

## TRAVEL

# Quebec City in winter: Architecture, history and food make it a wonderland

The Winter Carnival and Montmorency Falls are among the attractions.




The Chateau Frontenac and the Terrasse Dufferin toboggan run are part of the winter scenery in Quebec City. Photo Credit: Alamy / Vlad Ghiea

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The castle-like chateau dominates the landscape, snow-covered and majestic. The St. Lawrence River undulates under frozen ice caps. The charming shops line snowy streets with hints of brick and cobblestone poking through. Quebec City in winter weaves a spell of sheer magic.

Its mix of architecture, history, art and French culture make the Canadian provincial capital feel like Europe, at half the travel time and a fraction of the cost. Winter may seem like an odd time to travel here, and indeed I'm sure Quebec City is lovely in the other seasons, but the wonders of winter, with 4 feet of snow covering everything, gave it a magical, pristine feeling.

## THE CHÂTEAU

Sometimes called the “most photographed hotel in the world,” the Fairmont Le Château Frontenac ([fairmont.com/frontenac/quebec-city](https://www.fairmont.com/frontenac/quebec-city)), first opened in 1893, is the most prominent feature on the Quebec skyline. It has 611 upscale hotel rooms, a number of restaurants and a spa. The rooms, which start at about \$250 a night during the upcoming Winter Carnival, aren’t large but are well-appointed, and the service is impeccable.

Aside from the ornate beauty inside the hotel’s common areas, its location is the big draw. The Château is within walking distance of Parliament, the parks that host the Winter Carnival, the shops and restaurants along Rue St. Louis and Rue St. Jean and a funicular ride down to the Petit Champlain.

## PETIT CHAMPLAIN

As soon as you hit the brick streets of the Petit Champlain, you know you are in for a treat. To the right, rows of stone buildings house adorable shops (some kitschy and touristy, some with wares by true artisans) and quaint restaurants. To the left, a pub that looks straight out of a Dickens novel, with stone walls, a cozy fireplace and a friendly bartender. Straight ahead, more shops, restaurants and ice sculptures leading to a park with cannons aimed toward the river. The streets stay decorated for Christmas throughout the winter.

The open courtyard known as Place Royale is the site of the first permanent French settlement in North America. On the square you’ll find Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, the oldest stone church in North America, built in 1688.

Just past that, stop to admire one of the city’s gorgeous murals. The Fresque des Quebecois mural recounts the story of Quebec City and pays homage to historic figures, authors and artists, and even hockey players.

## THE CARNIVAL



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The two-week Carnaval de Quebec (Jan. 26-Feb. 11) takes place in several parks in the city, most fairly close to one another. One area contains only ice sculptures. Another has an area for dance, concerts and drama performances. Another, a hockey shooting contest, ax throwing and more. The carnival also features an ice canoe race, singles night, snow sliding and pond hockey. Several nights are set aside for the famous nighttime parade, led by Bonhomme Carnival, the festival's mascot, a somewhat creepy snowman who bears a striking resemblance to the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man. For about \$12, an effigy you attach to your coat gets you into nearly everything ([carnaval.qc.ca](http://carnaval.qc.ca)).

## MONTMORENCY FALLS

Open year-round, the spectacular Montmorency Falls Park is just a 15-minute drive from downtown Quebec City. With temperatures well, well below freezing, I expected the falls to be frozen, but amid the snowy scenery, across a frozen and snow-covered lake, the falls still gushed.

At 272 feet, they are taller than Niagara Falls (but not as wide). Start at the visitor center, where those who can't stand the cold can sit inside and stare out picture windows at the magnificent falls. Or spend about \$12 and take a cable car up the cliff. As you exit, take a short trail to a lookout where you can get sprayed with the water or another trail that takes a suspended bridge from one side of the falls to the other. In cold weather, you can go ice climbing next to the falls. In warmer weather, zip line across them ([sepaq.com/ct/pcm](http://sepaq.com/ct/pcm)).



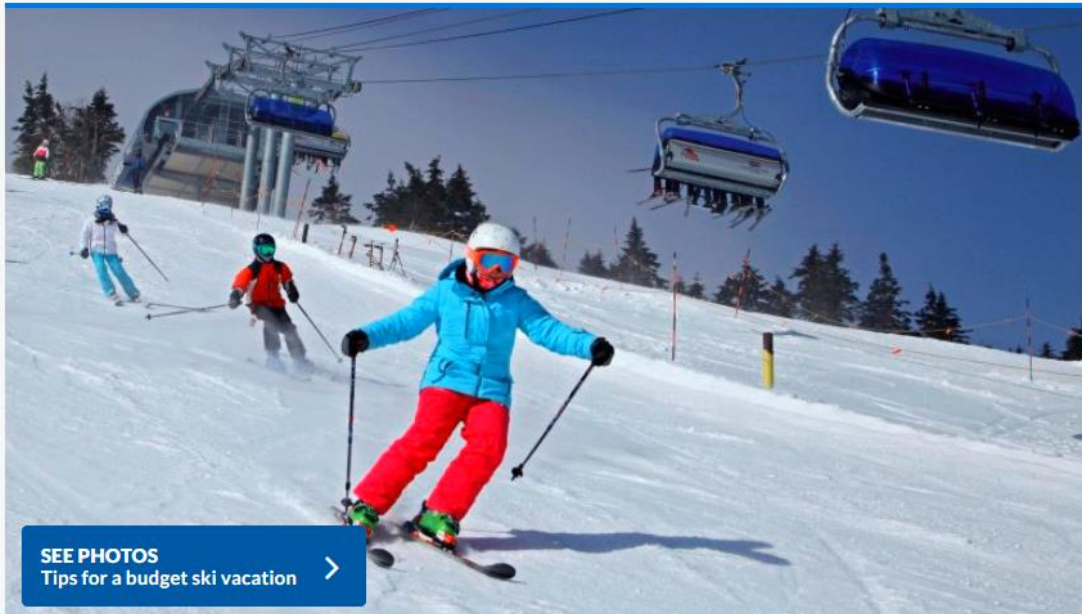
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## MUSEUMS AND MORE

The city boasts a number of museums and other attractions to help you while away your time. The Musee de la Civilisation ([mcq.org/en](http://mcq.org/en)) is the most popular. Its interactive exhibits tell the story of Quebec culture and history as well as some unusual topics, including one about dogs during our visit, and one about brains that will run until March 11.

The Aquarium du Quebec isn't the most amazing aquarium I've been to, but it may be the most distinctive. You start with a fantastic jellyfish and sea horse exhibit, then move on to the stingray touch tank. Next, head outdoors (yes, in the snow) for polar bears, walruses and a seal show. Next, on to the main building, which, though slightly dated, has an array of tanks including a three-story tank of ocean animals ([sepaq.com/ct/paq](http://sepaq.com/ct/paq)).

## THE FOOD



Poutine — French fries smothered in gravy and topped with cheese curds — is the best-known Quebec specialty. Locals recommend Ashton, a fast-food chain, and Le Chic Shack, a burger joint near Château Frontenac, as the places to try them. I didn't find a poutine I didn't like. At Restaurant 1640 at L'Auberge du Tresor, the upscale eatery served poutine with duck confit and Gouda cheese curds. At the quaint Le Lapin Saute in Petit Champlain, they served it with tenderly cooked rabbit.

We found more specialties we loved: BeaverTail and maple syrup taffy. A BeaverTail, or queue de castor, is a pastry covered in all sorts of sweet goodness, almost like an open-faced doughnut. We first spotted them at the Carnival, which is also where we sampled the taffy. Servers line up behind a flat counter of snow, on which they ladle maple syrup in a line. You wait a few minutes, then use a wooden stick to wrap the sweet, gooey stuff around it.

In Old Quebec, it seems you can find a creperie around just about every corner. At Le Casse-Crepe Breton on Rue St. Jean, we told our server we wanted only sweet crepes. She returned bearing an enormous one filled with strawberries and chocolate, one with butter and sugar and one with the Canadian staple, maple syrup. The best way to see Quebec really is to eat your way around it.

## **IF YOU GO**

**WHAT TO WEAR** You'll need thermal underwear, wool socks, winter boots (the good kind; don't think you can get away with Uggs), a heavy coat, a hat and gloves. We were able to walk five to eight miles a day without being too cold in this gear.

**MORE INFO** [quebecregion.com/en](http://quebecregion.com/en)