



MY CITY*

QUÉBEC CITY

AT ITS BEST ON A CRISP WINTER MORNING, MÉLANIE JEAN SHARES
THE FRENCH CULTURE AND WILD SPACES OF HER NATIVE CITY



**There's no better way to get to the heart of a city than through the people who live there. Every month we ask someone, clearly in love with their city, to take us on a personal tour and tell us what makes it so special. You may feel inspired to visit one day, but for now just sit back, relax and enjoy some armchair travel.*

How long have you lived in the city?

I'm Québec City born and bred and it's been my home for almost 40 years.

Tell us what makes your city unique

Québec City is the most European city in North America, steeped in French culture and history. As the oldest fortified town north of Mexico, the historic architecture of Old Québec is a big part of its charm and makes it a UNESCO World Heritage site. Previously occupied by indigenous peoples, in the mid-16th century, the French explorer Jacques Cartier claimed it on behalf of the French king, and Samuel de Champlain established a fort at Cape Diamond on the St Lawrence River, which eventually became Québec City – a trading post for the lucrative fur and logging trades. It's thanks to this rich history that we still have such a strong French identity and unique architecture. The Place Royale has cobblestone streets and buildings dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries, and it looks particularly charming in the snow. Perhaps the most famous building, though, is the Fairmont Le Château Frontenac, which rises imposingly from a clifftop – the Dufferin Terrace runs next to the hotel and offers amazing views. The proximity of nature also makes this city unique. It's easy to get to hiking trails that'll take you to cliffs overlooking the St Lawrence River, through glacial valleys, and into the heart of the forest.

What does it feel like in January?

The extreme cold can sometimes feel harsh, but it offers the opportunity to enjoy winter sports. Old Québec City turns into a picture-postcard scene, especially with the lights and decorations lingering after the festive season.

What time of day do you most enjoy and why?

I prefer to get up early as I love to see the magnificent sunrises over the St Lawrence River or Lake Saint-Charles. Even though it can be very cold at dawn, the early morning is always the most beautiful time of day.

What's the nature like?

Québec City has lots of trees and green spaces, and the quality of life here is excellent. Our urban parks – the »



① The spectacular Fairmont Le Château Frontenac. ② Winters are 'snow' joke in Québec City with chilly climes leading to a guaranteed blanket of the white stuff. ③ Head to Place D'Youville for a spot of ice skating. ④ Wrap up warm to explore in the winter months. ⑤ The unique charms of Old Québec. ⑥ We may not speak French like the Québécois but we know we like the sound of this shop

* Sound like a local: Québec and Québécois are pronounced 'Kébec' and 'Kébécois'.



“Québec City has all the attractions and advantages of a big city, but somehow doesn’t feel like one”



historic Plains of Abraham, a former battleground, and Domaine de Maizerets state park, a historic estate – are often compared to New York’s Central Park because they’re so large and leafy. Both parks have walking and cycling trails, gardens and ponds, and at this time of year they’re a base for winter sports, while in summer they host outdoor events. As you head north of the city, the terrain becomes more mountainous and it offers magnificent views, especially from the Jacques-Cartier National Park or the Marais du Nord.

Where’s your favourite outdoor space?

I love the Marais du Nord, which I can reach in just 20 minutes from the city centre. This beautiful park is home to so much wildlife, it’s possible to see nearly 200 species of bird here, and it’s a great place to spot animals, such as beaver or deer. It has beautiful hiking trails and you can take canoes out on the marshes, too.

Tell us about the colours of your city

Québec City is surprisingly sunny all year around, even in winter. However, in January the sun rises late (about 7.30am) and sets early (4pm), so we learn to appreciate the short days. This month often sees a couple of snowstorms, bringing fresh snow for the winter sports enthusiasts. That, coupled with the blue skies and the colourful architecture, help to get us through winter.

Tell us about the people who live in your city.

The Québécois are very friendly and sociable people, who love to go to restaurants and to meet up with friends; it’s such a welcoming and warm place to live. It has all the attractions and advantages of a big city, but somehow doesn’t feel like one.

Where do you like to gather with friends?

We’re spoilt for choice if we want to eat out. Saint-Jean Street is one of the oldest streets in the city and is a fun place to go at night, offering a lively mix of shops, bars and restaurants. If you want to try something more traditional, in Old Québec City you’ll find several restaurants with typical cuisine of the Québec region, from fine dining to the famous poutine that originated here – a unique dish of French fries topped with fresh cheese curds and gravy.

What’s the shopping like?

The locals love to shop! The Les Galeries de la Capitale shopping mall is well known across Canada, as it also has a huge amusement park. For something quirkier, head for the prettiest street in the city, Petit-Champlain, in the Old Québec area, where you



can find unique little shops, where there are always great finds often from local designers and artisans.

Where do you like to escape to?

The Jacques-Cartier National Park, a glacial valley that offers breathtaking landscapes just 30 minutes from the city centre. It has hiking trails, a boating lake and places to walk, canoe or go fishing. In winter you can go snowshoeing or Nordic skiing.

What's your favourite way to get about the city?

We mostly drive because the city is quite spread out and also because it gets so cold. A large bus network also serves the city and its suburbs, but you do have to drive to access the natural landscapes beyond the city. In winter, it's easy to get around on foot because the authorities are so efficient at keeping the streets ploughed. We have almost 30 sets of stairs connecting the Upper and Lower Towns, including the city's oldest stairway built in 1635, which links Côte de la Montagne with Rue du Petit-Champlain. They're known as the 'Breakneck Steps' because they're so steep, but even these are kept well cleared when it snows.

What has been your best discovery about your city?

Stepping into the Morrin Centre Library is like taking a journey through time. This beautiful building is so full of history; it was once a prison and later became a university. Today it's the only English language library, with many rare old books in its collection.

What would surprise a newcomer to your city?

Winter in Québec City is an experience in itself. We get a lot of snow and it's not unusual to hit -35C during a particularly cold snap. If you've never experienced those temperatures it can be a shock to the system!

What one thing would you change about the city?

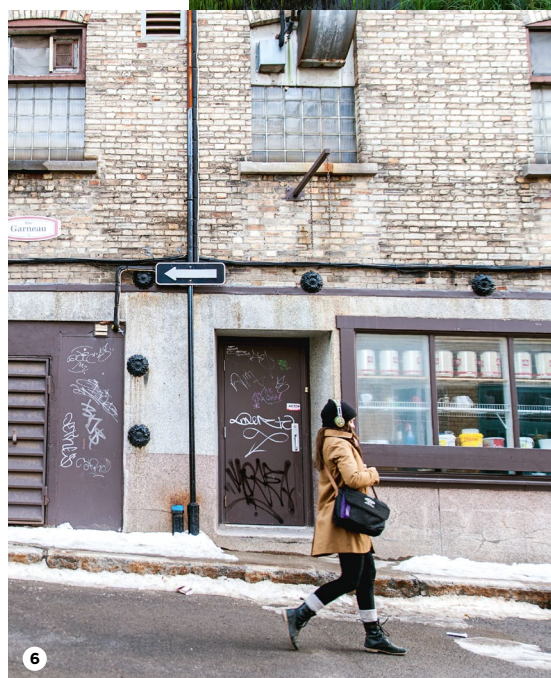
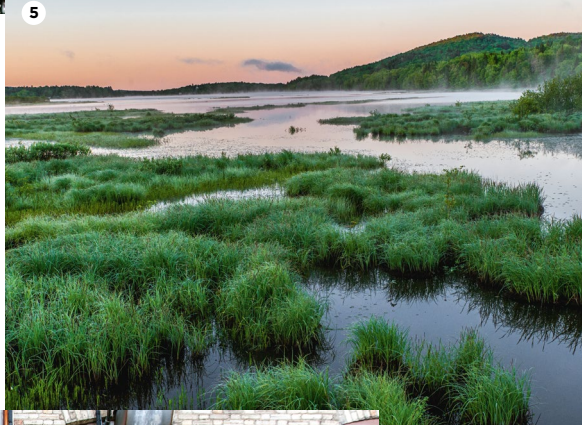
The only thing I'd change is the length of the winter. Although beautiful, it can feel very long (four or five months). I'm ready for spring after two months.

Where would you recommend somebody to stay if they were visiting your city?

The neighbourhood near the Old Port is full of charm and it's a little quieter than the Upper Town area. Its proximity to the historic Petit-Champlain district and Place Royale with its beautiful Notre-Dame-des-Victoires Church – one of the oldest in North America – is also a selling point.

What keeps you in your city and where would you like to live if you could not live here?

The tranquillity and its proximity to nature are my favourite things. If I couldn't live here, I'd like to live in Oxford. I fell in love with it on a visit to England in 2018, and found it quite similar to Québec in many ways. »



- ❶ The Breakneck Steps – hopefully it's only a sweat you'll break climbing all those stairs!
- ❷ Chips, cheese and gravy – yum! We'll be 'poutine' our order in for this local dish.
- ❸ The pretty colours of the city stand out against the wintry background.
- ❹ A flurry of fresh snow makes Old Québec look pretty as a postcard.
- ❺ The Marais du Nord National Park at sunrise.
- ❻ Despite the freezing weather, the streets are kept walker-friendly



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MÉLANIE JEAN is a geographer and professional photographer, specialising in travel and nature. See her work at melaniejean.photos or on Insta: @melanie_jean_photos and @ilovequebeccity.



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1 Stock up on fresh produce at the local markets. 2 For the best views in town, head to Terrasse Pierre-Dugua-de-Mons. 3 Chez Boulay offers a delicious combination of local ingredients and French culinary skills. 4 We have it on good authority that La Folle Tablee's brownies are worth the visit alone

MELANIE'S PERSONAL TOUR

Favourite café

LA FOLLE TABLEE

A gourmet café-crêmerie that's unique in Québec City, where you can find the best brownies. They also have a food truck that goes around town. @lafolletablee (Instagram)

Favourite museums

MUSÉE NATIONAL DES BEAUX-ARTS DU QUÉBEC

The exhibitions and the architecture are wonderful. mnbaq.org

MUSÉE DE LA CIVILISATION

An interactive museum that the whole family can enjoy. mcq.org

Favourite café or bar

MACFLY BAR ARCADE

You can play on arcade

machines from the 70s and 80s at this retro bar. macflybararcade.com

Favourite restaurant

CHEZ BOULAY

A popular place to enjoy typical French-Canadian cuisine, it combines local northern territory ingredients with French culinary skills. chezboulay.com

Favourite market

LE GRAND MARCHÉ DE QUÉBEC

The best place to buy local fresh food. legrandmarchedequebec.com

Favourite hotel

HÔTEL NOMAD

Each of the rooms is beautifully decorated according to a theme.

It also offers the best view of Fairmont le Château Frontenac. hotelnomad.ca

Favourite way to spend an hour

DOMAINE DE MAIZERETS

This park is the ideal escape. domainemaizerets.com

Best view

TERRASSE PIERRE-DUGUA-DE-MONS

This terrace offers spectacular views of Old Québec City and the St Lawrence River.

The one must see

THE PETIT-CHAMPLAIN AREA

Québec's oldest neighbourhood, it offers magnificent views, unique restaurants, ancestral homes and much more. quartierpetitchamplain.com **S**