

CRUISE

History and old-world charm in Quebec City

By Tom Stieghorst | Jul 12, 2018



The Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac hotel commands a bluff overlooking the St. Lawrence River. Photo Credit: TW photo by Tom Stieghorst

After first discovering the charms of Quebec on a cruise several years ago, I was determined to return. As a port of call, this city of 500,000 has as much to offer as any I have ever visited.

Founded in 1608, it is the cradle of French-speaking North America, and history is everywhere to be found here. Cruise ships dock in the heart of the lower city, created by commerce along the banks of the St. Lawrence River.

The lower city is full of quaint shops, especially on Petit-Champlain, a street redeveloped by artists in the 1990s.

The upper city, on a bluff protected by fortifications, is home to imposing government, religious and military buildings and most of all to the majestic 611-room Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac hotel, developed by the Canadian Pacific railroad in 1893 and now run by Fairmont Hotels & Resorts.

A 40-second funicular ride (less than \$3) spares passengers a climb up the slopes.

One of the joys of Quebec is road testing whatever French language skills you might have without flying to France to do so. The Canadian dollar, at this writing about 75% of the value of a U.S. dollar, stretches your purchasing power.

Situated where the St. Lawrence widens as it heads east to the sea, Quebec offers beautiful views of the river, which are only enhanced by colorful foliage in the fall, when a majority of cruises are scheduled.

This year, the peak day falls on Oct. 5, when six of a possible seven berths will be occupied. Other banner days will be Sept. 26, when the Disney Magic makes the maiden call for Disney Cruise Line, and Sept. 29, when the Queen Mary 2, Seabourn Quest and Seven Seas Navigator will all be in town.

Cruise authorities in Quebec are doing their best to spread traffic into the summer and have succeeded most notably with Holland America Line, with a record 42 calls scheduled this year, but also with Princess Cruises, which has its first summer call in August.

Since I was last here, the port has enhanced the arrival by building a handsome 389-space parking garage, allowing a surface lot to be remade into the Place des Canotiers park, the largest public space in Old Quebec.

Port officials have also engaged Bermello, Ajamil & Partners to study a possible terminal to replace a temporary tent that is now erected annually for the busy season alongside one berth.

Plans are in the works for an elevated bypass that will carry a popular bike/pedestrian path away from the berths, where turnaround operations now force the closure of the bike/walking area for safety.

Day visitors can wander the old city, explore the Chateau Frontenac (which hosted me) and its many historical displays, visit the first hospital in North America founded by Augustinian nuns and sample French-Canadian cuisine.

Alternatively, there are visits to Montmorency Falls, a 276-foot waterfall about 7 miles from town, which offers a cool zipline. From there it is a quick trip across a bridge to the Ile d'Orleans, a sort of agrotourism area with restaurants, wineries, jam makers and others that serve locally sourced goods.

Finally, the Strom Spa Nordique is opening a riverside location this fall a couple of miles from the port, which could be ideal for cruise passengers on a small ship with limited spa services.