It feels like a mistake.

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Must-see winter attractions in Quebec

But don't be deterred by the possibility that you may have to spend one day holed up in some cozy, Euro-styled hotel room. Quebec, Canada and its surrounding area is the perfect vacation spot for winter-loving Francophiles — and there's no better time to visit than later this month, when the annual winter carnival begins.

For starters, Quebec has a lush and gorgeous history. Still ringed by a full set of fortified walls atop a high bluff overlooking the St. Lawrence River, the inner old town feels like a mini-Paris, without the attitude. Better still, the entire place is walkable — a jaunt from the Parliament building just outside the western wall to the original city below the eastern perimeter would take about a half hour (though leave a lot more time for browsing and hot chocolate).



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Rue du Petit-Champlain is home to an art coop featuring dozens of craftsmen.

Founded by the Frenchman Samuel de Champlain in 1608, who swiped the Native American word for "where the river narrows," Quebec remains that rare quirk of Canadian history: French troops were defeated by the British in 1759 on the Plains of Abraham (still visitable to this day), but despite the British win, French remained the dominant language — more so today thanks to Quebecois nationalism and a cultural preference for the French over the English.

Be prepared for at least one day of cold weather in Quebec. But fun is just outside your hotel door.

The main sites include those thick walls and the battlefield (now a park), the Chateau Frontenac Hotel and its front terrace and toboggan run, a daily farmer's market in the old port area, the National Art Museum of Quebec with its soon-to-open Rem Koolhaas addition, the Museum of Civilization, the arts and crafts co-op along Rue du Petit-Champlain, the Paris-style art sellers of Rue du Tresor, and picture-perfect streets such as Rue St. Jean and Rue St. Louis.

But the highlight of a cold-season visit to Quebec is the annual Winter Carnival ([camaval.qc.ca](http://camaval.qc.ca)), which dates back to 1894. If you can stand the cold, the Jan. 28-Feb. 21 event includes nightly parades, ice canoe races, snow sculptures, an ice palace, pond hockey, and sledding and other winter fun for the kids. If you miss it, other citywide events include a beer fest in March, maple sugar season tie-ins in late March and the annual jazz fest in late spring.

One tip: Quebec tourism authorities offer many discounts and freebies in both an online "passport" and a booklet version. Both are available at [quebecregion.com](http://quebecregion.com).

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MARC ARCHAMBAULT

Skiing at Le Massif is a one-of-a-kind experience, with trails appearing to run right into the St. Lawrence River (they don't, by the way).

## Skiing

No winter trip to Quebec is complete without skiing — and the best mountain in the area is the grandiosely named Le Massif about an hour north of the city.

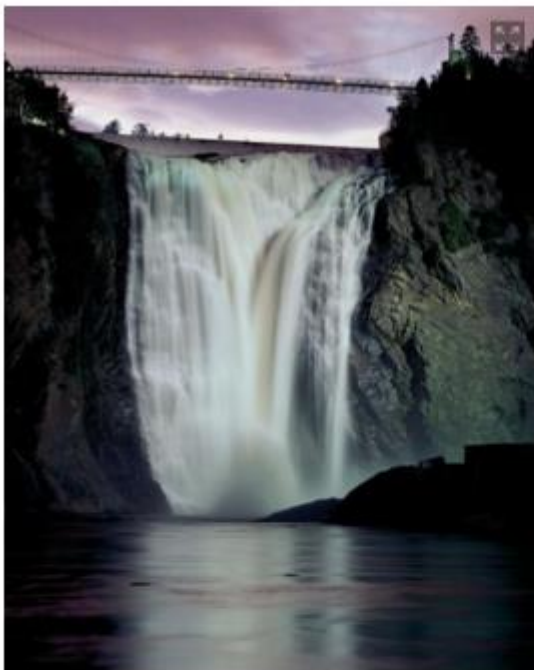
Rising on the bank of the St. Lawrence, Le Massif gives skiers the feeling that they are sliding right into the river itself. Runs are mostly for intermediates, but there are a few challenging trails for double-black-diamond lovers.

In the summer, the High Gorges of the Malbaie River National Park is worth a trip for its incredible hiking and vistas, but it is an hour north of Baie-St. Paul.

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## Near Quebec



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Just outside of Quebec are Montmorency Falls, which, at 272 feet, are more than a hundred feet taller than Niagra Falls.

On the road to the Charlevoix region of Quebec and its main city, Baie-St. Paul, don't miss Montmorency Falls, a 272-foot spillway far taller than Niagra. A cable car takes you from the foot of the falls to the top, and walkways get you right to the brink of the drink. There's even a rock climbing wall over the chasm — though fear not, you're always tied to a zipline and led by a professional guide.

Opposite the falls is the bridge to Ile d'Orleans, the mostly agricultural island that still looks like it must have in the 19th century.

### If you go:

**Getting there:** It's a 10-hour drive to Quebec from NYC, plus another 90 minutes to Baie-St. Paul. Nonstop flights to Quebec are few, but can be had for about \$300 (all prices in this story are American dollars).



HOTEL LE GERMAIN

The Hotel Le Germain in the old city of Quebec is a stylish, affordable option. Plus, the free breakfast includes the best croissants in town.

**Stay:** In Quebec, many good hotels are outside the city walls in the old port area. Hotel Le Germain ([legermainhotels.com](http://legermainhotels.com)) has stylish rooms, with free breakfast, for \$145 per night. In the Charlevoix region, the best hotel is Le Germain Hotel Charlevoix in Baie-St. Paul. Modern and sleek, it features a huge hot tub for apres-ski relaxation and a friendly open-kitchen restaurant ruled by chef Sylvain Dervieux.

**Eat:** Quebecois food resembles its French counterpart, except it's often too fancy or fussy — like an overly wrought melange of Nouvelle Cuisine and classic French. These bistros know how to do haute cuisine without too much flash in the pan: Restaurant SSS ([restaurantsss.com](http://restaurantsss.com)); Echaude ([echaude.com](http://echaude.com)); and Cafe St. Malo (no website), which is best known for local delicacies such as blood sausage and venison.

**Travel note:** If you're driving to Quebec from New York City, an overnight stop in Vermont is a must. A new option is the Taconic, a just-opened "boutique" hotel in Manchester — nicely situated in a wooded glen between downtown and Hildene, the famous home of Robert Todd Lincoln. Rooms at the Taconic ([taconichotel.com](http://taconichotel.com)) can be as low as \$161 midweek. It also has a restaurant called the Copper Grouse ([coppergrouse.com](http://coppergrouse.com)) that's so good it attracts as many locals as guests. The menu by Vermont native chef Adam Raftery features comfort favorites such as fried oysters, mac and cheese, a half-chicken, a burger and delicious, fork-tender short ribs. The cocktail menu is great, too.



GEOFF KURT ZMAN

Sylvain Dervieux is the master chef at Les Labours inside Le Germain Hotel Charlevoix in Baie-St. Paul.