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# The Tiny Island Just Minutes From Québec City That's a Food-Lover's Paradise

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Photo by Paul Hurteau & Claude Parent/Tourisme Québec

**Foodies can forge a delicious trail through Québec's bucolic Île d'Orléans.**

Alongside fresh berries, homemade jams, maple syrup, wine, and cheeses, Québec's Île d'Orléans serves up a side of nature and history.

You bite into a juicy strawberry that might just be the best you've ever tasted. Juice dripping from your chin, you attempt to tell the farmer manning his roadside stand how content you are, but you speak no French and he, no English. So you nod enthusiastically and grunt with appreciation. You set off on your way, but not before stocking up on a container of ripe berries to go and some jam for good measure.

The setting is the **Île d'Orléans** 🏝️, a bucolic island in Québec that's roughly twice the size of Manhattan and situated just a 15-minute drive away from **Québec City**. Here, animals roam freely on pastoral farms, picnic-ready waterfront views await, and agriculture thrives year-round, supplying the restaurants of the province. Settled in the 16th century as one of the first colonies of what was then New France, the historic architecture of Île d'Orléans takes visitors back in time, while mom-and-pop operations prevail (there are no chain stores to see here).

A favorite of history buffs and nature lovers, the island beckons gourmands, too, sampling everything from Old World cheeses to crème de cassis to succulent fruits plucked straight from the source.

Here are eight stops to make when forging your own delicious food trail through Île d'Orléans.



Photo by Jean-François Bergeron/Enviro Foto/Tourisme Québec

**Île d'Orléans is part of Québec's burgeoning viticultural region.**



## Sample the nectar of the gods

One of the most relaxing ways to explore the Île d'Orléans? Through its vines and wines. Cultivated in Québec for centuries, the viticultural industry here has only really begun to gain traction in recent decades: There are more than 70 regional winemakers.

At the **Vignoble du Mitan**, try varieties of red, whites, and rosés on its scenic terrace overlooking the St. Lawrence River and Laurentian Mountains. Or sample the offerings at the **Vignoble Isle de Bacchus**, which is also known for its ice wines. Black currant fans should seek out **Cassis Monna & Filles**, a family-owned operation producing crème de cassis, along with black currant wines and by-products like jams and syrups. Settle in at the restaurant, with its outdoor seating, where you won't regret ordering the killer *poutine*. The traditional Québécois comfort dish of French fries, gravy, and cheese curds comes topped off here with duck confit and black currant wine sauce, too.

## Indulge your sweet tooth

**La Boulange** bakery and café churns out excellent stuffed pastries like sweet brioches and chocolate croissants, as well as picnic-ready pizzas and breads. Chocolate fiends shouldn't miss the **Chocolaterie de l'Île d'Orléans**, set in a home dating to 1760. While the raw chocolate here is imported from Belgium, many of the fillings—like raspberry, strawberry, and maple—are sourced locally; there's an attached ice cream parlor and alfresco seating area, too.



Photo by Mathieu Dupuis/Tourisme Québec

## Pick your own berries

They don't call it the "garden of Québec" for nothing. The fertile soil of the Île d'Orléans means abundant produce: corn, potatoes, rhubarb, pumpkins, tomatoes, and, above all, berries, including strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries. You'll be stopping and sampling from the ubiquitous fruit stands, but if you're one to get in on the action, make a stop at

**Ferme Léonce Plante** 🌱. The pick-your-own berry farm grows the unique Authentic Orleans strawberry variety that's known for its antioxidants and found only on the island. (Strawberry-picking season runs roughly from late June through mid-October.)

## Get into a delicious jam

With berries comes jam, and you'll see the labels of **Confiturerie Tigidou** just about everywhere. *Tigidou* is French-Canadian slang that basically means "it's all good," and this stop on your tour is exactly that.

The Confiturerie Tigidou factory was established in 2012, when two islanders returned home with a dream of making jam from local organic fruit, adding very little sugar and no preservatives or thickening agents in the process. The results are heavenly: The jams, laced with mint or basil sourced straight from the gardens, are downright delicious eaten by the spoonful, or even mixed into cocktails. Stop into the factory, located in a restored 200-year-old house and barn, for a taste, to view the jam museum, or to stay for the night in the upstairs lodging.





Courtesy of Cabane à Sucre L'En-Tailleur

Try a traditional Québécois lunch or dinner—with maple syrup galore—at the Cabane à Sucre L'En-Tailleur.

## See where maple syrup comes from

Québec produces over three-quarters of the world's maple syrup, a great source of local pride. On the Île d'Orléans, you can go straight to the tasty source at the rustic, family-owned **Cabane à Sucre L'En-Tailleur**, one of the best of several local *cabanes à sucre* (sugar shacks) where sap is processed into syrup. Walk through the maple groves and shop for maple confectionary in the store, but don't forget to make a reservation for the main event. The lively, all-you-can-eat traditional Québécois lunch or dinner at the attached restaurant features live music and a feast of maple-infused everything from pea soup to meat pies to crepes. Top it off with a traditional *tire sur la neige*, a delightful maple sugar taffy cooled on snow and rolled over a Popsicle stick. (High season for **sugar shacks** is early spring, when snow is still on the ground, but you can get a meal at this particular shrine to maple syrup from May to October.)

## Say cheese

Île d'Orléans was the birthplace of Le Paillason, one of the oldest styles of cheese made in North America. You can immerse yourself in the island's rich cheesemaking culture at **Les Fromages de l'Isle d'Orléans**, maker of artisanal historic cheeses dating to the colonial period of New France. Taste all three versions (La Faisselle, a ricotta-like fresh cheese; Le Paillason, a frying cheese; and Le Raffiné, a soft washed-rind cheese), paired with a homemade spruce-essence beer, as you chitchat with staff dressed in period costume and shop for local gourmet food products.

## Down an ice cider

Sampling *cidre de glace*, or ice cider, makes for a truly Québécois experience: The boozy, apple-flavored juice was created right here in the region. Much like ice wine, the ice cider is culled from fruit left to freeze on the branches during winters and comes packed with concentrated flavor. Try it at a cidery like the gorgeous **Domaine Steinbach** with some pâté on the outdoor terrace offering panoramic views over the St. Lawrence River. Other good options are the **Domaine de la Source à Marguerite**, with its old-fashioned boutique, or the **Domaine Orléans**, the family-friendly option with farm animals and seasonal apple-picking (from mid-August through October in 2018).

## Raise a glass to microbrews

If you've spent time in Québec, you've likely seen locally crafted brews from the **Microbrasserie de l'Île d'Orléans** in stores, with festive labeling featuring pictures of locals. You can visit its brewery on the island, where you can sample stouts, IPAs, or, most especially, the Suzanne Marceau, an amber ale made with local maple syrup. Refuel on pub fare at the adjoining Pub Le Mitan; the terrace offers spectacular river views. *Santé!*

>>Next: **The Perfect Spring Day Trip From Montreal Is All About Maple Syrup**