

## Adventuring in stunning Quebec

Quebec City might not traditionally top client bucket lists, but *Andrew Doherty* discovers a Canadian gem with more than enough credentials to earn its place.



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"A country of freedom, of exquisite cuisine, immense natural beauty and of endless opportunities for adventure."

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As my coach rumbles across the outskirts of Quebec City I can't help but think, what did the French explorer Samuel Champlain think when he first laid eyes on the grandeur of this landscape in 1608?

Sailing his ship down the Saint Lawrence, he must have gazed across the wilds with both intrepidity and fear. The jagged cliffs towering hundreds of meters above the water, trees stripped of their foliage because of the cold, and the smoke from the villages of the native Huron people thick and black in the distance.

Canada, originating from the Huron-Iroquois word Kanata; meaning land of many long houses, is both imposing and impressive.

There is a buzz of excitement on the bus; our guide has just mentioned that we will have a chance to sample the local's favourite alcoholic drink. It's minus one outside and a little warm-up is certainly welcomed.

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## Caribou delights

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The first stop on my Canadian adventure is le Chemin du Roy, a traditional sugar shack. Our guide for the next three-days is Richard Seguin, a cheery French Canadian originally from Montreal. He leads us over to a table where a woman is adding ice to a blood-coloured mixture.

It's a fair comparison as the drink was originally the blood of a dead animal drank by the Huron. Fortunately for me the European settlers preferred something a little more palatable. Their version of the sweet drink is caribou, which includes port, vodka and maple syrup.

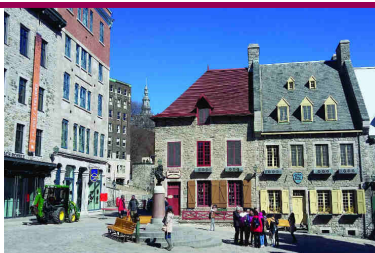
It is so delicious that I reach for another. Richard informs me that the maple syrup in the drink was collected from the maple trees surrounding the shack. He passes on a local saying: "One caribou goes to your fingers, and five turns you into a moose."

After a hearty lunch of pea soup, pork slices, beans and roast potatoes, two musicians provide us with some traditional music. Before I join the group of dancers, the owner Real Boissonneault leads me into the maple processing room for a personal tour. He informs me that for every gallon of syrup made, 40 gallons of water are needed.

The shack at full capacity sits 250 people and sees over 15,000 visitors a year. It's no surprise that it's so popular; from sitting down to an impromptu musical spoons lesson to sampling fresh taffy (a maple syrup sweet similar to toffee, hardened on a trough of ice), the sugar shack has left me with a full belly and a smile on my face. Even if it is a little caribou-induced.

## Origins of a nation

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After checking into the Hotel Manoir Victoria within the walls of Old Quebec, I arrive at the Onhoa Chetek8e lodge for a guided tour of the Huron village. The site is placed on federal land meaning no taxes added on goods within its boundaries. For clients who enjoy souvenir shopping, they will be glad to know that the gift shop prices are lower than elsewhere in Quebec.

Before the tour begins I am served a traditional snack of deer chilli, bison sausage and Three Sisters Salad; made from beans, squash and corn.

A quick walk around the site sees me in a medical tent where masks are carved from trees to scare away afflictions, a traditional Wendake long house where the tribe ate and slept and a tepee. The comforting smell of wood fires lingers on my clothes.

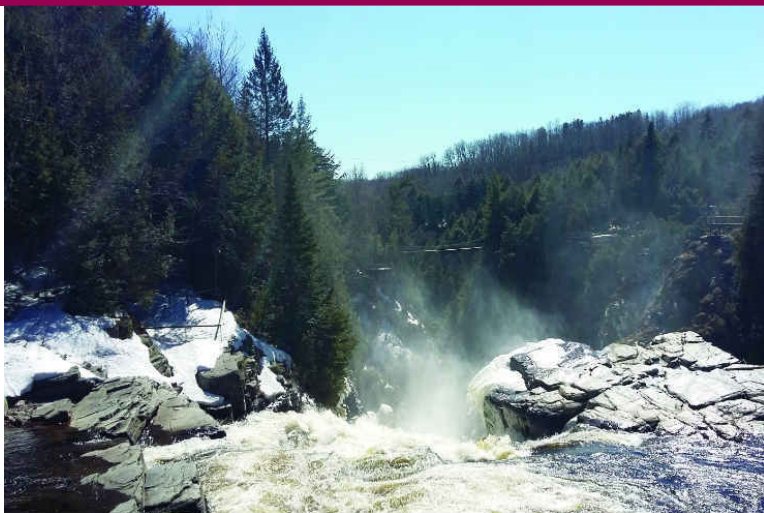
The sun beats down upon my neck as I explore Old Quebec the next morning. The charm of the French influence, the cobbled streets and patisseries, is reassuring against the epic landscapes surrounding the city. Added to the Unesco World Heritage List in 1985, my guide Colleen Roy informs me that the downtown area would have been underwater in the 1600s. We pass by a staircase linking the lower and upper town called L'Escalier Casse-Cou, or Breakneck steps. The name derives from the amount of people who tumbled down them after coming home drunk from the taverns.

Quebec is a popular port and fishing destination and from June 18-23 next year the Saint Lawrence will play host to dozen of tall sailing ships coming to dock as part of Canada's 150th birthday celebrations.

As I roll out of the city I pass a fisherman triumphantly hosting a huge catfish in the air. My bus driver toots the horn to get his attention; he beams at us and gives the thumbs up.

### **Traditional and modern**

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The rapids of the 74-metre high Sainte-Anne Falls are only a 30- minute drive out of Old Quebec. I'm left speechless by surging of the water and feel the icy spray on my face. Crossing one of the bridges 60 meters above the waterfall, the park's owner Helene McNicoll tells me bears are often seen in the area; suddenly watching *The Revenant* on the plane seems like a bad idea.

Visiting both Quebec's natural beauty spots and awe-inspiring architecture on the same day is easy when you've got the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupre only five minutes' drive away. The Basilica is the oldest pilgrimage site in North America and has welcomed people for more than 350 years. A tiled path adorned with the seven deadly sins splits the pews facing the altar. I try and avoid the gruesome depiction of gluttony; I've been looking forward to my dinner at *Ristorante Il Teatro* all day.

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## Gourmet dining

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Located just five minutes' walk from the Manoir Victoria, the restaurant is named so because of Le Capitole theatre next door, one to recommend to clients who like fine dining.

Pulling my curtains open the next morning I am again greeted by clear blue skies, this is my final day in Quebec and I will be sad to leave.

One thing sure to cheer me up is the craft brewery tour hosted by Broue- Tours. The first stop is Noctem Artisans Brasseurs and I sample the Suricat Tropicale – a cloudy beer made with citrus fruits.

The craft breweries are where the forward-thinking side of Quebec shines. With an average employee age of 26, Noctem is a refreshing example of young entrepreneurship. Funding the business themselves, the team has taken the concept of bringing a more personal experience for visitors to life. La Korrigane bar is just as good, serving us a mouth-watering Black IPA.

The day ends with dinner in Le Charbon steakhouse, with beef cuts sizzling on the open grills.

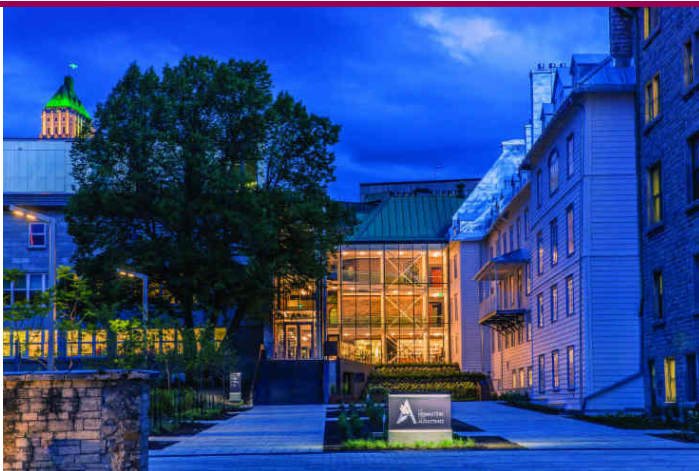
I can only speculate on Samuel Champlain's thoughts as he landed on the banks of the Saint Lawrence. For me, I will have the lasting impression of a wild land tamed by a hardy but friendly people, a country of freedom, of exquisite cuisine, immense natural beauty and of endless opportunities for adventure.

**Book it:** 1st Class Holidays offers stays in the Hotel Manoir Victoria from £140pn for a standard room from May 1 to June 18; prices from June 19 to August 31 from £172pn.

[1stclassholidays.com/manoir-Victoria](http://1stclassholidays.com/manoir-Victoria)

## That floating feeling

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Le Monastere des Augustines was founded in 1639 by three sisters from the Augustinian Order. It is considered the oldest cancer research centre in Canada, with the first breast cancer operation performed there in 1700. The monastery now serves as a hotel and holistic wellness centre. Guests are not forced to practise religion, but instead experience spirituality through meditation and selected health treatments.

Guests are encouraged to leave phones at the front desk and the rooms have no Wi-Fi. Visitors must also share washing facilities; there is a ratio of one bathroom between six people.

I walk through the silent corridors; the only sound is the creak of the wooden floorboards under my feet. There is a heavenly aroma in the air; it's a far cry from the iodoform smell of modern hospitals. Six nuns with an average age of 80 still live, work and worship in the building.

I am treated to a meditation session by one of the centre's therapists. This treatment encourages relaxation through conscious breathing techniques; I am told to close my eyes and take my shoes off. The next 15 minutes is like a dream and when I leave I feel like I'm floating.

[monastere.ca/en](http://monastere.ca/en)