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Canada 150: Quebec Delivers the Ultimate Summer Vacation



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This year our national neighbors to the north celebrate their 150th anniversary and we'll be celebrating with them as they do. Each month we'll focus on one part of their magnificent country and share it with you. From the sky-high trees and brown bears in British Columbia to the kitchen parties and codfish-kissing in the Maritimes, our toast to Canada will give you well over 150 reasons to make this the year you take the trip. This month we're getting out early and staying up late in Quebec.

Canada 150: Quebec

You can't talk about Canada without at least mentioning *La Belle Province*. Quebec has long attracted tourists with a welcoming French-Canadian accent. From the cobblestones of its capital to the youthful exuberance of Montreal, romantics of all ages fall hard for the province. And if your love affair is with nature, you're still in luck. Quiet, rural outposts full of adrenaline-filled adventures, historic landmarks, and innovative fresh cuisine make Quebec one of those provinces that inspire multiple return trips.

The Cities: Montreal and Quebec City

Montreal and Quebec City are like opposite sides of the same coin. In both you'll find incredible French-Canadian culture, art worth ogling, and a charm that lives up to everything you've read, but the cities are also distinctly different. In Montreal, you'll find a city infused with a buzzing core, be pulled into the celebrations that happen in the streets, and wonder why you bothered to book a hotel with so much to do every hour of the day. From live music to innovative designers to creative wares, Montreal will give you as much to try, taste and explore as you're willing to take on.

Quebec City, Montreal's less exuberant but equally intriguing sister, has a laid-back pace that will appeal to relaxed travelers. Horse-drawn rides through lamp-lit streets, museums that explore the city's exciting military past, and abundant outdoor art will make filling your days easy.

Here's a hint when it comes to deciding on your Quebec itinerary: Don't choose; do both. You'll be better for it. And if you can save time for the surrounds including Saguenay, Charlevoix, the Magdalene Islands and more, you'll find that Quebec has enough to fill your travel plans for years to come.

Celebrate a Milestone Birthday in Montreal

There is always a party to be had in Montreal, and traveling guests are always welcome to celebrate with the city's 1.7 million locals. Time your visit for the [Montreal International Jazz festival](#), the Just for Laughs Comedy Festival, or the annual Pride festivities and you'll find both free outdoor experiences and intimate, indoor shows.

Expect even bigger festivities this year as the city celebrates its [375th birthday](#) as well as Canada's [150th](#). As would be expected, the excuse to ramp up the programming and street parties is one Montreal wasn't going to shy away from. Among the most anticipated events is [La Grande Tournee](#); a celebration that includes circus performances and rotates through the city's neighborhoods to include everyone in the fun. And don't miss Cite Memoire—a multimedia project that posts projections on trees and buildings of Old Montreal each night. The free, walkable, self-guided tour is connected to an app on your phone that allows you to start and stop whenever you'd like.

Need a place to stay? Consider the newly renovated and iconic [Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth](#). This hotel is home to the suite where John Lennon and Yoko Ono staged their famous bed-in in 1969 and where the song "Give Peace a Chance" was penned. Pop in to peek at the new renovations and consider a bed-in of your own.

Roam, Night and Day, in Old Quebec City

If it's romance you're after, this is your city. The entire area of Old Quebec—the continent's only walled city north of Mexico—is a UNESCO World Heritage site. And in 2010, Quebec City was ranked among the top 20 most romantic destinations in the world. Hand-holding is almost mandatory here, whether you're walking along the top of the fortified walls, leaning back in a horse-drawn carriage, or strolling the Dufferin Terrace that looks out at the mighty St. Lawrence river.

Discover the city's history with the stories and artifacts at the Plains of Abraham and Place d'Armes. Architecture fans shouldn't miss the Petit-Champlain district or the Parliament Building, including the Tourny fountain (a 400th anniversary present to the city) that sits out front. Then hop the cable car to Lower Town and explore the local shops in search of a memorable souvenir to carry home.

Why Now is the Perfect Time to Go

Art for Peace: Starting this month, popular Sherbrooke Street turns into an open-air museum with 67 works of art reflecting the spirit of Expo 67. The project, developed in partnership with the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, runs from June 5 to October 29.

Go for a Spin: The highest observation wheel in Canada opens this month in Montreal's Old Port. Rising almost 200 feet above the ground, [La Grande Roue de Montreal](#) is a new attraction that will offer visitors an unbeatable view of the city and river.

Why It's Great Other Times of Year

Quebec Winter Carnival: The Quebec Winter Carnival is one of the province's most popular winter celebrations. Join the crowds that turn out each year in Quebec City. This family-friendly event has ice slides, outdoor treats and of course the popular mascot Bonhomme. It runs in late January through early February each year.

Valcartier Vacation Village: In December, this park turns into a winter wonderland with an on-site ice hotel built entirely out of snow and ice. You can book a night or simply admire it before heading off for a cozy fire and *chocolat chaud* (hot chocolate) somewhere warmer. And in the summer, the Vacation Village opens its outdoor **waterpark** perfect for cooling off.

Wendake Museum: Explore the area's First Nations history through dance, stories, and crafts at the Wendake Museum. The ancestors of the area's original people offer guided tours, cuisine tastings, educational activities and more. Want to dive deeper? Spend a night in the **Longhouse**.

Les Arts de la Rue: Come in July to catch the event poised to be the largest street theatre event in North America. 60 of the best theatre troupes from around the world will descend on the streets of Montreal for more than 800 shows ranging from clowns and acrobats to poetic imagery and grand art.

If You Go Don't Miss...

Ile d'Orleans: Only nine miles from downtown Quebec City, this island is the largest heritage site in the province. Farms, local foodie routes, resident artisans, and pristine countryside are here, surrounded by the famous St. Lawrence River. Visit from May to October to make the most of the seasonal fruits and jams.

The National Park

Located midway between Montreal and Quebec City, [La Mauricie National Park](#) has it all—including forests full of conifers and hardwoods, more than 150 lakes, and wildlife including loons (the same bird that marks the Canadian \$1 coin), beavers, and owls.

The park is heaven for canoers, but bikers, hikers and kayakers will love it too. Lookouts along the main parkway offer marked signs and exhibits detailing the history of the parkland, and short trails offer quick ways to enjoy.

Want to learn more about the area? Visit [Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site](#) where from the early 1700s to late 1800s blacksmiths produced products used for both military and home use. It's a great hands-on lesson in the history of Canada's first industrial community.

And don't forget to pick up a Parks Canada Xplorers program booklet if you're traveling with kids. The books offer activities for kids aged 6 to 11, along with engaging tips and stories. Bonus: Once kids have completed the booklet, they can turn it in for a free prize. And of course, all year long, entrance to the National Parks is free with your [Discovery Pass](#).