



## Is this the most European city in North America?

Blake Snow, CNN • Updated 3rd January 2018

**(CNN)** — Is it possible to travel to another continent without actually leaving North America?

The answer is "oui" if you venture to Old Quebec, Canada -- a 300-acre, self-contained neighborhood within the capital of Quebec City. Unlike similar historic districts in Puebla, Mexico; Old San Juan, Puerto Rico; or even Boston's Beacon Hill, Old Quebec encompasses a whole lot more than just a street or two of European-inspired architecture.

By comparison, Old Quebec is home to half a dozen famous streets and two dozen more deserving alleys and side streets.

That's not all. It also has five parks, countless shops and restaurants, several squares and schools, two distinctive parts of town (Upper and Lower), numerous boutique hotels, a well-integrated 18-story "skyscraper," a working citadel, the most photographed grand hotel in the world and more charm than many parts of actual Europe -- the very continent that Old Quebec so admirably emulates.

In short, the sheer size of the destination -- coupled with its enduring preservation and an estimated 3,000 local residents -- is what distinguishes Old Quebec. That's why millions of visitors travel here every year to convincingly trick themselves into thinking that they live in another time and on another land. Without the jet lag.

Local tourism officials are deftly aware of this appeal. "So Europe, so close," they often say to incoming Canadians, Americans and Mexicans.



Old Quebec is full of historic streets and squares.

Stephane Audet/Quebec City Tourism

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Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who was mostly educated in nearby Montreal, recommended Quebec City in an interview in the summer of 2017 as the ideal starting point for foreigners given the city's hybrid visual and cultural appeal.

But direct comparisons to Europe might be unfair. In truth, Quebec City and the greater, French-speaking province of which it is a part are so much more than a new copy of the Old World. It's a unique and likable fusion of two intersecting continents.

Take poutine (pronounced "poo-teen"), for instance -- the area's greatest culinary gift to the world.

Made of french fries topped with beef gravy and cheese curds, the French would have never invented it. But thanks to the North American way of throwing out the rules, cooks in Quebec thankfully did. And like others on the continent they call home, the Québécois deliciously serve it in large portions.

Other ways Quebec is not like Europe:

- Large pickups and yellow school buses are driven here; more room to stretch your legs.
- 15% tips for waiters and cabbies.
- A willingness to drive 30 hours to Florida or cross country like their neighbors down south.
- The aforementioned inventive cuisine.
- An enduring love for baseball and basketball (although not as much as hockey).

When considering a visit, what's the best way to take it all in?

## **Understand the history**

Quebec City is one of the oldest European settlements in North America, and it immediately and impressively shows. Founded nearly 400 years ago and quickly minted as the "Capital of New France," the city eventually fell under British rule before Canada declared independence in 1867.

Today the capital of Quebec is home to half a million people and is the only walled city still standing in North America north of Mexico. Locals even joke that the famous fortified walls were once used to keep Americans out (from attacking the British early in the Revolutionary War, that is), but now they're used to keep Americans coming.

## **Wander both Upper and Lower towns**

Situated within the walls of Old Quebec, both Upper and Lower towns feature enough inviting streets to cause indecision. Thankfully, the entire neighborhood is as manageable as it is impressionable -- easily explored within two full days of lazily walking about.

Highlights include the massive Château Frontenac hotel and boardwalk, Palais Royal (which doubled as an iconic french village in "Catch Me If You Can") and [Rue du Petit-Champlain](#), which was recently voted best pedestrian street in North America.

Other points of interest include Battlefield Park, nearby Montmorency Falls and catching little glimpses of Boston, San Francisco and Paris all in one remarkable city.

### **Eat this, not that**

Despite its European surroundings, Quebec cuisine is decidedly North American. The portions are large, the flavors are rich, and the variety is plenty. Unlike the United States, Quebec has retained its European-inspired cafe culture.

Recently sampled culinary highlights include the sweet and savory pastries from [Paillards](#), the poutine and dark chocolate milkshakes from [Le Chic Shack](#) and the smoked meat sandwich at [Be-Club Bistro](#), all of which are featured in an Old Quebec food tour.

At [Chez Muffy](#), with a reputation as one of the nicest restaurants in all of Canada, let alone Quebec, the prime rib, cheese ravioli and boiled carrots and cabbage were remarkably delicious.

### **Time your visit accordingly**

Although known for being a popular summer destination, Quebec City equally shines as a spectacular display for autumn foliage and a Little Women-like Christmas village when the holiday decor goes up in Old Town in early November. In January and February, [Quebec Winter Carnival](#) warms things up with festivities including parades, snow sculpture contests and canoe racing.

Whatever the season, it's easy to see why Quebec has long been recognized as an especially timeless city. It's neither Canadian, American nor European. It's "Quebecois," delightfully affordable and a whole lot closer than you think.

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