



Opening night parade in Old Québec, New France Festival, Québec City, Québec, Canada

New France Festival

Step into 17th-century Québec for 21st-century fun

By Mary Lu Laffey

In Québec City, Québec, Canada, there may be more festivals and events than there are months in the year.

In the winter, Québec Winter Carnival invites everyone to bundle up and stay outdoors with Bonhomme, its snowman-like mascot.

The Québec City Summer Festival is all about music.

Each August for the past 20 years, locals and guests by the thousands slip into period costumes to celebrate 17th- and 18th-century life at a storied outpost on the St. Lawrence River. They dress for an annual event called the New France Festival. More than 1,000 artistic programs are held during the five-day celebration.

Located inside the walls of Old Québec, the New France Festival celebrates the beginning of coloniza-

tion in North America.

When explorers set out from the settlement, they headed onto the Great Lakes, which led them to the rivers in the Midwestern United States and onto waterways beyond. The route that began in New France, now the province of Québec, continued to New Orleans.

Celebrated on the streets of the old city, the festival invites the world to embrace joie de vivre through a roster of daily parades and mesmerizing multimedia productions, street entertainment and shows. There are plenty of food vendors, too.

The historical celebration of the area is not limited to those of European descent.

Members of the Innu Nation of Mashteuiatsh often camp in Artillery Park to represent the daily life

of their ancestors during the New France era. Participants are descendants of the native people who first hosted “The Father of France,” navigator and explorer Samuel de Champlain as he sought to discover North America.

Champlain founded Québec, New France (now Québec City), on July 3, 1608.

Good value, la valeur

One of the highlights of the New France Festival is the opening night parade. Because our group wasn’t scheduled to pick up costumes until the next day, we were dressed in civvies. We settled on the bleachers near the Fairmont Chateau Frontenac hotel. Women in front of me and to my left were dressed in period costumes of silks and brocades with an abundance of plumes and feathers. Men were rakishly styled in their britches with stockings and buckled shoes.

As the lively parade passed our grandstand, it didn’t march, it rollicked.

Often called the “Parade of Giants” for the towering historic figures that lead hundreds

of characters fencing, singing, cajoling and marching, onlookers can hardly wait to leap from the curbing to join in.

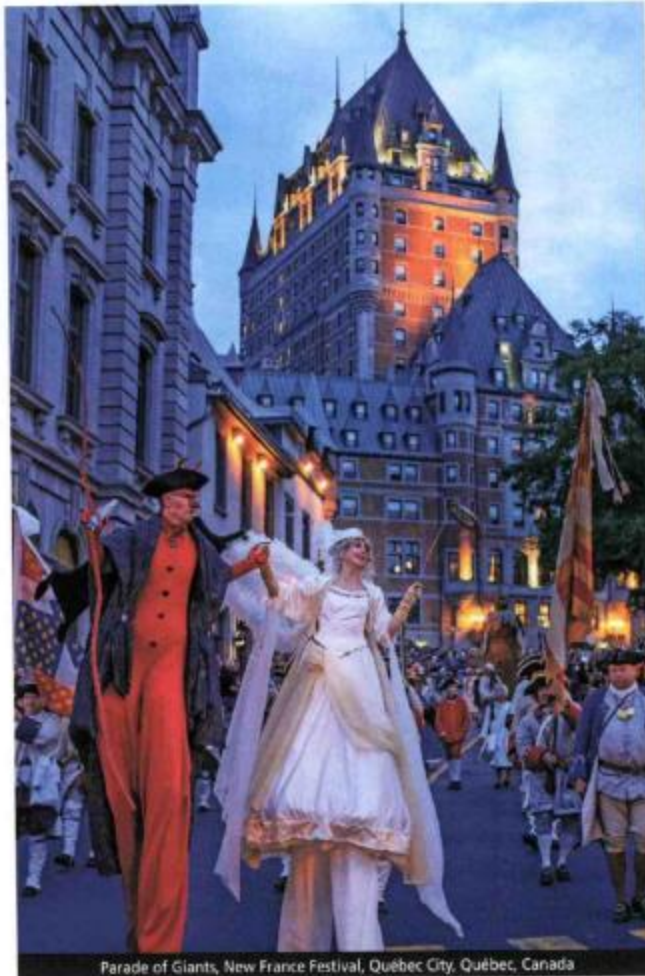
At the end of the parade, we filed in behind a group of musketeers and made our way to the opening night reception for the public.

On the following day, I had picked up my costume and was ready to play my part in another grand parade. This one culminated at water’s edge where a street fair, circa 1800s, was in full swing.

Merchants sold strawberries and cheeses, apple cider and other libations, while musicians played and vocalists joined in.

When a marching band stepped off, we lined up behind. We waved to the crowds, nodded to families and flirted with our hand-held fans.

Along the streets, intriguing characters roleplayed to tell a tale or two. There were young



women looking for husbands — *les filles du roi* — and scoundrels, too. The occasional Jesuit impersonator stopped to preach to small crowds, and bugles and drums were heard in the distance.

As the parade ended at Place Royale, parade watchers, assuming we were locals, approached and asked members of our group to pose with them for photos. Which we did *avec plaisir*. 🇩🇪

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