



# QUÉBEC CITY

A NATIVE SON SHARES HOW TO ENJOY HIS BEAUTIFUL CANADIAN CITY IN WINTER.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RENAUD PHILIPPE



OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Firepits in the historic center of Québec City help keep visitors cozy; traditional poutine at La Souche; a snowy scene in the Old Québec district; zipping down an ice slide during the city's annual Winter Carnival.

THIS PAGE: Looking toward the grand hotel Fairmont Le Château Frontenac from the ramparts of Old Québec.

A

T 6 A.M.

on this February day\*, the city still sleeps as the icebreaker is about to leave the dock to cross the St. Lawrence River. The ferry needs only a few minutes to reach Québec City from neighboring Lévis, a journey I have made for 20 years while observing through the lens of my camera. It's always the same sense of wonder I feel when I hear the echo of cracking ice get lost in the infinity of the river, my eyes riveted on the towering Château Frontenac, one of the world's most-photographed hotels. This morning, winter envelops the city, and once again time freezes. In just a few hours, about a foot of snow has fallen on the stones and bricks of Québec City, nicknamed "the Old Capital." Coat, boots, gloves, toque—it's time for a walk inside the city's historic ramparts. At this time of day, only tourists can be seen wandering through the maze of narrow streets, as city residents armed with shovels are busy freeing their cars from huge mounds of snow.

All is white. All is quiet. Only the sound of one's own footsteps in the snow disturbs this silence, but it also adds to the magic of

*\*This story has been translated into English from the author's native French.*

**The oldest staircase in Québec City, Escalier Casse-Cou (c. 1635), offers a gateway to the picturesque shopping district Petit-Champlain.**





the moment. On narrow rue Couillard, the door of the café Chez Temporel opens, releasing a warm aroma of coffee and croissants. I enter. It's a place full of history, where the old stone walls have witnessed the work of the great Québec writers who congregated here. Warmed up, I continue my stroll to the Dufferin Terrace, a long wooden belvedere at the foot of the Château Frontenac from which the view of the river and the Basse-Ville (Lower Town) district is unique.

Now, already noon. I hear shouts of joy from those who are sliding down the big toboggan chutes that have been one of the most popular attractions here for more than a century—1884, to be exact. From mid-December to mid-March, young and old enjoy this mammoth structure on the terrace, winter after winter, with the magnificent view of the river as the backdrop. And everywhere there is a thrill of



**EXPLORING QUÉBEC CITY**

**EAT & DRINK**

**Chez Temporel:** Since 1974, locals and visitors have come in from the cold to warm up with coffee, croissants, and local specialties at this Haute-Ville (Upper Town) favorite, while watching the stream of passersby just beyond the picture windows. [cheztemporel.com](http://cheztemporel.com)

**Chez Rioux & Pettigrew:** In the city's atmospheric Old Port neighborhood, foodies come here for the chef's secret four-course prix fixe menu, while music playing on a vintage record player amplifies a timeless sense of place. [chezriouxpettigrew.com](http://chezriouxpettigrew.com)

**Le Don:** Québec City's only vegan restaurant is also one of its most popular. It's not unusual to see the same travelers returning to eat here day after day. [donresto.com](http://donresto.com)

**Tanière<sup>3</sup>:** This high-end, special-occasion restaurant in a 17th-century underground vault offers one of the most unforgettable settings you could wish for. [taniere3.com/en](http://taniere3.com/en)

**Le Clan:** Stéphane Modat, one of Québec's most famous chefs, opened his new eatery on an Old Québec side street. Modat's creations are partly inspired by his time with First Nations peoples. [restaurantleclan.com](http://restaurantleclan.com)

**Paillard:** This café and bakery opens every day at 7 a.m., and its tables fill early because of its excellent breakfast sandwiches and hot drinks. [paillard.ca](http://paillard.ca)

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: A scenic toboggan ride on the Dufferin Terrace; the old-style general store Magasin Général; inside the magical Hôtel de Glace; skating in the Place d'Youville, with the Beaux Arts-style Le Théâtre Capitol in the background.



FROM TOP: The bakery-café Paillard on rue Saint-Jean is an inviting spot for croissants and hot chocolate; traditional clothing of the Huron-Wendat Nation at the Huron Traditional Site in Wendake.

discovery: climbing the city ramparts, walking around the almost mythical rue Saint-Louis and rue Saint-Jean, wandering from one store to another, strolling by a fire in the Place d'Youville, heading out to play at the Winter Carnival, one of the largest and oldest events of its kind, which now is in full swing.

As the afternoon passes, snow begins to fall again. I make a last stop on the road at the Magasin Général, a legendary general store founded in 1866, before exploring the historic shopping district Petit-Champlain, in Old Québec's Lower Town.

The Lower Town welcomes more and more tourists every year, especially in the vibrant Limoilou neighborhood. You have to check out Article 721, a little Ali Baba cave of treasures from local artisans. Around it you will find a restaurant, café, bar. The terrace of the bar Le Bal du Léopard is closed in this season, but this makes the interior all the more welcoming.

You still have to cross the river, this time via bridge to the island called Île d'Orléans. It is by stepping back that one can fully appreciate things: At the tip, in the quaint community of

**Le Chic Shack:** A comfort-food oasis in Old Québec's Place d'Armes serving burgers, poutine, and shakes, nearly all created with local ingredients. [lechicshack.ca/en](http://lechicshack.ca/en)

**STAY**

**Fairmont Le Château Frontenac:** At one of Québec City's most famous landmarks, luxury comes with stunning views of the Dufferin Terrace and the St. Lawrence River. [fairmont.com/frontenac-quebec](http://fairmont.com/frontenac-quebec)

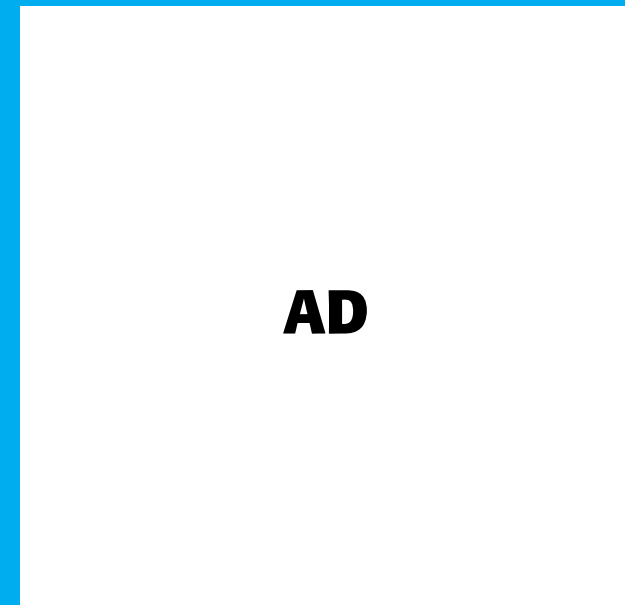
**Auberge Saint-Antoine:** Posh accommodations combine with city history, as artifacts from an on-site archaeological dig are displayed throughout the hotel. A two-minute walk brings you to the Museum of Civilization and popular boutiques in the Petit-Champlain district. [saint-antoine.com](http://saint-antoine.com)

**Hôtel Le Priori:** Located on a pretty pedestrian street in a building that dates back to 1734, Le Priori is a cozy and plush boutique hotel, with an interior design featuring brick and stone walls, plus gourmet breakfast. [hotelpriori.com/en](http://hotelpriori.com/en)

**SHOP**

**Magasin Général:** An old-fashioned country store that has long been a local landmark, it's the kind of place you enter thinking you'll stop for a few minutes—then you souvenir-hunt for an hour. [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/magasin-general)

**Article 721:** Artisanal gifts from some 60 Québec makers, along with vintage finds, fill this beguiling shop in the





Sainte-Pétronille, you can venture out onto the ice-covered river and see Old Québec in the distance, as well as Montmorency Falls.

My Québec City is an experience. For a photographer, winter is a spectacle. There is a reason that the Hôtel de Glace (Ice Hotel) inspired the directors of the famous Disney movie *Frozen*. Just a 20-minute drive or public shuttle from the city center, it is a dreamlike place, a world of ice and snow. Built with more than 2,000 blocks of ice and tons of snow, it is the only ice hotel in North America, where every year engineers and artists reinvent its theme and spaces.

**A view across the frozen St. Lawrence River from Île d'Orléans. Freshwater for much of its length, the St. Lawrence freezes during the winter months, providing visitors the chance to walk out onto its icy expanse.**

In Wendake, the Huron-Wendat Nation reservation located 15 minutes from the city, visitors are greeted with open arms at the Huron-Wendat Museum and Huron Traditional Site. A stay in Québec City would be incomplete without a visit to this site of great richness, which allows us to understand the past, the history of the territory that welcomes us. 🌐

Limoilou neighborhood.  
[article721.com](http://article721.com)

**Benjo:** Amid electric trains, stuffed animals, and a dozen special toy departments, winter visitors young and old will warm up quickly at this 25,000-square-foot destination toy store.  
[benjo.ca/en](http://benjo.ca/en)

**Rue du Petit-Champlain:** One of the most inviting window-shopping streets anywhere, this cobblestoned walkway lined with boutiques is considered the oldest commercial street in North America.  
[quebeccite.com/en/old-quebec-city/petit-champlain](http://quebeccite.com/en/old-quebec-city/petit-champlain)

#### PLAY

**Hôtel de Glace:** You can spend a bundled-up overnight here, sleeping in a bed carved from ice, but simply touring this architectural wonder will give you chills of amazement.  
[valcartier.com/en/accommodations/hotel-de-glace-ice-hotel](http://valcartier.com/en/accommodations/hotel-de-glace-ice-hotel)

**Wendake:** A step back in time 15 minutes outside the city, where you immerse yourself in the First Nations culture and experience, complete with galleries and crafts that honor ancient traditions.  
[tourismewendake.ca/en](http://tourismewendake.ca/en)

**Dufferin Terrace and Toboggan Run:** Enjoy the thrill of strolling the famous promenade overlooking the river, then speeding down the slide. This signature Québec City winter experience ends with a warm-up snack at the kiosk next to the Château Frontenac.  
[au1884.ca/en](http://au1884.ca/en)

AD