

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



A FOOD LOVER’S TOUR OF QUEBEC CITY

Think meat pies, poutine, and all things maple to contemporary takes on traditional French-Canadian fare

By Diane Bair and Pamela Wright
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

QUEBEC CITY — “This is the first drink that most teenagers in Quebec City get drunk on,” our guide Francois Vidal said, as we sipped glasses of Caribou. It was syrupy and sweet, and strong.

Vidal explained that the cocktail originated with Native Americans, who used to drink the fresh blood of caribou. Later, hunters and trappers added alcohol to the blood “to give them energy.” The name stuck, but our Caribou cocktail substituted wine for the animal blood, was sweetened with maple syrup, and fortified with whiskey.

We were sitting in **La Bûche** (418-694-7272, www.restolabuche.com), one of the city’s buzzing, new restaurants, a contemporary take on a sugar shack set in the woods, complete with rustic picnic tables, paper placemats and checkered napkins. The service was warm and the food (rabbit wings, venison tartare, and meat pies) was top-notch.

“It’s amazing what’s happening in the city right now,” Vidal said, as he opened the door to **Le Tournebroche** bistro, our next stop. “Young chefs are creating restaurants with new ideas, passion, and dedication, and they’re

changing the food scene.”

The warm and unpretentious bistro (418-692-5524, www.tournebroche.com) specializes in organic, rotisserie chicken, and is known for its strong local, farm-to-table ethos. We tasted the crispy, juicy, well-seasoned chicken (some of the best we’ve had), along with chips of deep-fried chicken skin, and its signature frites (blanched first and then fried).

We were on a guided food tour with **Tours Voir Quebec** (866-694-2001, www.toursvoirquebec.com), that promised seven stops and 15 tastings. Along the way, Vidal pointed out other restaurant hotspots and city highlights: Aux Anciens Canadiens, a longtime favorite serving traditional French-Canadian cuisine (“I think they’re more French than the French”); Frère de la Côtes (“a really good steakhouse”); Chez Boulay (“very talented chefs, specializing in game meat”); and Pub St.-Alexandre (“great beer selection”). We passed the Holy Trinity Church, which Vidal encouraged us to visit later. “Best secret in the city,” he said. And, we popped into **Delices Erable & Cie** (514-765-3456, www.deliceserableetcie.com), where we found all things maple: maple liquor, maple tea, maple wafers, maple vinegar, maple salts and peppers, maple butter, and maple



hand and body lotion. We left smelling like a pancake.

We were headed outside Old Quebec’s city walls, into the still slightly gritty, working class neighborhood of Saint-Jean, an incubator for edgy ideas and avant-garde entrepreneurs. “This neighborhood is where things first start,” Vidal said. “It had the first gay community, the first organic store. When something works in Saint-Jean, it moves inside the wall.”

Our first stop was **Le Snack Bar** (418-522-4727, www.snackbarsaintjean.com), a rustic little joint with wooden tables and wooden block seats, that Vidal assured us served the best poutine in the city. None of this fancy stuff, he said; this place served it the way it was meant to be, made on the spot, with top-quality ingredients, kept simple. French fries, cheese curds, and gravy. “It’s food for fun,” Vidal said. “Meant to be eaten at 3 a.m. after the bars close.” Not that we’ve had a ton of poutine to compare it to, but this basket of slightly crunchy, meaty fries, topped with thick cheese curds and doused with house-made, deeply-flavored gravy was worth every decadent calorie.

We waddled out, thankful to be walking off a few calories before entering **Le Moine Echanson** (418-524-

7832, www.lemoineechanson.com), a quirky, wine shop/café, with great wines and great food. The story goes the owners wanted to open a wine store but they couldn’t get a permit. So, they opened a restaurant instead, that also happens to sell and serve an amazing selection of wines from around the world. “We have a lot of funky, fun wines that you can’t find elsewhere,” the owner said. “Every bottle here has its own personality.” We enjoyed cod fritters, served with a chilled 2013 French Roussanne.

There were two more stops on the tour, and though we’d enjoyed every bite (and story) so far, we were stuffed. Alas, it didn’t stop us from eating the ham and cheese crepes at **Creperie-bistro le Billig** (418-524-8341, www.facebook.com/CreperiebistroLeBillig), made the traditional Breton way with buckwheat flour. Or, from devouring a divine piece of white chocolate stuffed with a dark chocolate ganache and hazelnut filling from **Erico chocolatiers** (418-524-2122, www.ericochocolatier.com). Now, we were officially full and done.

But who knows? We might be back in this ’burg later, when the bars close, craving poutine.

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From top: poutine at Le Snack Bar; an exterior view of Aux Anciens Canadiens and a selection of its wines.

HERE

DITCH YOUR PHONE, EARN A FREE NIGHT’S STAY

Hand over your cellphone or tablet when you check in to the Element Boston Seaport and you can earn a free night’s stay — good for a future trip — if you make it 24 hours without retrieving your device. The hotel’s Disconnected Stay Package coincides with Screen-Free Week, May 1-7, an international celebration when people worldwide swap screen time for “real-time” activities. After handing in your phone, hop on one of Element’s free bikes for a spin around Boston, enjoy the hotel’s evening Relax receptions, stroll along the Harborwalk for views of the waterfront and skyline, or visit nearby Harpoon Brewery. Traveling with kids? Take them to the Boston Fire Museum on Saturdays for free. Rates start at \$209 per night, double occupancy. 877-782-0151, www.elementbostonseaport.com.

BOSTON WELCOMES NEW SHIP

Enjoy a fine-dining experience and panoramic views of Boston aboard the newly renovated Odyssey ship. This 174-foot yacht, complete with climate control, viewing decks, and modern décor, just underwent a \$3 million renovation and will launch its first season in Boston May 10. The ship, operated by Entertainment Cruises and designed for cruising Boston Harbor, holds about 535 passengers, and offers brunch, lunch, and dinner cruises. It departs from Rows Wharf, but also stops at Charlestown, Fan Pier, The Hyatt Harborside, Marina Bay, and the World Trade Center. Rates range from \$42 per person (lunch) to \$120 (Saturday dinner). 866-408-8439, www.odysseycruises.com/boston.

THERE

EXHIBIT SHOWCASES ‘NEW’ TITANIC ARTIFACTS

See gambling chips, a gold locket, a cuff link, and other rare artifacts from the Titanic, which sank 105 years ago this month. These items will remain on display at “Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition,” located in the Luxor Hotel and Casino, for several months. They belonged to first-class passengers Virginia Estelle McDowell Clark and her husband, Walter Miller Clark, who were on their belated honeymoon; Virginia made it home but Clark did not (coincidentally, Las Vegas’s Clark County was named after Walter Clark’s brother, US Senator William Andrews Clark). The artifacts include never-before-seen gambling chips made of horn, an 18-carat gold locket with the initials “VC” (for Virginia Clark), a cuff link made with two gold Turkish coins connected by a chain, a gold-plated canister, and a brass shaving stick canister with the original shaving soap inside. Admission: \$24-\$42, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. 702-262-4400, www.luxor.com.

SIGN UP FOR A SUMMER ADVENTURE

Immerse yourself in local culture and stunning landscapes through REI Adventures, a series of summer adventure trips to destinations worldwide. Pedal through Croatia on a laid-back 8-day journey that takes you through rural villages, olive groves, vineyards, and lush vegetation. Discover hoodoos and hidden waterfalls on a 3-day women’s hiking and camping adventure in two of Utah’s most picturesque parks: Bryce Canyon National Park and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (19 new women’s adventure trips offered this year). Or experience pure solitude and wilderness views only accessible by foot on a 5-day backpacking adventure in Yosemite National Park, to an area called the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne, a canyon section in the Tuolumne River valley. Summer trips through REI Adventures start at \$549. 800-622-2236, www.rei.com/adventures.

EVERYWHERE

THE CADILLAC OF BIKE CARRIERS

Road tripping with bikes is no big deal with the new Thule T2 Pro XT 9035XT bike carrier. This simple-to-use, hitch-style carrier attaches to cars with a 1.25- or 2-inch receiver, and fits bikes with 20- to 29-inch wheels, including all-road, mountain, downhill, and fat bikes with tires up to 5 inches wide.

Attach the carrier to your car without any tools and secure it with the built-in cable lock (included). The carrier quickly unfolds for loading, and allows about a foot of space between bikes. Secure rear wheels in adjustable trays using a strap system, and position the ratcheting arm so it clamps the front wheel in place without making frame contact. The best part: The carrier tilts down away from your car so you can still access the rear trunk. The new T2 Pro XT Add-On allows you to extend the rack so it fits two additional bikes (four total) — a slick feature — and works with 2-inch hitches only. An integrated cable lock on each arm lets you lock every bike to the carrier. \$579.95 (carrier); \$419 (two-bike add-on). www.thule.com.

A MULTITASKING PHONE CHARGER

No more holding your phone or propping it against a tippy drink on your airline tray table. Ventev’s charge stand 3000c holds your phone in place in either vertical or horizontal position, and can charge it at the same time. This 3000 mAh portable battery and phone-charging stand works with Android and iOS devices. Use it to watch a movie hands-free, as an alarm clock in your hotel room, or to charge your device in your bag as you travel. The charge stand measures about 3.3 inches by 2.3 inches by 1.2 inches, weighs 3.2 ounces, and comes with either a micro USB or lightning plug. \$49.99. 800-759-9996, mobileaccessories.ventev.com.

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