



Detroit Free Press

Sainte Anne shrine north of Quebec City draws petitioners from around the world.

The warm heart of Quebec City

Detroit Free Press

QUEBEC CITY — Shop windows are dominated by winter parkas. A cool, bitter wind blows off the St. Lawrence River. The trees are turning quickly now.

On Fabrique Street, I hurry past a fur store with my inadequate raincoat and fleece, wishing I had a hood. Or gloves. Or both. In this brief season, fall, North America's most European city glows with brisk vitality. It has broad shoulders and French-Canadian sturdiness. City hall is decorated with giant pumpkins. Spindly geraniums are on their last legs in the flower pots. Cruise ships on color tours of Canada dock at the port, and visitors pour into the winding streets of the lower town.

Most Americans have been to Toronto, or maybe Vancouver or even Montreal. But Quebec City is far different than those large metropolises.

Here, everything is about New France, North America's French ties, both the past and present. And that sensibility is why Quebec City is also regularly named one of the most romantic cities in the world.

This time of year, it gets dark earlier each day. Already at 2:45 in the afternoon, I feel the hint of winter to come, and how Quebec fights the darkness.

I walk uphill toward the windswept river. I cut through a small alley that doubles as a market. There, artists sell touristy images in oil, acrylic and watercolor, all reds and greens and bright blues. There is a gay feeling of warm color and light in this tiny alley. Nearby, St. Louis Street also is full of bright colors — on the shutters, awnings, and in shop window displays — that soften forbidding gray stone and chilly blue skies.

Inside the luxurious Fairmont Chateau Frontenac hotel, the tradition of afternoon tea is another good insulator against the clutches of winter-in-waiting. There, a waiter serves a gleaming silver pot of steaming tea along with precise little appetizers. The room is hushed. It is warm in here. Couples linger. Nothing is rushed.



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Montmorency Falls just north of Quebec City, Canada, has a drop taller than Niagara Falls. There is also a bridge atop the falls that you can walk.

It feels like a warm blanket, sitting in this room with its wide windows.

One thing about Quebec City. Yes, the language is all French. But this place feels curiously familiar to Americans. Many places in the United States, including Detroit, were once part of Quebec and New France, right up until the French lost their vast holdings to the British in 1763.

Even today, freighters you see on the St. Lawrence River likely have come from the Great Lakes, connected by a ribbon of water. Many names in Michigan (including Detroit, "the straits") still resonate of French Canada. Quebec City still lives amid history. Madame Cadillac herself could walk down the street and feel at home.

A heavy defensive stone wall still marches around the old town, black canons lining the ramparts. (Actually, at this moment they appear to be trained directly on the white Caribbean Princess cruise ship docked below, so watch out, cruise passengers.)

Even the stone house that belonged to 16th century explorer Louis Joliet is pragmatically used as the ticket booth for the funicular hillside tram that con-

nects the upper town to the lower town.

Last winter saw record-breaking cold in Quebec City, with an average daytime high of 17.8 degrees Fahrenheit in February. Still, people came to the Christmas markets and Winter Carnival.

This year, the Christmas markets will run from late November through early January.

The big Quebec New Year's Eve festival will feature outdoor shows, lights and a Ferris wheel (Dec. 31).

Winter Carnival, Quebec's most famous event, runs Jan. 29-Feb. 14.

Other romantic things to do? Rent a car and drive just north of town to Montmorency Falls, a huge waterfall taller than Niagara. Keep going on to Sainte Anne cathedral in the town of Sainte Anne de Beaupre, North America's biggest Catholic shrine. You also can travel 27 hours south from Quebec City to visit its big sister, Montreal.

But in my opinion, couples seeking a getaway should just come here, stay put, wander the streets, eat lots of terribly rich food, and find a cozy place to stay.

Comfort sacrificed for fuel efficiency

Los Angeles Times

If you are crammed into a shrinking airline seat in a cabin in which passengers are packed sardine-style, it might be comforting to know that, at the very least, you are helping the environment.

The nation's airlines have gradually improved fuel efficiency rates on a passenger-per-mile basis, according to an annual study that gives credit to the airline trend of increasingly squeezing more passengers per plane.

The bad news: Passenger comfort has been sacrificed for fuel efficiency, according to a study by the International Council on Clean Transportation, a nonprofit group that researches and promotes clean transportation efforts.

From 2011 to 2012, the amount of fuel it took to transport a passenger one mile improved about 2 percent, partly because of improved technology in newer aircraft, according to the study. Fuel efficiency remained flat between 2012 and 2013 but began to improve between 2013 and 2014 as airlines began to squeeze in even more passengers, the study said.

The average domestic flight in the U.S. carried 145 seats in 2010, but by 2014 that number rose to 150 seats, according to the nonprofit group.

The squeeze is expected to continue. The average wide-body plane will grow by about 20 seats over the next 20 years while the average single-aisle plane will grow by about 10 seats, according to aircraft manufacturer Boeing Co.



Tribune News Service

Can't think of anything better blue sky and new snow.

Ski Speak: Going skiing? Do the mashed potatoes

SNOWMASS, Colo. (TRIBUNE) — Did last winter's ski instructor — "ski pros" they're called — drive you crazy, going on and on about carving, corn and mashed potatoes? That wasn't Thanksgiving dinner he was talking about. That was Ski Speak, the lingo you need to learn if you want to fit in with the "rippers" on the slopes. Shout a few phrases to your ski buddies and you'll snow the "gapers" in the lift line.

BOILER PLATE: Hard icy snow, a surface so dense your skis can't make an edge.

BUMP: A hulking mogul of snow, originally an insignificant pimple that grows into a mound as skiers steer around it.

CAT TRACK: Narrow ski trails, sometimes snow-covered maintenance roads that connect ski runs otherwise separated by cliffs, ravines or woods. Often added next to a black diamond run so beginners have an easy way to get back to the base area.

CHOCOLATE CHIPS: Rocks sticking up out of the snow, more dangerous than death cookies.

CORDOROY: Freshly groomed snow marked with thin, parallel grooves. See snow cat.

CORN: Crumbly, cornlike spring snow that has melted and refrozen.

DEATH COOKIES: Crunchy, crusty bits of snow that form when snow melts during the day and refreezes at night. Hitting a patch of it at high speed acts like a brake.

EAT WOOD: What you'll do if you lose control and hit a tree.

GAPERS: Novice skiers and

onlookers who spend more time standing around than actually skiing.

GLADE: A grove of thinly spaced trees, fun to ski between. Sometimes a shortcut between two downhill slopes.

HUCK: To ski off a cliff or mound, getting airborne in the process.

LUNCH TRAY: As in "launch," a snowboard.

MASHED POTATOES: Mushy spring snow often found at busy trail crossings or near the base area at the end of a warm day.

NOODLE: A ski so old or so poorly built that it won't stay rigid enough for fast skiing.

OFF-PISTE: Ungroomed snow, usually beyond or between marked trails.

POWDER HOUND: A skier whose day isn't complete until he finds a powder stash.

POWDER STASH: 1. a slope where the snow is deep, light and undisturbed; 2. a virgin patch the obsessed "hound" doesn't reveal.

TUCK: To crouch down in a racing position, knees bent and poles against your sides. A "no tucking" sign means no racing down a crowded slope.

YARD SALE: The pile of junk at the bottom of a black-diamond run when you crash and burn, scattering your skis, poles, goggles, hat, gloves, day pack, cellphone, water bottle, trail map, sunscreen, keys, driver's license and Grateful Dead ticket stubs over the snow.

WHOOPE-DE-DO: An undulating, dragon's-back trail on a beginner's slope designed for kids.