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A Family's Guide to Quebec's Charlevoix Territory

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The smallest tourism region in Quebec packs a punch when it comes to family fun

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Go beaver watching at Domaine le Pic-Bois in Saint-Aime-des-Lacs. // © 2017 Getty Images

The list of reasons to visit Quebec City with kids in tow is long and varied. It also most likely includes stops at the Plains of Abraham, the popular Petit-Champlain District and the majestic Chateau Frontenac.

But traveling families willing to leave city limits can start with a stop at Montmorency Falls, which is about 100 feet higher than Niagara Falls and located just a 20-minute drive from downtown. Here, clients can walk across the falls, ride the cable car or even go ziplining. But, instead of just heading back into the city after a visit, families should set their course for Charlevoix.

Feature image (above): Fly in a seaplane over Saguenay Fjord. // © 2017 Getty Images

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Approximately a two-hour drive from Quebec City, the majority of the Charlevoix region sits in a crater formed by the impact of a meteorite that hit the area 400 million years ago. The smallest tourist area in Quebec, it stretches from the village of Petite-Riviere-Saint-Francois to the mouth of the Saguenay Fjord on the St. Lawrence River.

Fathom Life at Sea

First, make a pit stop at Charlevoix Maritime Museum, which is located in the old Saint-Joseph-de-la-Rive shipyard. The area's seafaring history is explained in detail at the museum, but it's the "all hands on deck" experience that will be the most memorable for kids. Climbing onboard four anchored schooners and a 1923

tugboat named "Felicia" is really what makes this museum fun.

www.museemaritime.com

Island Living

Hop back behind the wheel, and you'll soon join the queue of cars waiting for the free, scenic ferry crossing to Isle-aux-Coudres, which is also within Charlevoix. With just one traffic light and only two gas stations, the island has an old-school seaside vibe that will charm visitors of all ages. Drop your things at Hotel Cap-Aux-Pierres, but don't get sidetracked by the hotel's view, pool or beluga-whale-themed minigolf course. Driving the approximately 15 miles around the island in a car should be a family's top priority.

www.hotelcapauxpierres.com

www.traversiers.com

Spin Your Wheels

If accomplishing double-digit mileage on a bike sounds overwhelming, don't worry: Cycling the entire Isle-aux-Coudres loop is not required (although the trip is relatively flat). But families up for the ride should grab a set of wheels at Velo-Coudres Rental Center, which has an assortment of family-friendly options ranging from bikes with trailers to tandem bikes, quadricycles and electric bikes. If you pedal continuously, you can circle the island in a couple hours.

www.velocoudres.com

Sweet Treats

During the bike ride, stop to take pictures, pet the curious kittens that might appear along the road or pick apples at Cidrerie Vergers Pedneault. The Pedneault family planted its first fruit on Isle-aux-Coudres in 1918. Now, with nearly a century-long history, the family grows more than 30 varieties of apples, pears and plums. Additional family specialties include some two-dozen alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, along with products such as apple butter, syrups and cider. Then, make a stop at Boulangerie Bouchard for a slice of sugar pie or one of the other sweet treats that the boulangerie has been baking for nearly 70 years.

www.boulangeriebouchard.com

www.vergerspedneault.com

High-Flying Fun

One of the best ways to understand and appreciate Charlevoix's geography is to see it from above on a seaplane adventure. With flights lasting 20 to 60 minutes, Charlevoix Aviation provides a bird's-eye view that packs a tremendous punch into a short amount of vacation time. Families can specify what they'd like to see, and choices include the coast of the St. Lawrence River, the Parc National des Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Riviere-Malbaie, l'Acropole des Draveurs, the Saguenay Fjord and more. Every seat on the four-passenger Cessna 206 floatplane offers a window view.

www.tourdhydravioncharlevoix.com

A Walk in the Park

Charlevoix's mountain scenery can take your breath away, but families don't have to end up breathless when exploring its Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Riviere-Malbaie national park. Parents with babes in arms can enjoy a gentle hike or float down the river on a mellow discovery cruise. Families with adventuresome teenagers may be up for the challenge of l'Acropole des Draveurs trail, a four-hour, roundtrip hike.

www.sepaq.com

Here Beaver, Beaver

Beaver watching is actually a thing at Domaine le Pic-Bois in Saint-Aime-des-Lacs. Thanks to the country's rich history, which includes the trading of beaver pelts, the buck-toothed rodent has long held cultural significance for Canada. Beaver viewing typically takes place in the evening from 5 to 7 p.m., when the creatures tend to be most active. Guides provide guests with information about the large rodent while waiting for the critters to emerge from their nearby dam. Once out in the open, the beavers go about their business, putting on a unique wildlife viewing experience. Bring layers, as temperatures can drop as the sun goes down.

www.lepicbois.com