

VACATION AGENT MAGAZINE

CRUISE / CANADA PORT UPDATE

BEYOND LEAF PEEPING

NEW PORTS ALONG THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER
ARE TRANSFORMING CANADA/NEW ENGLAND
INTO A SUMMER CRUISE DESTINATION

By Anne Kalosh

For decades, the Canada/New England itinerary has been largely marketed on fall foliage. That, however, is changing as cruise lines begin to visit the region in the summer. Plus, with new cruise ports emerging along the St. Lawrence River in Quebec, the region is expanded and refreshed, making it more appealing than ever.

Quebec City and **Montreal** are the key homeports, but at least seven other destinations welcome cruise ships.

Summer sailings change the client and the product, from retirees on sightseeing tours to younger people and families with children seeking more action. Quebec comes alive in the summer, bursting with festivals, exciting outdoor activities and family fun.

Plenty of excursions involve walking, biking, rafting, jet boating, zip-lining or cliff climbing. Gourmet restaurants, casual bistros, colorful markets, foodie tours, cooking classes, microbreweries, rooftop bars, free concerts and public art installations spice things up further.

Holland America Line pioneered summer cruises to Canada/New England with calls in Quebec, deploying multiple ships for years. Others are catching on.

Here are some highlights of the St. Lawrence ports:



A Holland America Line ship
at the Port of Quebec.



Quebec City. Holland America passengers rank Quebec City tops globally. It's easy to see why. Docking in the Old Port, at the base of the fortress city that's a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and beneath the Chateau Frontenac, is a spectacular experience.

Steps lead up to Rue du Petit-Champlain, thought by many to be the most beautiful street in Canada, and jammed with boutiques. Place-Royale, where Samuel de Champlain founded the city in 1608, is ringed by stone buildings, including North America's oldest stone church.

The castle-like Chateau Frontenac is a must-visit, and it's an easy stroll to shops, cafes, restaurants, parks, plazas, galleries, churches and museums.

City tours take in the Plains of Abraham, a battleground that changed Canada's future. Outlying attractions include Montmorency Falls, reached by cable car or motorcoach, where activities range from sedate (afternoon tea) to spine tingling (zip-lining or cliff climbing).

At Wendake, a self-governing territory of the Huron-Wendat nation, visitors can explore a traditional long house. Families can enjoy the Quebec Aquarium with its polar bears, walrus and seals.

Ile d'Orleans, a pastoral island in the St. Lawrence, is famous for artisanal products, and cozy farmhouse shops give samples of black currant liqueur, wines, jams and maple treats.

Montreal. A new \$78 million cruise terminal opened at Alexandra Pier this year, the city's 375th anniversary. It puts passengers in the heart of Old Montreal, the historic district. Archaeological traces of the city's origin are steps away in the Pointe-a-Calliere national historic site. Walking and biking trails, parks, a zip-line and Canada's largest Ferris wheel are right on the riverfront.

Old Montreal features pedestrian streets, a market, 240 restaurants, rooftop bars and eye-catching architecture. After dark, "Cite Memoire" tableaux projected on walls, alleys and even trees, share remarkable snippets of history. At Notre-Dame Basilica, where Celine Dion was married, a spectacular light show, AURA, is accompanied by orchestral music.

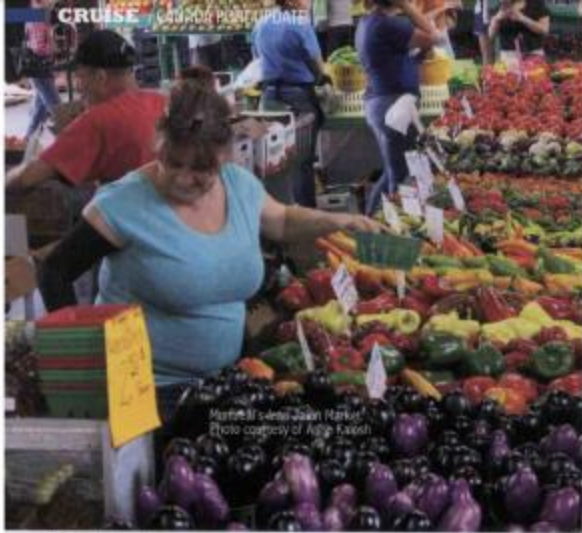
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Iles de la Madeleine's beaches are lined with red sandstone cliffs. Photo courtesy of Anne Katoch

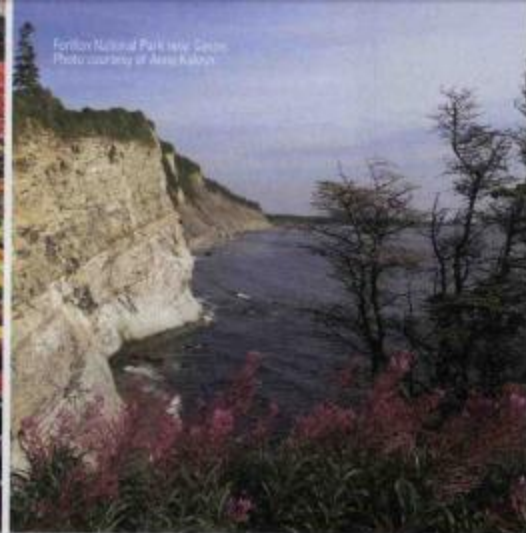


CANADA CRUISE SHIP NEWS

- New in 2018, Hurtigruten will offer an April itinerary calling at Havre-Saint-Pierre and Bonaventure Island. A May cruise will visit Iles de la Madeleine.
- Disney Cruise Line will provide two full days in Quebec City and stops at Saguenay and Baie-Comeau on a pair of new weeklong cruises between New York and Quebec in September.
- Windstar Cruises will sail between New York or Boston and Montreal, stopping at Quebec City (with some overnight stays) and Gaspe, with scenic cruising of Saguenay Fjord.
- Other lines featuring Quebec ports include Celebrity Cruises, Cunard, Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania Cruises, Pearl Seas Cruises, Princess, Regent Seven Seas, Royal Caribbean, Seabourn, Silversea, Victory Cruise Lines and Viking Cruises. None, though, has more itinerary variety or a longer season than Holland America Line, with its multiple ships and embarkation ports.



Montreal's vibrant Jean Talon Market
Photo courtesy of Anne Kozicki



Forillon National Park (left), Saguenay
Photo courtesy of Anne Kozicki

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Further afield, one of the trendiest neighborhoods is Mile End, home to artists, writers, musicians and filmmakers. It's best explored on walking or biking tours, especially by those who are food-oriented. In Little Italy, Jean-Talon Market bursts with flowers, fruits and vegetables, cheeses, fish, meats, baked goods, a creperie, an oyster bar, a spice shop and much more.

Some of **Montreal's** other draws include the wonderful Museum of Fine Arts and Parc Jean-Drapeau, spanning two islands in the St. Lawrence where remnants of Expo 67 include the Biosphere and the Casino de Montreal.

Iles de la Madeleine. This beautiful archipelago is fringed with red sandstone cliffs and dotted with houses painted in all colors of the rainbow. The islands produce distinctive cheeses, smoked fish and other treats. A microbrewery, l'Abri de la Tempete, uses locally malted barley, flowers, algae and herbs to flavor its beers.

At Artisans du Sable, sand is sculpted into artworks, while cooking classes at Gourmande de Nature use local products. Shops in tiny La Grave sell gourmet chocolates, artwork, jewelry and handicrafts.

Havre-Saint-Pierre. This town is the gateway to the Mingan Archipelago National Park Reserve, with its incredible rock monoliths. Whales can be seen on boat excursions to the islands. Some tours cater lunch inside a former lighthouse keeper's home.

Back on the mainland, visitors can learn about the native Innu people at the Ekuanitshit village. Women offer samples of bannock bread and explain the use of plants in traditional medicine. A church is decorated with stunning Innu art.

Gaspé. This port serves as the gateway to several destinations on the Gaspé Peninsula, which *National Geographic* has singled out as a "must see." Tour boats visit the magnificent offshore Perce Rock and Bonaventure Island, the summer nesting home for hundreds of thousands of northern gannets.

Excursions to Forillon National Park reveal gorgeous vistas of sea cliffs, forests and wildflowers. Trails lead to lookout points, beaches, an old farmstead and general store.

Sept-Îles. This city offers insight into traditional Innu life through the four seasons in a multimedia presentation at the Shaputuan Museum, while the Agara Complex mingles a boutique and art gallery of aboriginal handicrafts. The Old Trading Post re-creates a 17th-century meeting place between Innu and Europeans.

An exhibit near the cruise terminal showcases Hermel, the boat that Mylene Paquette rowed solo across the Atlantic in 2013. Mid-ocean, she was assisted by Queen Mary 2. Small boat adventures leave from the port for Grande Basque Island, frequented by Basque whalers centuries ago.

Baie-Comeau. Chicago Tribune publisher Robert McCormick established a paper mill in this northern bay in 1936 and built a town for the workers. It's easy to see why Disney Cruise Line will visit.

The entertaining Franquelin Lumberjack Village re-enacts a lumberjack's life in times past. Families can learn how the massive Laurentide Ice Sheet shaped most of Canada and the northern U.S. in a dynamic, multimedia experience at the Garden of the Glaciers. Kids particularly enjoy searching for seashells in the middle of a forest at the Seashell Valley, once beneath an ancient sea.

Saguenay. No wonder this port has grown into one of the busiest on the St. Lawrence. Set on the lovely Saguenay Fjord, it's perfect for scenic cruising.

What also stands out is the amazing welcome for every ship. Costumed actors from the community musical "La Fabuleuse" greet passengers, rain or shine. The show itself, chronicling the area's history, features a cast of more than 100 all-volunteer actors, including children and even animals.

Saguenay National Park can be explored on tours that incorporate hiking, kayaking, climbing or helicopter rides. A new forest adventure gives the chance to observe black bears.

Trois-Rivières. Ships dock alongside the historic district, where walking tours, some led by costumed characters, enrich the experience. The Museum of the Ursulines housed the first school for girls in New France, while the Borealis museum gives a lively recounting of the pulp and paper industry, with activities for kids.

The Old Prison, now a museum, reveals dark secrets about the penal system's not-too-distant past. Some of the guides are former prisoners.

For a more upbeat interlude, the microbrewery Le Temps d'Une Pinte (Time for a Pint) taps creative beers like key lime pie. At Sugar Shack Chez Dany, rollicking meals are served family-style, with folksy entertainment. Even the waitress might play the spoons.