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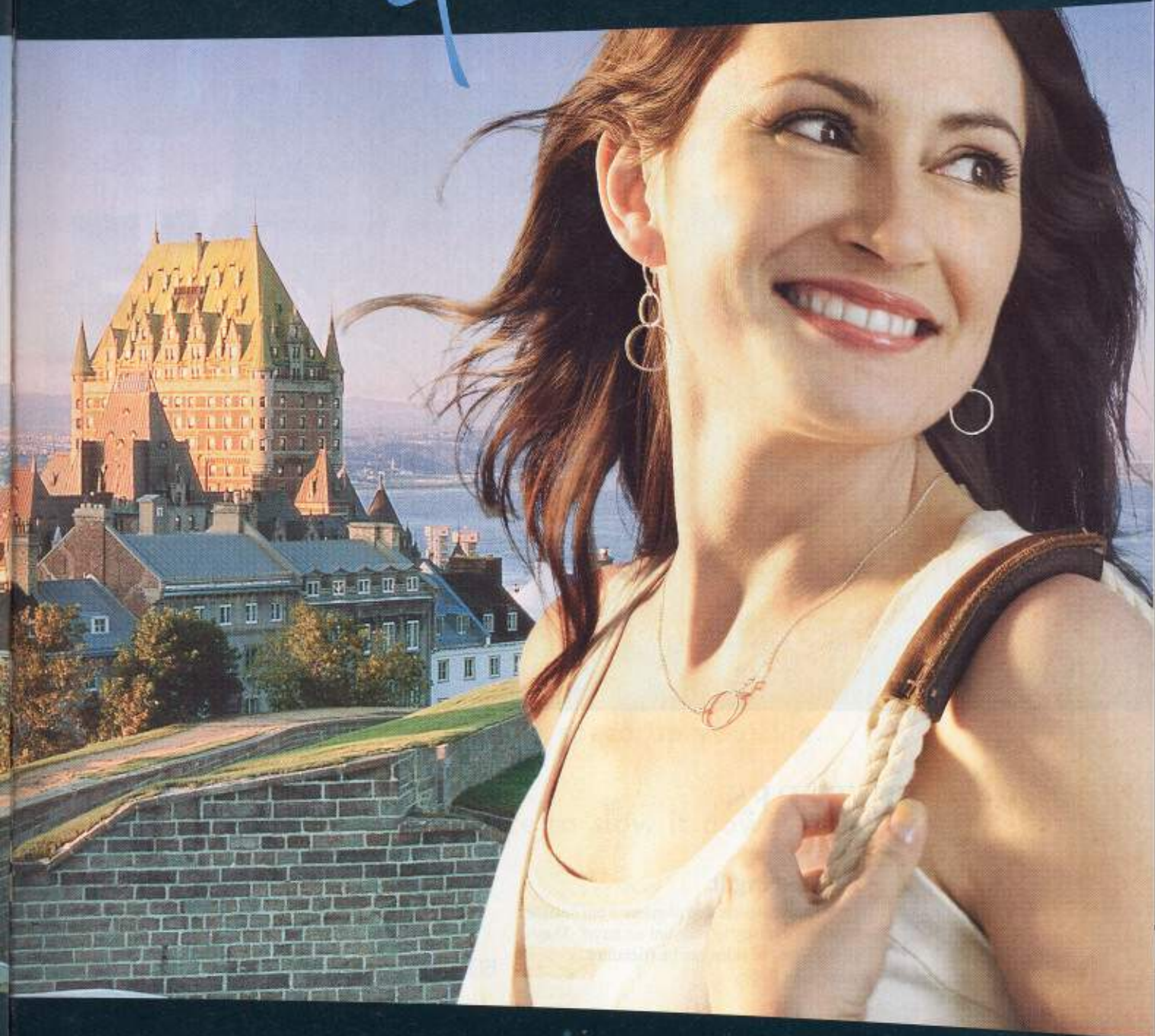
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OLD WORLD, NEW VIBE: QUEBEC CITY

This UNESCO World Heritage Site offers a step back in time for business travelers, without sacrificing today's conveniences.

BY MARK CARDWELL

The Fairmont Le Château Frontenac with
Auberge Saint-Antoine in the foreground



IF YOU
HAVE A
FREE...

HOUR

Rain or shine, sleet or snow, walk along the Dufferin Terrace next to the Chateau Frontenac and enjoy the best view Quebec City has to offer. Then walk over to ultra-narrow rue des Trésors and buy a painting or print of what you've just seen from one of the many vendors there. You can try to haggle, but don't expect much.

IF YOU
HAVE A
FREE...

DAY

Visitors come from everywhere to see the Old City, and so should you. Spend a morning wandering the narrow streets of the Upper Town to admire the many historic homes, churches and other buildings. In the afternoon, meander down to the Lower Town and shop for souvenirs along tight rue de la Petit-Champlain, which is clogged with stores. In summer, there are often street performers in the square in front of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires church, one of the oldest in North America.



on't plan on getting a lot of work done when you come to Quebec City on business. The city's stunning natural setting, bewitching Old World mystique and plethora of award-

winning restaurants, attractions and activities provide travelers with ample reason to focus more on making merry than making money.

This lively provincial capital of 700,000 only seems to get better with age. Founded nearly 400 years ago on a cliff overlooking a narrow strait on the St. Lawrence River—a picture-perfect location that earned comparisons with Gibraltar in the age of sailing, and now helps Quebec City rival Niagara Falls as a honeymoon capital—it is Canada's oldest major city and arguably its most beautiful. Safe, clean and easily accessible by car, train or plane, the city's narrow streets, colonial-era historic district and overwhelmingly French-speaking population give it a positively European feel...minus the jet lag.

Lately, money has also been added to the mix. Long dismissed as a sleepy bureaucratic backwater and an economic basket case—mostly by envious residents of its much larger provincial rival, Montreal, 155 miles to the east—Quebec City is basking in a business renaissance on

the verge of its 400th anniversary, which will be celebrated throughout 2008. Buoyed in recent years by a red-hot real estate market and booming banking, insurance and high-tech niche sectors like computer animation and biomedical research, the city currently leads the nation in most major economic and social indicators. Notably, Quebec City was picked the "best city to do business in Canada" in 2006 by *Canadian Business* magazine.

The city's best sights, restaurants and hotels, as well as most government and corporate headquarters, are located in the downtown area, which is one of the city's

[Quebec City's] narrow streets, colonial-era historic district and overwhelmingly French-speaking population give it a positively European feel...minus the jet lag.



eight boroughs (called *arrondissements*). The other boroughs, which fan out like feathers on a peacock's tail on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, are easily accessible from downtown (outside of morning and afternoon rush hours). The borough of Sainte Foy is by far the wealthiest, and a likely destination for many business travelers. Located on the western end of Quebec City and close to the airport, Sainte Foy is the region's economic, shopping and learning hub.

Despite its European look and lifestyle—which once prompted a diplomat to quip that “Quebec looks and feels more like a resort than a real town”—Quebec City is truly North American when it comes to the rhythm of daily life and business. A third of the 95 percent French-speaking population also speaks English—especially in the tourist-laden downtown area—but a few words of French and a basic understanding of Québécois culture will go a long way toward ensuring the success of a business trip.

GETTING AROUND

Cars are king in Quebec City. All the major rental companies are here, and taxis are omnipresent. (*Out*, tipping is expected: 15–20 percent, as in restaurants.) Walking is also an option in the Old City, especially when sightseeing. Public transportation is available in the form of buses only (no subway or trams)—but the service is confusing, complex and slow because of the city's urban landscape and the lack of adequate public funding. When it comes to transportation, the green revolution hasn't hit Quebec City yet.

WHAT TO DO

Business travelers, who make up about 10 percent of the 9.5 million visitors to Quebec City annually, help to keep the city's many international-caliber restaurants, über-trendy boutiques and hotels—like the Hotel Dominion 1912, one of Canada's best and a perfect location for doing business—brimming with customers.

Economic success and international accolades, however, have only added fuel to the joie de vivre that has long defined the Québécois. It began with Samuel



Champlain, the intrepid French explorer who founded a colony here in 1608 and encouraged its inhabitants to dispel the gloom of Canada's harsh winters with food and drink. In addition to the smell of croissants, fine French cuisine and the sound of bars that stay open until 3 a.m., that spirit has spawned a dizzying array of special events, festivals and outdoor activities year-round.

The most famous is the Quebec Winter Carnival, a colorful Lent-inspired party in early February that celebrates the cold in a city ringed by world-class ski hills and filled with outdoor skating rinks. But the city's summertime attractions are beginning to rival its winter ones. The Quebec City Summer Festival (July 5–15, 2007) will attract upwards of a million people to more than a dozen outdoor venues to watch bands and street performers from around the world.

And don't forget that the area boasts a dozen or so golf courses and some of Canada's best biking and walking networks, and is less than an hour's drive from the heart of the boreal forest and some of North America's finest fishing, hunting and nature reserves.

WHERE TO STAY

With 12,600 hotel rooms, Quebec City has something for everyone. The best place to stay is within the cozy confines of the Old City, which has 50 hotels ranging from city landmarks and chic boutique hotels to small, family-run businesses and B&Bs.

Kings, queens, prime ministers and U.S. presidents have stayed at the century-old Fairmont (CND\$250 and up), which was designed like a German castle. All rooms

IF YOU
HAVE A
FREE...

WEEKEND

Devote your first day to exploring the Old City. The next day, you might slip out into the surrounding countryside. In spring, summer or fall, a drive around nearby Orleans Island is a popular pastime for locals and tourists alike. In early spring, when the sap flows and maple syrup production is in full swing (Quebec produces 80 percent of the world's supply), sugar camps abound there. For around CDN\$20, you can enjoy a syrup-soaked meal of eggs, crêpes, ham and beans, plus all the French-Canadian music you'll need until the following spring. In summer and fall, the island is famous for its successive harvests of strawberries, raspberries, vegetables and apples (including several you-pick operations). A number of vendors also sell farm-made wines and ice-cider, made from the juice of apples harvested in the dead of winter.

From far left: Fireworks over the St. Lawrence River; rue Saint-Louis, Old Quebec; rue Petit-Champlain, Old Quebec

are elegantly appointed. Sadly, however, many standard ones facing interior courtyards are postage-stamp size.

Recent recipient of a corporate retreat award from Relais & Châteaux, Auberge Saint-Antoine (CND\$250 and up), is an elegant boutique hotel built on the site of an old maritime warehouse. It features stone walls, glassed-in artifacts dating to the 1600s, and antiques in guestrooms, many of which offer river views, terraces and hot tubs.

Hotel Dominion 1912 (CND\$175–250 and up) earns rave reviews for its modern facilities, excellent staff and elegant extra touches, like glow-in-the-dark sinks and fruit bowls in each room. Other

popular digs in the area for meetings and conventions include the Hilton Quebec, Delta Quebec, Loews Le Concorde, Hotel Manoir Victoria and Hotel Palace Royal.

Sainte Foy is another likely neighborhood for business travelers. Close to the airport, major highways and the city's biggest retail, commercial and manufacturing businesses, it's a busy, functional place. In Sainte Foy, look for a room at Chateau Bonne Entente (CND\$100 and up). This English-style country inn offers a first-class spa and a pond filled with waterfowl in summer. The staff pampers guests with afternoon tea and fresh cookies in the wood-paneled tearoom, and duvets, clawfoot bathtubs and fireplaces in its rooms.



Panache at the Auberge Saint-Antoine



E ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

If Quebec City has an Achilles heel, Jean-Lesage International Airport is it. The small facility is not badly built—in fact, it is currently undergoing a multimillion-dollar facelift aimed at modernizing the single terminal building to expand capacity, improve services and attract new carriers. But therein lies the

rub: You can't get to most major destinations by air directly from here; you have to pass through Montreal or Toronto first. Ten carriers offer some 300 flights from here each week, but apart from 25 nonstop daily flights to major cities in Eastern Canada and the U.S., Quebec City's so-called international airport is primarily a gateway to

remote Quebec communities like Baie-Comeau and Sept-Îles. This aside, the airport offers all the modern amenities, including free Wi-Fi access in every section of the terminal. When taking a taxi from the airport to downtown, you'll pay a flat rate of CND\$30 or CND\$15 to the area surrounding the airport.

QUEBEC CITY HOTELS

Auberge Saint-Antoine
10 rue St-Antoine
Lower Town
Quebec City
G1K 4C9
888-692-2211 or
418-692-1177
saint-antoine.com

Chateau Bonne Entente
3400 Chemin
Sainte-Foy
Quebec City
G1X 1S6
800-463-4390 or
418-653-5221

Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac
1 rue des Carrières
Upper Town
Quebec City
G1R 4P5
800-441-1414 or
418-692-3861
fairmont.com

Hôtel Dominion 1912
126 rue St-Pierre
Lower Town
Quebec City
G1K 4A8
888-833-5253 or
418-692-2224
hotelboutique.com

QUEBEC CITY RESTAURANTS

L'Initiale
54 rue St-Pierre
Lower Town
Quebec City
G1X 4T6
418-694-1818

Laurie Raphael
117 rue Dalhousie
Lower Town
Quebec City
G1X 2R9
418-692-4555

Le Saint-Amour
48 Ste-Ursule
Upper Town
Quebec City
418-694-0667

WHERE TO DINE

Good restaurants abound in Quebec City, but you'll find the best (and most prestigious) downtown, particularly in the Old City. In addition to French and Québécois cuisine, try the mouthwatering cow, goat and sheep's milk cheeses produced locally.

Le Saint-Amour, as its name suggests, is one of Quebec City's most romantic restaurants. It features an atrium and an award-winning owner/chef who serves dishes like caribou steaks grilled with wild berries and peppercorn sauce, or filet mignon cooked with port wine and local bleu cheese. The wine list includes more than 800 bottles. At this mainstay for Quebec's business and political elite, reservations are a must.

Laurie Raphael is the city's top spot, bar none. Known for its eclectic cuisine—think classic French dishes combined with just about everything under the sun—it's a culinary crossroads, thanks to renowned head chef Daniel Vézina, who is widely known across the province for his TV cooking show. Try the seven-course *dégustation*, which is enhanced by a different wine with every course.

Offering modern but intimate dining and a menu that changes with the seasons, chef Yvan Lebrun's L'Initiale is considered a world-class establishment. Just down the street from Laurie Raphael, with a quieter setting, this creative eatery offers exquisite meals like scallops of lamb, many of which are cooked over a spit, adding to the flavor. **E**

Recommend your favorite place to stay in Quebec City at ExecutiveTravelMagazine.com.

MARK CARDWELL, a freelance writer based in Quebec City, says he gained five pounds doing the research for this story.