



Seasons

Spring

Summertime in Québec

Autumn in Québec

Winter in Québec

Themes

Aboriginal cultures

Cruises in Québec

Ecotourism

Montréal

Places of worship

Québec city and area

Québec under the stars

Québec's national parks

Québec's natural grandeur

Spa vacations

Sugaring off

The St. Lawrence estuary

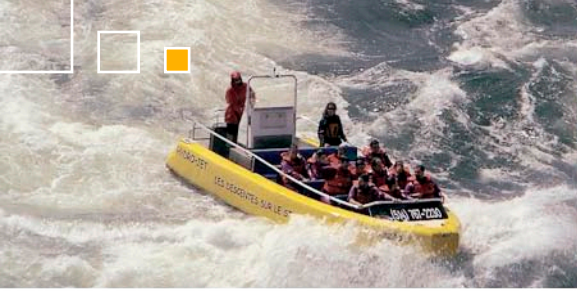
The vast gulf

The whales of the St. Lawrence

Tourism in Québec

Visiting gay-friendly Québec

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[Back to general index](#)

Spring

Energetic and magnificent

Quebec in spring is best described as...

The joys of sugaring off

As soon as the thaw begins, the maple sap starts running, and it's time to get together at one of our 400 sugar shacks for an old-fashioned meal in a warm, rustic atmosphere. Taste taffy on the snow and maple syrup desserts! Come and savour the sweet pleasures of the sugar bush!

A unique show of migratory birds

Snow geese and Canada geese return from the south in the tens of thousands. Their favourite stopover is the banks of the St. Lawrence River, especially near Baie-du-Febvre, and at Cap Tourmente and Montmagny. This sight will leave you spellbound!

Skiing and snowboarding in the sun

The snow may be melting, but the conditions are still perfect in the eyes of the skiers and snowboarders who continue to race down the slopes under sunny skies until late April. Ah! Spring skiing is bliss!

Urban exuberance

The cities outdoor ... are jam-packed. After the long winter, Québécois know better than anyone how to enjoy the sunshine! It's also time to browse through the boutiques and discover new designer collections or pop into a museum.

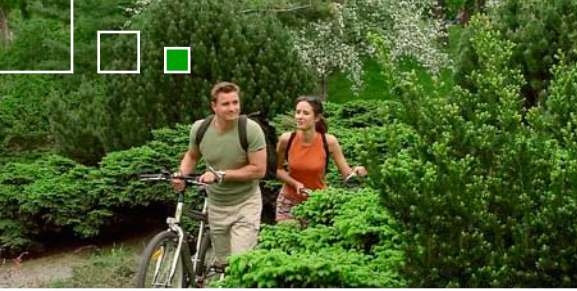
Unbelievable whitewater rafting

Swollen by the melted snow, the rivers are raging. Come try rafting in a spectacular natural setting. Colourful challenges and thrills are what lie in store!

The great outdoors

Let the increasingly warm days tempt you into going hiking, horseback riding, fishing, cycling or trying loads of other activities in the Québec regions. The outdoors is constantly changing-it is truly magnificent!

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[Back to general index](#)

Summertime in Québec

Impressive and festive!

In the summer, a wonderful breeze of happiness flows through Québec! The energy is at its peak with the countless festivals (more than 200 from June to September) that fill every region with a party atmosphere. Québec's rich and varied nature, including a million lakes and rivers and some 500 locations for hiking, is the ideal setting for enjoying outdoor activities. And, as always, you can find first-class accommodations and fine cuisine in Québec's cities and villages. Around here, vacation ideas abound!

Summer in Québec means...

Majestic national parks

Observe seals lazing in the sun, climb mountains, stroll along cliffs overlooking a spectacular fjord, cycle through vast forests, canoe down winding rivers... These are just a few of the activities that await you at the 25 national parks that show off Québec's natural attractions!

A river overflowing in riches

You'll marvel at the immense St. Lawrence River with its bewitching isles, its numerous whales, its wide variety of seabirds and unforgettable sunsets... You'll be enchanted by the ancestral villages dotting the length of its banks. Enjoy a cruise for a few hours or a few days and admire the river's charms from Montréal all the way to the Îles-de-la-Madeleine. A sea of discoveries is waiting for you!

Celebrated golf courses

Golf lovers can put their skills to the test at nearly 400 courses, including many located not far from the major cities. Take advantage of well-known courses designed by renowned architects and set in splendid surroundings. You are officially invited to tee-time in Québec!

A cyclist's mecca

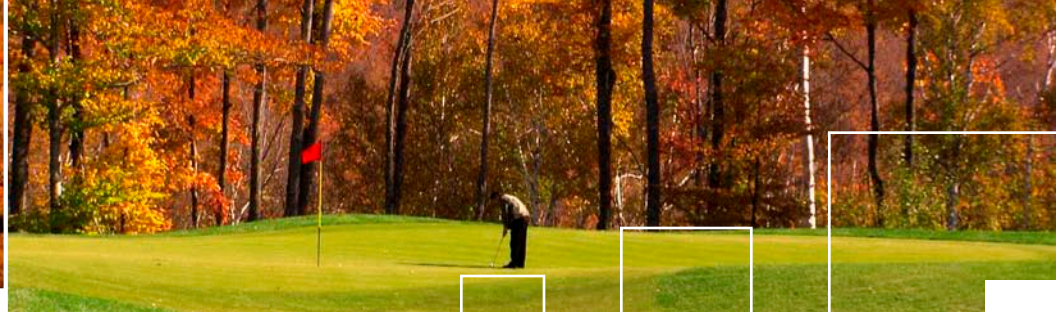
A remarkable network of bicycle paths criss-cross through Québec's regions. Our Route verte (green route) network now boasts 3,000 km (1,860 mi.) of bikeways through city and country... and it's still growing! By 2005, the route should extend 4,300 km (2,790 mi.), making it one of the largest of cycling networks in the world.

The luxury and comfort of resort vacationing

Québec's resorts, nestled amid lush greenery, offer packages that combine quality accommodations, fine dining and diverse sporting activities. Country pleasures designed to delight you!

Lively cities, nature in full bloom... come experience summertime in Québec!

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[Back to general index](#)

Autumn in Québec

Vivid and invigorating!

Autumn in Québec is...

A symphony of colours

In September, the Laurentian and Appalachian mountains show off their prettiest shades, with those regions that boast a heavy concentration of maples becoming especially spectacular. You'll observe the most striking colours from the end of September to mid-October. Every week during this period of transformation, Tourisme Québec tracks the progress of the changing colours throughout Québec's various regions. Consult this table on www.bonjourquebec.com and then plan your unforgettable outings!

A dramatic entrance

Between the end of September and mid-October, hundreds of thousands of snow geese arrive on the sand banks of the St. Lawrence River. Flying in from the Great North, they make a brief stopover before taking off for their wintering grounds along the U.S. coasts. For observing flocks of snow geese, there are plenty of great spots to choose from. Head to Montmagny and Isle aux Grues (in the Chaudière-Appalaches region), the Cap Tourmente National Wildlife Reserve (near Québec City) or even Baie-du-Febvre, along the shores of Lac Saint-Pierre. To plan your snow goose observation outings during their migration periods, consult the countdown presented each week by Tourisme Québec on www.bonjourquebec.com

Highly colourful activities

There's something about being in the middle of a vibrant forest that makes many an outdoor activity all the more fun. Take a chair lift ride at a ski centre and enjoy an endless panorama of colour! Trek through national parks, explore trails on horseback or by bike and listen to the crackle of leaves underfoot. You might even get in a round of golf on a verdant green surrounded by fiery trees!

Enjoying the fruits of Québec's harvest

Southern Québec is famed for its magnificent orchards, and the apple harvest is in full swing. In the Montérégie and the Eastern Townships, located between Montréal and the U.S. border, apple harvest activities abound, such as the ever-popular "pick-your-own bushel" right from the producer's trees. You can also sample beverages offered by cider houses and vineyards, including delectable ice ciders and ice wines that are made from apples or grapes that have frozen!

Tracking nature's bounty

Québec's large wilderness areas are a veritable paradise for hunters, and our fall is particularly pleasant for practicing the sport. It's the perfect time for hunting moose, white-tailed deer and small game on Québec's numerous wildlife reserves and lands operated by outfitters. In the heart of the Gulf of St. Lawrence lies Île d'Anticosti, a large and primitive island that's home to some 120,000 white-tailed deer and that welcomes thousands of hunters. Northern Québec, an immense and wild territory that's inaccessible by car, attracts hunting enthusiasts with its caribou herds-the largest in the world with nearly one million head. If you're seeking a unique experience, look no further!

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[Back to general index](#)

Winter in Québec

A thousand and one pleasures in the snowy realm

Québec in winter is...

The largest skiable area in the North American northeast. The Laurentian and Appalachian mountains are a veritable paradise for downhill skiers and snowboarders. If you are among these winter enthusiasts, you have nearly 90 ski centres to choose from!

Where snowmobiling rules. Discover the wilderness of Québec's regions by way of 33,650 km (20,896 mi) of groomed snowmobile trails.

4,000 km (2,484 mi) of cross-country ski trails traverse the great outdoors. Ideal for admiring the silvered trees in the early-morning sunshine. Certain trails are even equipped with shelters for longer treks.

An abundance of festivals and carnivals. All winter long, enjoy a happy whirlwind of all sorts festivities. The Québec Winter Carnival alone, the largest of its kind, attracts more than one million visitors!

'Tis the season for extraordinary experiences. Ice fishing on frozen lakes, ATV expeditions through unexplored territories, dogsledding or snowshoeing excursions, a night in the ice hotel or in a traditional igloo or winter camping... near Québec City — these are just some of the extraordinary activities in store for you.

Cities boasting unparalleled charm. Discover Old Québec City, one of the most romantic cities in the world, with its famed walls and wonderfully preserved XVIII- and XIX-century homes. Montréal, the fashion capital, is a veritable Mecca for shoppers! Its underground network of malls and passageways give you access to the city's métro system and hundreds of shops, restaurants, hotels and movie theatres without ever setting foot outdoors.

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[Back to general index](#)

Aboriginal cultures

Kuei... Welcome!

When most people hear the term “American Indian” they think of feather headdresses and hordes of whooping warriors on horseback. However, this stereotype does not reflect either the modern-day or historic reality of aboriginal people in Québec. The aboriginal people have lived in this part of North America for at least 10,000 years and, over 450 years ago, witnessed the arrival of the first Europeans. In recent decades, they have been faced with major changes in their way of life, having to adapt to the modern world while maintaining close links to their natural territory and their fundamental values.

Aboriginal people have a rich oral tradition and, through their stories and legends, can teach us valuable lessons about spirituality and living in harmony with nature. They observe the concepts of protection and preservation, through the symbol of the circle - uniting all the elements of the earth and promoting sustainable development, and they are ever eager to teach us more about their world and traditions.

Who Are They?

In Québec, the term “aboriginal” refers to the first inhabitants of this land. It includes the Amerindians—a term coined in the 20th century to replace “Indians”, as the first European explorers called the inhabitants of the New World—and the Inuit (formerly called “Eskimos”), who live in the Far North of Québec, in an area known as Nunavik. The expression “First Nations” is also used to designate all Amerindian nations. The term “tribe” is rarely used in Québec, and “community” is preferred to the word “reserve”.

Natural heritage

In Québec, there are 100,000 aboriginal inhabitants – the majority of them less than 25 years old, divided in eleven linguistically and culturally distinct aboriginal nations, living in some fifty villages scattered an area measuring over 1.6 million km² (618 000 mi²) between the 45th and 62nd parallels. Some still communicate in their own language, (though they also speak French or English). Apart from those in the Far North, these communities, rural or urban, set along the St. Lawrence or deep in the forest, are reachable by road. Hospitality and sharing are traditional values among aboriginal people, so they extend a warm welcome to visitors eager to discover some of the aspects of a heritage forged over thousands of years of living in North America. For a few hours or days, you, too, can become a true child of the universe, in total harmony with nature.

A canoe gliding across the water in the early morning mist, the taste of grilled trout melting in your mouth, the northern lights shimmering in the Arctic sky, the voice of a storyteller describing the creation of the world... A stay among the aboriginal people of Québec is a special opportunity to become acquainted with these communities, which are today seeking to reconcile their traditional ways of life with the demands of living in modern-day North America. You will be amazed by their rich culture.

In the aboriginal communities, the elder transmit their values and beliefs to the youths, yet, the necessity of a diversified economy leads them to offer to visitors to share their culture and understand their values, reflecting both their heritage and their modern outlook.

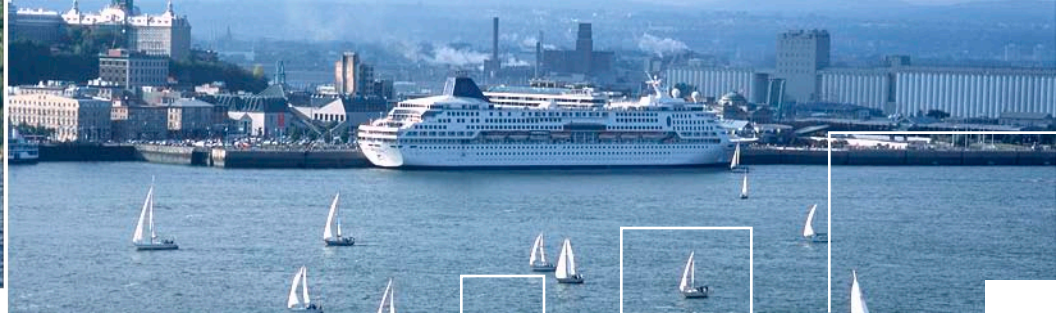
The Sources of Life

Aboriginal people enjoy a wide range of outdoor activities: trekking, canoeing, dog-sledding, snowshoeing (or the more contemporary snowmobiling), fishing, trapping, gathering wild berries and medicinal plants; and eating their traditional meals - caribou, beaver, bear, moose, wild goose and a variety of fish.

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Photos

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[Back to general index](#)

Cruises in Québec

Get on board today!

To admire some of the most breathtaking panoramas in Québec at your leisure... let the waves carry you away! Cruise down the main waterway: the majestic St. Lawrence, which stretches over 1,100 kilometres (685 mi.) from east to west across Québec, or even along one of Québec's other large rivers or huge lakes. Enjoy a front-row seat for observing marine mammals, birds and plant life, and to admire, for example, the magnificent Saguenay River Fjord and the sensational cliffs, over 700 metres (2,300 ft) high, over the towering rivière Malbaie.

Whale watching

Every summer, 13 marine mammal species visit the St. Lawrence River, including right whales, fin whales, porpoises and belugas. Seeing these large marine mammals is what drives many people to take these cruises along the estuary. Areas that are known to be especially good for spotting these sea mammals are the Gaspé peninsula, the Saguenay River Fjord and the St. Lawrence estuary (Saguenay-St.-Lawrence Marine Park). Most cruises start from Tadoussac.

Destination: the islands

Get on board to see the St. Lawrence islands and their natural treasures up close! The islands of the Archipel-de-Mingan (Duplessis) are simply magnificent with rock formations that have been sculpted by the elements over centuries. Île Bonaventure, across from Percé in the Gaspé, is home to the largest Northern Gannet colony in America.

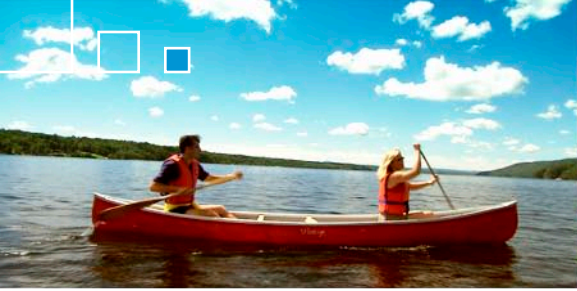
In lac Saint-Pierre, designated a biosphere reserve by Unesco, 103 islands are home to 288 bird species. The Îles du Pot-à-l'Eau-de-vie archipelago, across from Rivière-du-Loup in the Bas-Saint-Laurent region, is a sanctuary for marine birds. Grosse Île is home to a national historic site, marking its importance in the history of immigration in Québec, and paying tribute to the Irish immigrants who died there in the 19th century.

Unique excursions

- From Mid-May until October, the CTMA Vacancier cruise ferry connects Montréal and the Magdalen Islands every week with stops in Québec City and Chandler. During winter season, the ship links the islands with Matane.
- The Nordik Express, a supply ship equipped with a few cabins, steams from Rimouski to Sept-Îles, to Anticosti, and to the Lower North Shore (Duplessis), taking you to places inaccessible by road.

And lastly, to travel shore-to-shore on the St. Lawrence River or to visit some of its islands, such as Île aux Grues (Chaudière-Appalaches) and Île aux Coudres (Charlevoix), take a ride on one of the many ferries operated by the Société des traversiers du Québec!

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[Back to general index](#)

Ecotourism

More and more, Quebecers are looking for ways to preserve and promote a deeper understanding of their vast natural heritage. In fact, the provincial and federal governments have created some 22 National parks in an effort to preserve the region's most representative specimens and to offer the public the pleasure of exploring these vast expanses of wilderness.

Over the years, park administrations have developed a keen interest in the interpretation of the region's rich flora and fauna, placing special emphasis on educating visitors who come to explore these privileged areas and raising their awareness of the sanctity of these natural habitats.

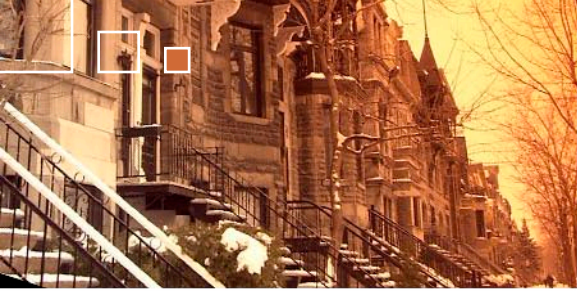
Eight national wildlife reserves also testify to this commitment to the environment including the well-known Cap Tourmente, the age-old stopover of snow geese and other migratory birds. Québec is also home to three Unesco-designated Biosphere Reserves: mont Saint-Hilaire, Charlevoix and lac Saint-Pierre.

Explore wide open spaces

Numerous companies specializing in ecotourism and adventure tourism offer you the opportunity to discover Québec's natural wealth on foot, in a canoe or by sea kayak. By choosing a company certified by Aventure Écotourisme Québec, you can be sure of practicing your activity in a safe manner. This association promotes quality standards, and clients receive instruction from qualified guides who make respect for the environment a top priority.

Maritime Québec, which opens onto the estuary and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, is an exceptionally beautiful region where you can observe thirteen different whale species from a boat or simply by standing on the shoreline. The Saguenay–Saint-Laurent Marine Park is one of the many jewels of this maritime region, where the confluence of these two mighty rivers provides a rich source of food, creating a fluvial haven for large marine mammals.

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[Back to general index](#)

Montréal

Energizing, electrifying, amazing!

Montréal the metropolis has everything a big city can offer. But Montréal is also one-of-a-kind-a multicultural city that blends its French accent with that of over 80 other ethnic communities and charms visitors with its Euro-American ambiance. Montréal is also innovative and invigorating, offering a whirlwind of cultural creations, both traditional and modern. Its downtown bustles with life at the foot of its mountain, while history is rooted in the old quarters near the river. With its year-round party atmosphere, Montréal beats to the rhythm of its festivals: jazz, comedy, cinema, fireworks and more! The city beckons you to discover its fashionable boutiques and famed cuisine, over 30 km (18 mi.) of indoor pedestrian walkways, and its lively casino. Stroll through its colourful streets and typical neighbourhoods representative of a mosaic of nations, take a ride along one of its many bicycle paths (over 660 km / 400 mi. in the region), party in its inviting bars... Montréal? Oui, s'il vous plaît!

Explore the old city

Riding in a horse-drawn carriage around the XVIIIth- and XIXth-century residences of Old Montréal, you will discover the imposing neo-gothic Notre-Dame Basilica, as well as museums that recount the past, such as the Pointe-à-Callière museum and the Centre d'histoire de Montréal. The Old Port invites you to relax all year round. Among its attractions, you will find the Montréal Science Centre, a vast complex dedicated to scientific culture that also includes an IMAX theatre. The Old Port is also the starting point for trips along the turbulent Lachine Rapids, at the western end of the island!

Pulsate to the rhythm of the city

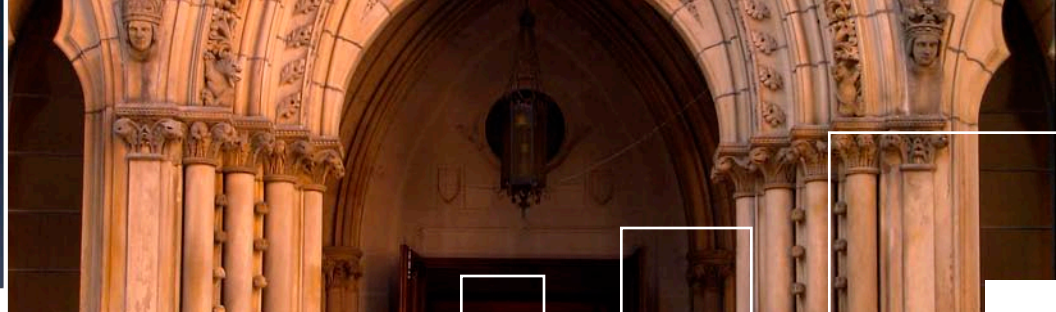
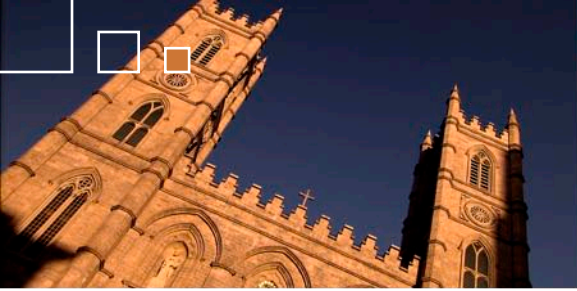
Downtown abounds with department stores, boutiques and cinemas, not to mention major museums, such as the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Musée d'art contemporain, the McCord Museum of Canadian History and the Canadian Centre for Architecture.

Objective: Recreation!

Île Notre-Dame and Île Sainte-Hélène are synonymous with vacationing fun. At Parc Jean-Drapeau, you'll have a ball at Québec's largest amusement park, La Ronde, and at the beach. At the Biosphère, in the former U.S. pavilion from Expo 67, you'll discover the secrets of water, while at the Stewart Museum, located inside an authentic fort, you'll learn about the history of the New World. In the east end of the city, in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighbourhood, you will find irresistible attractions, such as the Olympic Park, host to the 1976 Olympic Games, which boasts the tallest inclined tower in the world. On the same site, you can also visit the Biodôme, a magical place that is home to four ecosystems. Nearby, the Montréal Botanical Garden, one of the world's largest, introduces you to a host of horticultural universes, including a Chinese garden and a Japanese garden, and at the Insectarium you can observe up close insects from around the world!

Come feel Montréal-a dynamic, modern and warm city!

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[Back to general index](#)

Places of worship

Since the early days of New France in the 17th century, religion and public demonstrations of faith have been an integral part of the outlook, character and lifestyles of Quebecers.

The conversion of the Amerindians and the spread of the Catholic faith throughout America played an important role in the growth of this initially French and later British colony. Today, numerous places of worship stand as evidence of Québec's centuries-old tradition and its religious and cultural heritage.

Sanctuaries and pilgrimage sites

St. Joseph's Oratory, whose gigantic dome rises high above the northern slope of Mont Royal, stands on one of the loveliest sites in Montréal. For 60 years, visitors from the world over have gathered at the tomb of its founder, Brother André. The Oratory is noted for its remarkable architecture and works of art, its way of the cross set in an outdoor garden, and its organ and carillon concerts.

The worship of Saint Anne on Côte-de-Beaupré near Québec City dates back to the mid-17th century. The current Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré Basilica was inaugurated in 1926. Every year, hundreds of thousands of tourists and pilgrims visit this impressive Romanesque cathedral, with its five naves, magnificent mosaics and some 240 stained-glass windows.

The Notre-Dame-du-Cap Sanctuary near Trois-Rivières is another important shrine. Dedicated to the Virgin Mary, it has been a popular pilgrimage site for more than 100 years; the original chapel built in 1714 is still standing.

Worship and wonder

Québec has many lovely churches, many of which have been classified as historic monuments and all an integral part of the urban and rural landscape. Some are huge and awe-inspiring, such as Notre-Dame Basilica, St. Patrick's Basilica and Mary Queen of the World Cathedral in Montréal and Notre-Dame-de-Québec Basilica in Québec City.

Others are more modest, generally older, buildings. These include the lovely Notre-Dame-des-Victoires Church in Québec City, the Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours Chapel in Old Montréal, the Cuthbert Chapel in Berthierville and the Indian Chapel in Tadoussac.

A visit to the many small museums run by religious orders offers a key to understanding the early days of the French colony in North America. Some of the better known ones are the Ursulines and Augustines museums in Québec City.

Outside the big cities, monasteries and abbeys have long been peaceful havens of quiet contemplation, making them popular stops with visitors. Two of these are the Benedictine Abbey at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac on the shores of Lake Memphremagog, and the Cistercian Abbey of Oka, on Lac des Deux-Montagnes.

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[Back to general index](#)

Québec city and area

A taste of old Europe

Watch out, or you may fall under Québec City's spell-the only fortified city in North America! As you explore the winding side streets, on foot or in a horse-drawn carriage, the romance of the city will enrapture you. Curious about the past of this historical city? Stroll through its oldest neighbourhoods, like Petit Champlain, Place-Royale and the Old Port. Even though this capital city is steeped in history, the year-round activities are truly up to date: world-class winter carnival and summer festival, theatre, exhibitions...and the accommodations and dining are topnotch!

Wonders on the Capital's door step

The outskirts of Québec City are simply enchanting. In just a few minutes, you could find yourself deep in the countryside or in the heart of one of the large natural parks. The Chute Montmorency alone (83 m / 272 ft. high) is a magnificent waterfall well worth the detour. Characterized by abrupt dips in the landscape, the Parc national de la Jacques-Cartier is sure to leave you speechless. Venture through the marshes at the Cap Tourmente National Wildlife Area to observe up close 300 species of birds, including the tens of thousands of snow geese that visit twice a year, in the spring and fall. This region is a sports lover's paradise both in summer and winter, with spectacular golf courses and majestic ski slopes like Mont Sainte-Anne and Stoneham.

An endless list of vacation ideas

This region, the birthplace of the province, features many ancestral villages all along the legendary Chemin du Roy, the first vehicular highway in Canada, and on Île d'Orléans, whose rural charm was so perfectly described in the songs of Félix Leclerc. On the edge of the downtown area, discover the traditions of the Huron-Wendat people in the village of Wendake at the Onhoüa Chetek8e site. The Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré Basilica is a pilgrimage site that attracts over one and a half million visitors each year. Interested in exploring the area by bicycle? Check out one of the trails on the Route verte, such as the Chemin du Roy, or the Corridor des Cheminots and the Corridor du Littoral, along the St. Lawrence River towards Beauport and the Parc de la Chute-Montmorency. Finally, for a winter experience beyond compare, spend a night or two at the ice hotel, built every year near Lac Saint-Joseph!

Nature and culture... it's all yours in the Québec City region!

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[Back to general index](#)

Québec under the stars

If it's the wide-open spaces that draw you to Québec, why settle for a room with four walls when there are splendid campsites available, set in the midst of some of the most spectacular scenery on the whole continent?

Quebeckers love to camp. In fact, it's estimated that about one million Québec households have their own camping equipment. There are some 92,000 campsites in Québec, from the most rudimentary to the most sophisticated. The annual Guide du camping lists close to 800 Québec campgrounds, all of them rated with one to five stars depending on the quality of their facilities, equipment and services. Interested in travelling light? You'll find approximately 150 campgrounds that rent equipment, travel trailers, tent-trailers and tents.

Where to go? Take your pick!

You can pitch your tent by a calm, back-country lake or set up your tent-trailer on a fully serviced site with a swimming pool, playground and more in an almost-urban setting. You can paddle down a river like the early voyageurs or pedal your way along the Route verte bicycle trail network. Spread out your sleeping bag for a week or lay your head down in a new place each night as you explore as much of the countryside as possible. Wake up in the heart of an orchard, near an old-time village, in the shadow of a covered bridge or next to a natural wonder. Feast your eyes on whales spouting in the St. Lawrence or your ears on the roar of a waterfall or the tinkling of a brook. There's no end of possibilities!

For information:

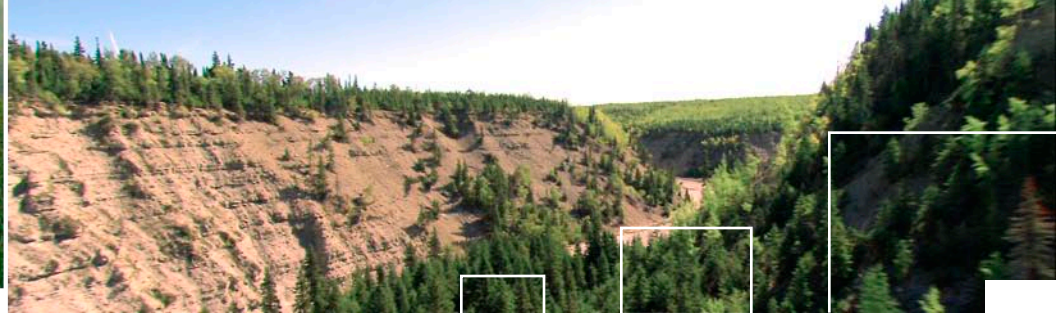
www.campingquebec.com

A site operated jointly by the Fédération québécoise de camping et de caravaning; Camping Québec, which represents close to 85% of all campground operators in Québec, the Conseil de développement du camping au Québec, which publishes the annual Guide du camping (also available in English online) and Camping Caravaning, the only French-language camping magazine in North America.

www.sepaq.com

The site of the Société des établissements de plein air du Québec, where you can find out about everything available in the network of public parks, including all-inclusive tenting or recreational vehicle packages in the heart of nature. The network includes 4,000 campsites in 22 Québec parks and 16 wildlife reserves.

www.bonjourquebec.com



[Back to general index](#)

Québec's national parks

Magnificent. Manifold. Unique!

Ah! To find oneself amidst Québec's finest scenery and highest peaks! Sweet daydreaming that could so easily be translated into blissful reality, as all regions boast their very own earthly paradises featuring extraordinary ecological surroundings: Québec's national parks. Most of them are equipped with picnic areas, cycle tracks and interpretative signs. Canoe, kayak, sailboard, cross-country ski and snowshoe rentals are often available, as well as various accommodation options. The land's more than 1700 km criss-cross of hiking itineraries may very well lead trekkers to many an uncharted natural wonder... Everything to please the outdoor type is within reach, all year-round!

World-renowned parks

The Parc national de Miguasha, on the Gaspé's Chaleur Bay, is featured on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This unique fossil repository is well-known for the abundance, diversity and quality of preservation of its plant and fish specimen, which could very well be 370 million year old!

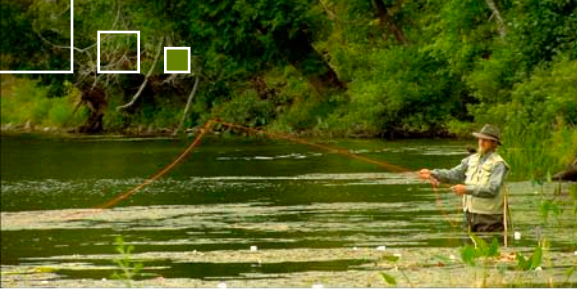
The Charlevoix region, a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, conceals two magnificently panoramic parks. The Parc national des Grands-Jardins, with its summits well over 1,000 meter high, provides outstanding viewpoints. The Park, with its nordic flora-taiga and tundra-is also visited by herds of caribou, a rare occurrence in this latitude.

The Parc national des Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Rivière-Malbaie is indeed something else, with its steep rock faces-at 700 metres, the highest in Eastern Canada-and its Rivière Malbaie, into which flow countless streams and 100 metre high waterfalls.

Québec has more than 22 national parks and each one of them is blessed with a distinctive appeal. As they all abide by the guidelines of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), hunting is strictly forbidden. Yours to discover!

Most of Québec's national parks are run by Parcs Québec. However, the La Mauricie and Forillon National Park of Canadas, as well as the Mingan Archipelago National Park Reserve, are run by Parks Canada. Both agencies are jointly responsible for the good husbandry of the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park. The Gatineau Park comes under the authority of Canada's National Capital Commission.

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[Back to general index](#)

Québec's natural grandeur

Awesome!

A million lakes and rivers, a spectacular fjord, the magnificent St. Lawrence where the whales spawn, two mountain ranges... What more could you ask for? Québec is known for its immense natural spaces. An unparalleled outdoor destination, Québec's impressive diversity of panoramas and vast array of activities attract vacationers season after season!

Countless trails

Is there anything more exhilarating than a jaunt through the great outdoors? Québec has exceptional trails for explorers of every ilk. Cyclists can travel some 3,000 km (1,863 mi.) of marked paths thanks to the Route verte (green route). Hiking enthusiasts can explore numerous major routes, including the International Appalachian Trail, the Sentier des Caps and the Traversée de Charlevoix (primarily accessible in the winter, by snowshoe or ski). Lastly, Québec enjoys an international reputation for the quality of its ATV and snowmobile trails, with food services and accommodations close by!

And don't forget our parks

You'll find unbelievable treasures at the 25 national parks maintained by Parcs Québec (Sépaq, the Québec agency governing outdoor establishments) and Parks Canada. Stand at the top of a mountain and gaze out at forests stretching as far as the eye can see. Take a long hike and spend the night in a rustic hut or paddle along one of our innumerable lakes and sleep in a tent. Québec's parks are a reflection of the regions they occupy: sometimes mountainous, sometimes maritime, sometimes forest covered... but always offering an incomparable escape!

Abundant wildlife

You'll be astounded by the sight of a whale in the St. Lawrence. Don't miss the spring and fall stopovers of the snow geese and the Canada geese. Observe salmon travelling upstream by way of fish ladders. Sail out to meet the seabirds and seals of the St. Lawrence. Take a stroll and catch a glimpse of a white-tailed deer, a moose or some other animal inhabitant of the boreal forest!

Aquatic fun

Water is one of Québec's greatest riches. As you travel throughout the land, you'll notice lakes, lakes and more lakes... all beckoning you to go swimming, canoeing or fishing. Québec's rivers also invite you to engage in these activities, or to take a thrilling rafting or kayaking trip. Lastly, the St. Lawrence is an inexhaustible source of marine fun. You're sure to fall under the spell of its shoreline and wilderness islands! See Québec... nature in all its splendour!

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[Back to general index](#)

Spa vacations

Choose your oasis and relax

Why not indulge yourself and enjoy total relaxation? Savour the dolce vita far from the hustle and bustle, amid a backdrop of pure air, lush greenery and resort comfort. There are plenty of treatments to choose from: relaxing baths, massages, body wraps, aesthetic care... Add to the mix gourmet meals and lots of free time for lounging around drinking in the gorgeous and invigorating countryside. There's no better way for shrugging off life's everyday worries. Go ahead and try the Québécois approach to spa vacationing, where quality treatments and personalized care are a top priority.

Spoil yourself!

Abandon yourself to pure comfort and relaxation at one of the spas certified under the Spas Relais santé network. Let yourself be pampered while enjoying all the pleasure of resort vacationing. Members of this association follow a code of professional conduct and observe strict quality standards. You can't go wrong! Or visit one of the cozy and enchanting hotels or inns that are part of the Québec Resorts & Country Inns network. In addition to fine dining, many of them offer their guests relaxation treatments.

Need more suggestions for treating yourself?

Replenish your energies while enjoying the benefits of a European-style thalassotherapy getaway in the Gaspésie. This region, bathed by the salty waters of the St. Lawrence, is home to well-known thalassotherapy centres.

Wash away your stress and relieve your tired muscles by succumbing to a wide variety of massotherapy techniques ranging from the traditional to the highly avant-garde: Swedish massages, reflexology, reiki, waterfall or volcanic rock massages and many more.

Give yourself some down time in a spa centre tucked away in a forest in the fall, when the many-hued trees provide a brilliant setting.

Soften your skin and soothe your muscular or arthritic aches in a bath of sea mud or peat (fangotherapy).

Shake off your fatigue in a health centre set amid the fabulous lakes and mountains of the Lanaudière or Laurentides regions and take advantage of their renowned resort centres, like Tremblant, nestled at the foot of Mont Tremblant.

Alternate warm and cool baths, Scandinavian style. Finnish sauna, steam baths, diving in icy rivers, outdoor spa affording glimpses of deer... an unusual and unforgettable experience offered in the Laurentides and Eastern Townships regions.

Breathe in the scent of river algae used in many treatments offered at spa centres in the Bas-Saint-Laurent. The sunsets will take your breath away!

Re-energize your batteries in a health centre in the lovely Charlevoix region. You'll be hard pressed to say what you like best—the spectacular views of mountains and sea, or the fine dining that's so prevalent in the region.

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[Back to general index](#)

Sugaring off

Quebeckers have a sweet tooth. They're particularly fond of maple syrup, the delicious nectar they learned to make from Québec's original Native inhabitants, who discovered the secret hundreds of years ago when they watched squirrels chewing on maple branches in springtime and feasting on the sap.

Sugaring off is a sure sign of spring, and a trip to a sugar shack is one of those lovely old-time rituals that has survived amidst the hustle and bustle of modern life.

Watching for crows and Canada geese

As the temperature starts to rise in late winter, so too does the water trapped in maple trees' trunks and roots. The cycle of cool nights and warm, sunny days really gets the sap flowing. In the old days, people used to look to nature to know when to start tapping the trees. They'd watch the birds, the phases of the moon, spring runoff, the position of the Big Dipper and other more mystical signs—in fact some still do today.

Natives would tap a tree by notching it with a tomahawk and inserting a piece of bark as a sort of funnel. Over time, the tools and technology used for collecting and processing the sap evolved and have been completely revolutionized in recent years. Goodbye metal spouts, horse-drawn sleds and metal buckets; the maple sap now travels through a network of plastic tubing straight to an evaporator in the sugar shack, where it is boiled down into syrup. The basics haven't changed though. The sap turns into syrup at 107°. And it still takes 40 litres of sap to produce a single litre of syrup, and you have to burn a cord of wood to make 40 litres of syrup. Keep boiling it and it turns into "tire," or taffy, and then sugar.

In olden days, families had to wait for the sap to run in spring to stock up on sugar for the entire year. Any extra would sometimes be sold to family members and friends who had moved into the city but came back home for the occasion, giving rise to the traditional sugaring-off parties. These days, an annual trip to a sugar shack is still a popular outing. It's truly a great feast, as Quebeckers tuck into traditional cuisine that's high in cholesterol and carbohydrates. Everything is cooked with maple syrup, from ham to omelettes, baked beans and "oreilles de crisse," our version of pork rinds. Afterward, everyone gathers around a trough where hot taffy is poured onto fresh snow. You have to roll some taffy around on a stick and pop it into your mouth at least once in your life to be able to appreciate Quebeckers' passion for this sweet treat. It's a pleasure as fleeting as spring.

For more information

Institut québécois de l'érable (Québec maple institute):

www.erable.org

Association des restaurateurs de cabanes à sucre du Québec (Québec association of sugar-shack owners):

www.laroutedessucres.com

www.bonjourquebec.com

Photos

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[Back to general index](#)

The St. Lawrence estuary

Legendary treasures

You can't help but be dazzled! The St. Lawrence estuary offers up a steady stream of gripping and constantly changing panoramas. Don't miss the opportunity to observe the whales or discover captivating islands while on a luxurious cruise, enjoying the ecological, cultural and historic wealth that abound in the estuary. Sample locally caught fish smoked in the old-fashioned way, such as smoked eel, a Kamouraska specialty. And there's a section of the St. Lawrence that is so blessed in natural riches (and large marine mammals) that it's the site of a national park: the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park. Featuring an exclusively marine environment, this park encompasses a section of the estuary and of the Saguenay Fjord. In the springtime and autumn, hundreds of thousands of snow geese make a stopover on the river's banks, with Montmagny and Isle-aux-Grues, as well as Cap Tourmente, near Québec City, their preferred resting spots. This is unquestionably an ecotourism paradise!

From islands with a history...

Discover a host of charming islands, each with its own distinct cachet. Not far from Québec City lies the immense Île d'Orléans, which boasts farmlands, orchards and magnificent villages dating back to early New France. The Isle-aux-Grues archipelago, across from Montmagny, is composed of several small isles and islands, including Grosse-Île, a quarantine station for European immigrants who arrived by boat from 1832 to 1937. This national historic site pays tribute to the Irish victims of the 1847 typhus epidemic. At the foot of the impressive mountains of the Laurentian massif, in Charlevoix, Isle-aux-Coudres sits in exceptional surroundings. This holiday resort is renowned for its air of tranquility and its antique mills. You can tour it on foot, by bike or by sea kayak.

Across from Rivière-du-Loup, the small inhabited islands belonging to the Duvetnor company play host to large colonies of seabirds, including murrelets, razorbills and common eiders. Île aux Lièvres, the largest of these islands, is a wooded wilderness area that's ideal for hiking and roughing it in the great outdoors. A little further sits Île Verte, where forty or so islanders live year round, taking in the salt air and an ambiance from days past. Here you will enjoy extraordinary vistas, bed and breakfasts located in pretty wooden houses and the sound of a lighthouse that dates back to 1809. You'll also observe minke whales and seals frolicking in the waves just off the island's north shore.

Off the shores of Trois-Pistoles, on the tiny Île aux Basques, a sanctuary for birds and northern plants, you can see the foundations of the stone ovens built by the Basque fishermen who hunted seal, porpoise and whales in the river until the XVIIth century. Near Rimouski, the Bic islands, which form a national park, showcase striking landscapes of spectacular capes, sharp cliffs, tranquil bays and craggy rocks. This park is well known for bird- and seal-watching and for hiking and sea kayaking excursions.

Left bank, right bank

All along its two shores, the river presents diverse and unforgettable sights. Twice a day, the tides completely transform the shorelines. Among the many lighthouses that dot the estuary, don't miss the lighthouse at Pointe-au-Père, near Rimouski, which now houses a museum dedicated to the tragic shipwreck of the Empress of Ireland, in 1914. While the North Shore is mainly composed of forest and rugged mountains overlooking the river, the South Shore is characterized by gentle farmland plains. On both shores, you'll find ancestral villages and legendary resort areas, such as La Malbaie (Charlevoix), Tadoussac (Manicougan), Métis-sur-Mer (Gaspésie) and Notre-Dame-du-Portage (Bas-Saint-Laurent). From its majestic vantage point high atop the summit of Cap Diamant, Québec City overlooks the St. Lawrence.

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Photos
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[Back to general index](#)

The vast gulf

A sea of natural attractions

Here, the St. Lawrence is known as “the sea.” It’s so broad that its horizon appears to stretch to infinity! Its salty waters, which obey the rhythm of the tides, are home to abundant marine life. Fin whales, humpback whales, porpoises and seals are among the marine mammals that you can observe here. Fishing is a popular activity, so you’ll taste lobster, crab, scallops, Northern shrimp and halibut... all the bounty of the sea that, over the centuries, enticed the aboriginals to settle along the gulf’s banks. Far from the major urban centres and flowing into the Atlantic Ocean, the gulf is famous for its extraordinary natural sights, many of which you can easily see while on a cruise. It goes without saying that the regions bathed by the gulf are very popular vacation spots! The St. Lawrence is also the access route to the tiny villages that dot the Basse-Côte-Nord, which are inaccessible by road.

Exceptional islands

At the brink of the Atlantic, the Îles-de-la-Madeleine are a highly sought after oasis. In the summertime, vacationers flock to the islands to enjoy their white beaches, red sandstone cliffs, charming homes and, of course, sheer tranquility. Come savour the succulent seafood cuisine—they say the lobster is the best in the world! Île d’Anticosti, in the Duplessis region, is a place of savage beauty and home to 120,000 white-tailed deer. This incredible natural island, 222 km (138 mi.) in length, or 17 times the island of Montréal, is a paradise of cliffs, waterfalls, canyons and rivers. Harrington Harbour, an isolated island, is its own unique little world, with a tiny village, colourful homes inhabited by English-speaking fishermen and wooden boardwalks in a tundra setting...

Attention: extraordinary attractions

The shores of the gulf harbour unparalleled natural attractions, like the one-of-a-kind Percé rock, a colossal mass that’s 433 m (473 yd.) wide and 85 m (93 yd.) high. If ever there was a symbol of the Gaspésie, this is it! Just off Percé, tens of thousands of Northern gannets put on a fascinating show on 1229628 Île Bonaventure, a small island where they spend their summers. Lastly, at the eastern tip of the Gaspésie, Forillon National Park is a sumptuous blend of mountains, sea and superb beaches. On the North Shore, in the Duplessis region, the Mingan Archipelago fascinates visitors. The unusual shape of these islands-imposing natural monuments jutting out into the gulf not far from the shore-creates a spectacular landscape. It’s as though Mother Nature had sculpted objects, animals and human faces right into the rock!

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[Back to general index](#)

The whales of the St. Lawrence

Set out to meet the giants of the sea!

Seeing a whale burst dramatically through the water's surface is a fascinating and unforgettable experience, but one that can be yours on the St. Lawrence River! Québec is one of the few places in the world where you can see no fewer than 13 species of large sea mammals attracted by the river's wealth of shellfish, on which they feast, as well as by the river's impressive depth!

Québec's cetacean population

The Blue Whale, the most imposing animal on Earth, growing to a gargantuan 82 feet in length (25 meters), lives in the waters of the St. Lawrence River, as does the second-largest cetacean, the fin whale. Numerous species of rorqual can also be seen in the river, including the humpback whale, known for its exuberant leaps through the air. As well as these giants, you'll probably see porpoises and dolphins (especially in the gulf) and you might catch a flash of white floating on the waves: these are belugas, the small Arctic whales that stay here year-round. At present this endangered species numbers around 1,000.

Drift towards the whales

Many ports in the St. Lawrence estuary, on both north and south shores, offer whale watching excursions daily from May through October. The best places for cetaceans are the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park (with numerous departures from Tadoussac, Baie-Sainte-Catherine, Rivière-du-Loup and Trois-Pistoles), the Mingan Archipelago National Park Reserve of Canada (Duplessis) and the Forillon National Park of Canada, in the Gaspésie. The experienced guides on these trips are renowned for their knowledge, not only on the whales, but on their habitat as well as on other ecotourism subjects. There are very strict regulations on the speed of the observation boats and their minimum distances from these marine mammals in order not to disturb them.

Observing from the shore

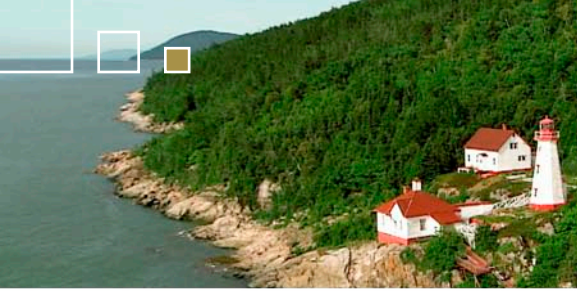
In some spots, the river is so deep near the shore that you can regularly see whales without leaving the shoreline. Places where this is possible include the mouth of the Saguenay Fjord, Cap-de-Bon-Désir (Bergeronnes), two sites in the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park, and Pointe-des-Monts (Duplessis). To be sure you don't miss a thing, take a trip along the Whale Route!

Seals and whitecoats on the horizon

There are also many seals in the river. They love to lounge about on sun-kissed rocks along the shoreline or in the estuary and it is possible to watch them either through a telescope from the shore or from a boat. For the adventurers, a sea-kayaking expedition, (with a qualified guide, for the river's current can be dangerous!) makes a perfect experience.

Watching Whitecoats off the Îles-de-la-Madeleine remains one of the most amazing sights. Near the end of the winter, hundreds of thousands of seals arrive from Greenland, making their home on the pack ice for a few weeks in order to give birth to and feed their young. Taking a trip to watch this wonderful phenomenon is a unique adventure. Don't miss out on this experience of a lifetime!

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[Back to general index](#)

Tourism in Québec

A Long love story

Québec has been putting out the welcome mat for visitors for a long time. History tells us that our first tourist was a Frenchman, Asseline de Ronval, who came to look over New France in 1662. And it would seem that even back then pilgrims were visiting Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, the oldest pilgrimage site in North America.

After New France fell to the English in the Conquest of 1763, the new lords of the land came to appreciate their new possessions. Admiral Horatio Nelson is said to have enjoyed his stay in Québec in 1782, but that may have been because of a sweetheart. Drawn by the region's splendours, Governor Guy Carleton was already spending time in Baie-des-Chaleurs in the late 18th century. Fifty years later, wealthy Anglophone families summered there.

In those days it was called resort living, rather than tourism. Starting in the latter 1800s, the rich would escape the unhealthy cities by steamship or train and set up residence in the countryside. The Québec City region, the Laurentians, Charlevoix, the Lower St. Lawrence and the Gaspé Peninsula were all popular for the lovely countryside, bathing and fishing in summer and skiing in winter. People went to the country seeking a lifestyle inspired by mid-19th century romanticism, which glorified nature and bygone civilizations.

Those early holidayers were rich and most of them spoke English. The gentlemen played golf. The Murray Bay Golf Club, founded in 1894, is the third-oldest golf club in North America and the oldest one remaining on its original site. It delighted visitors to the Charlevoix region, a tourist destination whose popularity has stood the test of time.

In the 1870s, the Québec government began leasing sections of rivers and even entire lakes to Anglo-Canadian and American private fishing clubs. In 1963, the first Department of Tourism was also responsible for hunting and fishing!

With advances in transportation and a growing hotel industry, tourism really took off. The Château Frontenac, the jewel in the crown of Québec's hotels, opened in 1893. Over the years, the world's most-photographed hotel has hosted its share of celebrities, including Princess Grace of Monaco, Charles de Gaulle, François Mitterand, Alfred Hitchcock, Montgomery Clift, Chiang-Kai-Shek and Charles Lindbergh. Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt stayed there, of course, when they came to Québec City in August 1943 and September 1944 to plan their final strategy for the Second World War.

Even back in the 19th century, major tourist events were drawing crowds. The Montréal Winter Carnival, celebrated annually from 1883 to 1889, attracted over 50,000 party-goers from south of the border each year. A million faithful converged on St. Joseph's Oratory in Montréal to mark the passing of a humble miracle-worker named Brother André, in 1937. Special trains were laid on to bring tens of thousands from the United States.

Montréal opened its airport in 1941, but the biggest boost to tourism actually came from the expansion of the highway system and the explosion in the number of cars. The Department of Roads published a roadmap of Québec in 1926 and followed up the next year with a series of advertisements and a guide to lure American and French visitors. Québec opened its first tourism office in New York in 1940.

The 1967 World's Fair in Montréal (Expo 67) attracted 50 million visitors, including heads of state and royalty, over a heady six-month period. Some of them returned for the summer Olympics, also in Montréal, in 1976. In the meantime, a commissioner general of tourism had taken up his duties in Paris and offices had been opened in Boston and Chicago.

In 2002, tourists made 27.5 million trips in Québec and spent \$7.3 billion. These days they come for Québec's wide-open spaces, its endless variety of outdoor activities, vibrant cultural life, original regional cuisine, renowned festivals, museums and huge public celebrations, including the Montréal Jazz Festival.

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Photos

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[Back to general index](#)

Visiting gay-friendly Québec

Fun-loving and free-living!

Tourisme Québec is a member of the IGLTA, the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association.

Looking for a little joie de vivre? It's everywhere in Québec. Some openness? We're overflowing with it! Gay and lesbian communities throughout the world enjoy the ambiance of freedom and safety that prevails here. Québec bewitches its visitors with its extraordinary cities, its fabulous festivals, its fine dining and countless boutiques... not to mention its colourful nightlife! Montréal, the second-largest French-speaking city in the world, has a sizeable gay district: the Village. Nightclubs, restaurants and boutiques catering specifically to a gay clientele abound, as do a large number of hotels and bed and breakfasts.

Equal and legal

An avant-garde society, Québec was one of the first jurisdictions in the world to outlaw any form of discrimination towards homosexual persons. Moreover, under legislation that was passed unanimously by the National Assembly in June 2002, same-sex couples can legalize their status as a couple by entering into a civil union. This new institution also grants same-sex couples the right to adopt children.

A rainbow of festivals

In Québec, we sure like to party, and the gay community is no different from the rest! In August, amid a carnival atmosphere, nearly a million people gather in the streets of Montréal for the city's annual gay and lesbian pride parade, the flamboyant conclusion to the wildly popular week-long Divers/Cité festival. Historic Québec City hosts its own gay pride festival, Fierté Québec. In September, image + nation, Montréal's international gay and lesbian film and video festival-the oldest and largest of its genre in Canada-showcases more than 200 films. In October, the Black & Blue Festival attracts tens of thousands of gay visitors to Montréal with its program of sixty different events, including one of the biggest raves in the world. The first World OutGames will be held in Montréal, Rendez-vous Montréal 2006, during which 16,000 participants from over 100 countries will compete in sporting and cultural events.

You'll have a gay old time...

Nature is just a hop, skip and a jump from Québec's major cities. Not far from Montréal, the Laurentides and Eastern Township regions are home to resort spots and large ski centres. In every region, huge parks provide the perfect setting for you to take part in numerous outdoor activities that are as varied as the passing seasons. The majestic St. Lawrence River, which cuts through Québec, is ideal for incredible cruises. After an activity-filled day, you'd prefer to spend the night in an establishment that caters specifically to a gay clientele? Certain hotels and campgrounds in Québec do just that.

Come in... we're open!

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