



photography: Stephen Smith

Quebec City

The charm of this UNESCO World Heritage Site is world-renowned. For years, highbrowed diplomats, movie stars and millionaire tycoons arrived to its historic hilltop for a birds' eye view of the mighty Saint Lawrence River. Queen Elizabeth II graced the palatial Chateau Frontenac in 1959 with her husband, Prince Philip. Ten years later, Princess Grace of Monaco opened the Queen's Ball when she waltzed with the Winter Carnival president in the lavish ballroom.

But these days, North America's oldest walled city is making big headways among the ultra chic crowd. A handful of boutique hotels are popping up in the most picturesque places, making it a perfect spot for canoodling couples to cuddle and purr "L'Amour."

Beyond The Walls

After a quick 1.5-hour flight from Toronto to Quebec City's Jean Lesage International Airport, my paramour and I headed to the other chateau "l'autre chateau" as the locals describe this gem five minutes

outside the old city. I wanted a place with a spa. He wished to sample amazing cuisine.

The Chateau Bonne Entente has been getting rave reviews so on we went to this four-diamond, five-star 140-roomed property. The ultra luxurious chateau was recently inducted into the luxury status of Leading Hotels of the World.

Not bad kudos for a property that was originally a private residence for a colonel constructed after WWII. Vestiges of the small white house still remain if you walk up the original wooden balustrade stairwell that emerges into the chateau's "Cocooning Section" where angular ceilings remain in eight of the original rooms.

Since then, over \$15-million of renovations have added additional wings, outdoor heated jacuzzi, spa, elegant bar and restaurant and more rooms. The bedroom suites sport bathrooms with polished granite counters, recessed lighting and wide sandy colored tiles while the fluffy goose down king-sized bed accentuates a casual elegance.

Lara Croft vixen, Angelina Jolie stayed in the luxurious Spa Sensual Suite when she was filming "Taking Lives" two years ago. Publicist Pascale Banville says the actress loved the place so much after the staff baby proofed all the corners around her sleek dark mahogany furniture for son Maddox. An overflow bath with illumination therapy lights and white bowl basin triggered the serenity now reflex.

For my "Serenity Now" experience, I was off to the chateau's AmeriSpa for a full aromatherapy treatment. Masseur extraordinaire Marina welcomed me with three bottles of aromatic potions. I chose a muscle relaxant with the soothing fragrance of eucalyptus and mint oils. That night, my beau managed to get his wish as we entered Executive Chef Alain Laflamme's domain, the stylish Monte Cristo Resto Lounge known for its Mediterranean-style cuisine. Our five-course dinner

included a pan-seared foie gras prepared to creamy perfection over toasted crostini sprinkled with sautéed green grapes that was paired with a glass of sweet golden Moulin Touchais from the Val de Loire Region in France. We finished with a sumptuous Peking duck on a bed of soba noodles toasted with a glass of ruby red Chianti from Italy.

A 30-minute drive from Quebec City takes you to the bucolic country setting of maple trees, farmer's fields and pure wilderness. Over at Auberge Duchesnay, the newest lodge in the Sepaq park system, there's plenty to do for couples and families. Recently renovated, the former forestry school campus has been converted into a posh 48-room lodge that meshes natural rustic elements with state-of-the-art amenities, all hallmarks from Le Germain fame designer Viateur Michaud who waved his magic wand to create a warm balance with nature.

Undoubtedly the focal point of the deluxe auberge is its towering two storey stone fireplace with large hearths on each floor. The blazing fireplace radiates warmth and casts a cozy feel for all who enter her premise.

Overlooking picturesque Lac St. Joseph and the rolling Laurentian Mountains, the Duchesnay captures stunning views from all the rooms that face onto the rugged scenery. Sporting our white terry robes, Stephen and I lounged by the full window for a romantic view of the sunset as it was casting pink shadows over the hilltops ahead.

Next, it was dinner at the Bistro Bar Le Quatre Temps where Executive Chef Sebastien Rivard uses local produce to create a fusion of innovative courses. I sampled a delectable crostini with creamy goat's cheese and tomato, a "Tartelette Tiede Au Fromage Tourilli Et Tomates Confites" followed by coils of cannelloni stuffed with local venison covered in a creamy wild mushroom sauce.

In summer and fall, the 89-km² property comes to life where harried urbanites breathe in the fresh country air. Guests can wander the trails, canoe or tour the premise with a naturalist who delivers insightful narratives of the area. You can even view black bears at the new viewing platform. For fall, the rustic colors transform the Laurentians into a magnificent panacea of ochre, sienna and bright burgundy. A photographer's dream not to be missed.

The "New" Old Quebec

You might have seen the familiar streets of Quebec City in films "Catch Me If You Can" and "Taking Lives" which were filmed in La Belle Ville recently. With its steep streets, New France architecture, gabled candy colored rooftops, and bronze statues in the town squares, Old Quebec emits an old world charm punctuated with a joie de vivre of French whimsical playfulness. Peak into these ancient buildings and discover new boutiques, hip bijoux shops, funky ateliers and chic restaurants.

Some boutique hotels are also the latest kids on the block like the Dominion 1912, one of the earliest to enter the foray which first opened in 1997. It is conveniently located in the heart of Old Quebec surrounded near antique shops, galleries, restaurants and the old port.

In the former digs of the Dominion Fish and Fruit Co., the city's first skyscraper, the Dominion 1912 as it's now known possesses a minimalist opulence that epitomizes luxury without the bells and whistles of excess. The hotel plays up the building's industrial past with a nod to the Edwardian exterior as Quebec designer Viateur Michaud (who recently completed the Duchesnay) brings urban sophistication by his use of Canadian made elements.



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The lobby is open and airy with dark woods, linen fabrics drape the windows and columns and the log fireplace entices weary guests to relax in one of the super plush white-slipcovered sofas, the kind you can sink in for hours.

In the suites, there is a mesh of cool greens with golden wheat shades. The hotel's signature goose down duvet covers the king-sized bed (all rooms have one) with crisp 200 thread count Egyptian cotton sheets. It's the perfect tonic after a day of climbing countless stairwells and roaming the cobblestone streets.

In the evening, we ambled up Rue de la Montagne and strolled the famous boardwalk as the St. Lawrence River shimmered against the night sky. Behind us was the regal Grande Dame, the immense Chateau Frontenac, as magnificent as ever.

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