

Quebec : Historic Land of Cities and Lakes

If you are a devotee of history, culture, entertainment, grandiose scenery and good cuisine, then you might want to start planning a trip to Quebec. It is Canada's largest province – 644 000 square miles in area, about seven times the size of Britain – and it has just about everything a traveller could want. In particular, its people have a unique character, with a distinctive cultural identity that has been fashioned by a long history.

Quebec has been the gateway to Canada ever since the French explorer Jacques Cartier arrived there in 1534. It was therefore fitting that when King George VI became the first reigning British monarch to visit the country 50 years ago this May, his first port of call should be Quebec City.

A natural citadel perched 360 feet above the St Lawrence River, Quebec City is the only walled city in the Americas north of Mexico. As you walk the streets of the Upper Town and Lower Town, you are aware that history is all around you. Some

of the oldest buildings in North America can be found here: the Old Jesuit House in Sillery dating from 1637, the Quebec Seminary founded in 1663, and the church of Notre Dame des Victoires built in 1688.

The original European settlement was founded by Samuel de Champlain in 1605. Twenty years later on the death of Champlain, the Comte de Frontenac became Governor and transformed the settlement into a small city. The impressive 19th century hotel that dominates the city – the Château Frontenac – is a fitting tribute to the ambitious count.

September 13, 1759, marked a turning point for Quebec. It was the time of the Seven Years War between France and England, and Major General James Wolfe was given the task of taking the territory for the English Crown. Wolfe took his boats by night along the St Lawrence, landed at a spot now called Wolfe's Cove, led his troops up the rocky cliffs and surprised the French commander, the Marquis de Montcalm.

French and British troops fought a fierce battle on the clifftop on land belonging to a farmer named Abraham – the Plains of Abraham. In the end, the British were victorious, but Wolfe was mortally wounded, as was de Montcalm. A memorial high above the river commemorates both commanders: 'Valour gave them a common death, history a common fame, posterity a common monument'.

Quebec City was the first place in North America to be proclaimed a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

The cosmopolitan sophistication of Montreal

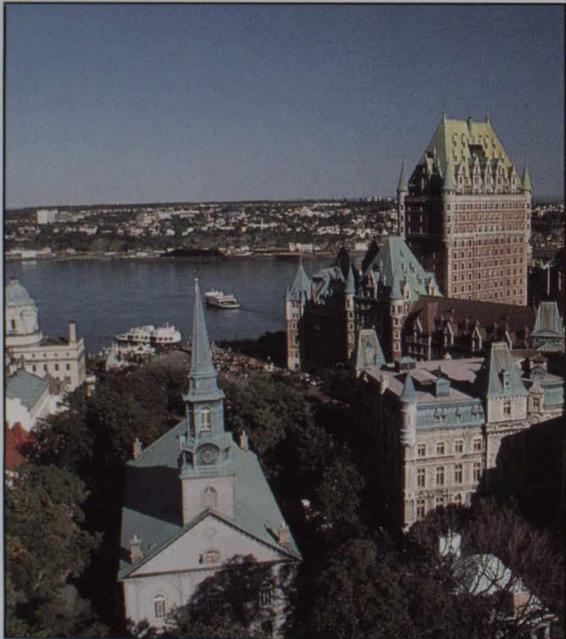
One hundred and sixty miles further up the St Lawrence lies cosmopolitan Montreal, the largest city in the province and one of the world's great inland ports.

Like Quebec City, Montreal has a long history. In 1535, Jacques Cartier discovered an Indian village on the site; in 1611, Samuel de Champlain built a trading post there, which he named Place Royale. Paul de Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve, founded the permanent community of Ville-Marie at Place Royale in 1642. Since then, Montreal has grown and prospered, and today it accounts for half the population of the province of Quebec.

The city takes its name from the hill in its centre, Mont Royal. Take a horse-drawn carriage up the road that leads to the summit and you will have a breathtaking view over the city. To the east lies Old Montreal, the waterfront and the Olympic Park; to the west are the fashionable streets and the gracious houses of Westmount. You may even spot a tall column erected in 1809 in honour of Nelson – a forerunner of the one in London's Trafalgar Square.

Old Montreal, which occupies the original site of Ville Marie, is well worth a visit. Its highlights include the Château Ramazay (1705), originally the residence of the French governors; the beautifully restored Du Calvet House (1725); and the Chapel of Notre Dame de Bonsecours (1657).

The Chapel was founded by Marguerite



Whether its the great outdoors, or the sense of history in the old quarter of Quebec City, there is something 'to suit everyone's taste.

