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## One City, Two Worlds

### Historic and modern, European and North American, Quebec City has a lot to offer

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In the capital of the Canadian province of Quebec, a horse drawn carriage patters by, its driver wrapped in layers of coats, his old-time hat rimmed with snow. Above the city, a castle towers, its romantic, Loire Valley-style, fairytale architecture a tease to expect a princess and her regal entourage inside. Having gingerly tip-toed up an icy, gas lamp-illuminated cobblestone alleyway one winter morning, I look out to a vista that embraces the magnificence of the historic, now quasi-frozen St. Lawrence River—and the patchwork of centuries-old buildings that cascade in irregular undulations down to its ship littered shore.

Amid the quiet, early morning streets, there's really not much to indicate the 21st century at all. It even seems possible that French Explorer Samuel de Champlain, who founded Quebec City and New France as a fur trading post in 1608, may stroll by. Instead, a coat-clad passerby greets me with, "bonjour." She's not Champlain, but rather a nattily attired, Parisian-looking Quebecois (in high-heeled boots no less) unlocking the doors to her modern art gallery for the day. "Bonjour," I respond, and enter her shop, stepping between two worlds—one ancient and the other contemporary—that define Quebec City.

A UNESCO World Heritage site, Quebec City hovers above a cliff overlooking the river valley. Once home to native people and later a battleground between French and English explorers, it showcases architecture and traditions that boast more than 400 years of history. Crowded with day-trippers in summer months, the town's trendy boutiques, chic restaurants, museums, avant garde galleries and friendly bars, are quieter and even more welcoming in winter. With its ideal mix of old and new, Quebec City embodies a distinctly European essence—a rarity in North America. Here, the French language dominates, and the city proudly pays attention to French culture and modern Gallic trends, adapting them with a Quebecoise affability and well-entrenched frontier spirit.



Walkable in any season, the original neighborhood of Old Quebec can be explored, too, by horse-drawn carriage or hop-on-hop-off double-decker buses, which provide an overview to major sites. A convenient funicular will whisk you up to the top portions of the city, but nothing beats walking to discover hidden nooks of Quebec City. Besides allowing for frequent rest stops at cafes and countless steaming cups of cafe au lait, wandering without direction in Old Quebec brings you face-to-face with a mixture of centuries-old monuments and hip, mom-and-pop

businesses wedged into ancient structures. For a delicious introduction to the city, sign up for Quebec Food Tours, which leads you on a culinary ramble through the city's distinctive St-Roch neighborhood. Sharing insider tips and historical anecdotes, the 3-hour trek unveils a Quebec that residents savor.

A verdant landscape surrounds Quebec and feeds its gourmet scene. Embracing a farm-to-fork ethos before the trend set in worldwide, the city draws from a melange of influences and readily utilizes local food growers and producers. Myriad cheeses made by local makers, distinctive wines grown nearby, and artisan charcuterie creators and bakers present a French-tinged, international gastronomic mood throughout the city. Try Cafe Saint Malo for its classic mussels or cassoulet; Le Billig for crepes; Le Chic Shack for poutine (which locals insist is the world's best hangover cure); and J.A. Moisan to buy ingredients (such as pate) for that picnic you'll want to pack when you climb to Quebec's major attraction—the Citadel, a historic fortress.

Thanks to its northern clime, harsh temperatures and snowfall typify the month of January. But the citizens of Quebec City don't bemoan the cold—instead they celebrate it. Join them for frosty fun at the Quebec Winter Carnival, a chilly fête held Jan. 27-Feb. 12. From a canoe race on an iced-up river to snow baths to snow sculpture competitions, the family-friendly fest includes skating, sleigh rides, night parades and more. More winter thrills are possible with a 90-minute drive northeast to Le Massif, where some of the province's steepest slopes await, including a terrifying 2,526-foot vertical drop that is easily one of the most harrowing ski runs east of the Canadian Rockies.

Surrounded by all this cold, it seems appropriate to bed down in an igloo mansion. Literally. Hotel de Glace is the only ice hotel in North America, a place that melts each spring and gets re-imagined and re-sculpted each winter. Created using more than 15,000 tons of snow, the astonishing structure lacks nothing. Glittering ice-formed chandeliers illuminate the interiors, exquisite hand carved ice furniture awaits your snow-suit-clad rump and ice glasses hold the vodka you'll imbibe to stay warm.

Though I'm a bit nervous the night I snooze at Hotel de Glace, I follow instructions to dip into the hot tub and huddle in the sauna before cocooning deep inside the hotel issued sleeping bag—which helps retain body heat. I sleep deeply and awaken to the sound of French echoing through the frozen halls. With glee, I jump from bed, pull on my ski clothes and literally skate from my room into the hotel's great hall.

I wonder what Samuel de Champlain would say about tourists paying to sleep on ice.

## When You Go

**Fly** Take a direct flight on American from San Antonio to Quebec.

**Stay** Hotel De Glace, this year promising a river theme, opens Jan. 4, and closes March 26. [hoteldeglace-canada.com](http://hoteldeglace-canada.com)

**Eat** Cafe St. Malo mimics a Left Bank bistro. Warm up with its famous cassoulet, a stew of beans, meat and vegetables. [lecafesaintmalo.com](http://lecafesaintmalo.com)

**Shop** Le Sachem sells authentic First Nation arts and crafts, including animal-skin moccasins and peace pipes. J.A. Moisan, touted as North America's oldest grocery store sells maple syrup, local cheese and ice cider dessert wine. [nativespiritart.com](http://nativespiritart.com); [jamoisan.com](http://jamoisan.com)

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