

Québec



Québec is truly the dutiful daughter of its European motherland: a pristine green of pasture and towering forest, sprinkled with bronze church spires and picture perfect sidewalk cafés. But she is also the vivacious rebel of French chic, liberal attitude, sinfully delicious cuisine and beautiful people. Unlike their ancestors across the Atlantic, Quebecers know how to have their cake and eat it too – washed down with a steamy bowl of café au lait at a mere fraction of the cost.

Not only are prices refreshingly reasonable, but you'll find the Québécois as vibrant and inviting as the colorful Victorian facades, lush rolling hills and romantic bistros strewn across this magnificent province. And it's a *Canadian* province, so we're never too far away from nature, proudly paraded in protected parks, majestic mountain ranges and windswept rugged coastlines.

And what diversity! Montréal and Québec City are bustling metropolises with a perfect mixture of sophistication and playfulness and history-soaked preserved quarters tucked away in their back pockets. The rustic allures of old Québec are scattered among the Eastern Townships, and produce from the farmlands surrounding bucolic Charlevoix graces the tables of the region's stellar restaurants. The Laurentians abound with ski resorts and peaks, while the jagged coasts of the unblemished Gaspé Peninsula and the cliffs soaring high above the Saguenay River are equally as breathtaking. Those with a thirst for the extraordinary find the Far North an enchanting getaway.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Drink up the dynamic nightlife in happening **Montréal** (p258)
- Savor the unparalleled culture, history and charm of walled **Québec City** (p301)
- Get sprayed by whales in the Saguenay River fjord at **Tadoussac** (p326)
- Soak up the artsy vibe and sample local delicacies in **Baie St Paul** (p321)
- Hike the stunning peaks above the tree line in **Parc de la Gaspésie** (p340)
- Swoosh the slopes at action-packed ski resorts such as **Mont-Tremblant** (p291)
- Get back to nature in spectacular **Parc du Bic** (p336)
- Sea kayak amid the remote, sculpted islands of the **Mingan Archipelago National Park** (p350)



History

Québec has had a tumultuous history and, by Canadian standards, a very long and complicated one.

At the time of European exploration, the entire region was fully settled and controlled by various Aboriginal groups, all of whom are resident today, including the Mohawks along the St Lawrence River, the Cree above them, the Innu still further north and east, and the Inuit in the remote far north.

French explorer Jacques Cartier landed in what is now Québec City and Montréal in 1535. Samuel de Champlain, also of France, first heard and recorded the word '*kebec*' (an Alonquin word meaning 'where the river narrows') when he founded a settlement at Québec City some 70 years later, in 1608.

Throughout the rest of the 17th century, the French and English skirmished over control of Canada, but by 1759 the English, with a final battle victory on the Plains of Abraham at Québec City, established themselves as the winners in the Canadian colony sweepstakes. From that point onwards, French political influence in the New World waned.

When thousands of British Loyalists fled the American Revolution in the 1770s, the new colony divided into Upper (today's Ontario) and Lower (now Québec) Canada; almost all the French settled in the latter region. Power struggles between the two language groups continued through the 1800s, with Lower Canada joining the Canadian confederation as Québec in 1867.

The 20th century saw Québec change from a rural, agricultural society to an urban, industrialized one, but one that continued to be educationally and culturally based upon the Catholic Church, which wielded immense power and still does (about 90% of the population today is Roman Catholic).

The tumultuous 1960s brought the so-called 'Quiet Revolution,' during which all aspects of francophone society were scrutinized and overhauled. Intellectuals and extremists alike debated the prospect of independence from Canada, as Québécois began to assert their sense of nationhood. For more on the crisis of the '60s, see p46.

Formed in 1968, the pro-independence Parti Québécois came to power in 1976, headed by the charismatic René Lévesque. Since then, two referendums have returned 'No' votes on the question of separating from Canada. In

QUÉBEC FACTS

Nickname La Belle Province

Population 7,651,500

Area 1,540,687 sq km

Capital city Québec City (population 167,000)

Birthplace of Trivial Pursuit, AM radio, Ski-Doo snowmobile, Plexiglas

Home of Leonard Cohen, Brian Mulroney, Jacques Villeneuve, Rufus Wainwright

Kitschiest souvenir Cow-shaped maple syrup lollipops

the new century, the notion of an independent Québec is less attractive to a younger generation with more global concerns.

Local Culture

Quebecers are passionate folks; just bring up the subject of separatism if you're keen to test the theory. Life here is sipped slowly, like its strong rich coffee, which is often accompanied by a *chocolatine* (chocolate croissant) and engaging conversation with friends or family. Citizens of 'La Belle Province' understand that life is simply too short for bad wine, bland cuisine and drab fashion – denim included.

The Québécois drink more alcohol than the average Canadian, and predominantly liberal views contribute to a laid-back atmosphere that feeds an effervescent nightlife in Montréal and Québec City. On weekend evenings, city streets are often packed with pedestrians well into the early hours of the morning.

Land & Climate

Québec is quite simply stunning, from the mountainous Laurentians to the jagged, windswept coastlines of the Gaspé Peninsula. Charlevoix is flat and agricultural with checkerboard farms. The landscape of the Far North is littered with untamed forests and parkland that give way to arctic tundra at the province's northern corners.

In terms of temperature, the province is saddled with extremes. Montréal and Québec City can go from 40°C to -40°C in six months, and May could see a dump of snow. Generally, the summers are comfortably warm, although high humidity can make Montréal pretty steamy. Winters are very snowy, but usually bright, sunny and dry.