## 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

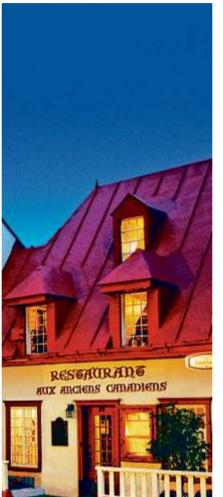
Vidal explained that the cocktail originated with Native Americans, who used to drink the fresh blood of caribou. Later, hunters and trappers added alcohol to the blood "to give them energy." The name stuck, but our Caribou cocktail substituted wine for the animal blood, was sweetened with maple syrup,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

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.tourne broche.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.toursvoirguebec.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.deliceserable etcie.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.snackbar saintjean.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 topquality 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

We waddled out, thankful to be walking off a few calories before entering Le Moine Echanson (418-5247832, 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/Creperie bistroLeBillig), 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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#### 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.

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in the Tuolumne River valley. Summer trips through REI Adven-

tures start at \$549. 800-622-2236, www.rei.com/adventures.

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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.

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