

Travel & Outdoors

WISH YOU WERE HERE



Cities of the St Lawrence

One's hip and artsy, the other's steeped in history; here's why Montreal and Quebec City make the perfect break, writes **Laura Millar**

I've barely left Montreal airport when I'm confronted by a series of its tourism posters featuring people performing a range of hair-raising looking feats, from balancing on poles to abseiling down buildings. The strapline is 'Never Grow Up', and, as I discover over the next couple of days, it couldn't be more apt for this city – the biggest in the French-speaking province of Quebec – which just loves to have fun.

This is immediately apparent as I head to the Quartier des Spectacles, or the 'Entertainment District', in downtown Montreal. There's a vast square, the Place des Festivals, where concerts and other outdoor events are regularly held, and beyond it is a host of theatres, ticket offices, restaurants and bars, all swarming with excited people. I've come in mid-July, when the city is gearing up for a couple of the many festivals it runs year-round. Billboards and theatre-fronts are proclaiming big names on the comedy scene, ready for Just for Laughs, Canada's biggest comedy fest, while a little further up towards the

Rue St Denis, acrobatic performers are enticing the crowds as part of the annual Circus Festival (Cirque de Soleil has its headquarters here).

"I think we actually lose count of how many festivals Montreal has every year," laughs local guide, Martine Wenn, who's showing me around. "All we really know is that it's between 100 and 120." That's a lot, in anyone's book, and this includes festivals of everything from ballet, to sport, and even food trucks, for this is also a city that loves to eat. You can get almost anything from one of these polished, shiny vehicles, parked at various locations around town: from 'beaver tails' – fried dough with a range of sweet or savoury toppings – to Canadian staple, poutine, otherwise known as chips and gravy, with added cheese curds. And boy, does Montreal love to drink beer, too – there are dozens of microbreweries

There are dozens of microbreweries and craft beer bars throughout Montreal



Montreal at night, main; Quebec City, above

and craft beer bars throughout the city, some of them releasing that distinctive smell of yeast and hops as we walk past.

Martine wants to show me a couple of the city's newest attractions, both of which were established last year, in honour of two significant birthdays: Montreal's 375th – it was officially founded in 1642 by two French missionaries, Paul de Maisonneuve and Jeanna Mance, as part of a project to create a colony dedicated to the Virgin Mary – and Canada's 150th, commemorating 1867, when Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia united to create the Canadian Confederation.

We stroll down Rue St Denis to the Old Port – Montreal is, essentially,

an island, sitting on the St Lawrence River, and to this day is still important for shipping and trading. Looming high behind us is the impressive dome of the chapel Notre Dame de Bon Secours, or 'Our Lady of the Harbour', the statue of the Virgin on top immortalised in a line of the song *Suzanne* by one of the city's most famous sons, Leonard Cohen. Just across from it is a 60m high observation wheel, which opened in September 2017, and we board it as night falls. The views across the city are spectacular – I can see the giant, illuminated cross situated on the top of Mount Royal hill (a replica of the one erected here by Maisonneuve in 1643); the lit-up windows of the art deco Aldred Building, which looks like a miniature Empire State; and the Gothic exterior of the Basilica of Notre Dame. Then Martine tells me to keep an eye on the steel, cantilevered Jacques Cartier bridge to the west: every hour between 9pm and midnight, it lights up to different patterns, which are dictated by social media users by using a hashtag on Twitter. This art installation was also inaugurated last year, and it produces quite the show, using a range of colours which dazzle off the water below.

I'm impressed with how Montreal uses technology; afterwards, strolling back to my hotel via the atmospheric cobbled streets of the old town, I spot various video projections on the walls of some of the buildings, which Martine explains is part of 'Cite Memoire', another installation which is a way of telling the story of the city, with short films re-enacting key moments throughout history. And the next day, I discover the Phi Centre, downtown, an arts space which, for the past three years, has held exhibitions using virtual reality. After a few fascinating and mind-boggling displays, some of which instill more than a slight feeling of motion-sickness, it's time to leave the city of the future, and visit a city of the past.

Three hours' drive east takes me to Quebec City, a small, well-preserved town with a population of just over 520,000 – compared to Montreal's sprawl of nearly two million. Constructed, essentially, on a cliff, which tumbles down to the St Lawrence, QC is composed of an upper and lower town, and was the origin of Quebec province. Formerly a trading post for the French and Americans, particularly in fur, it was established as a permanent settlement for the French in 1608 by navigator Samuel de Champlain, who became known as the 'Father of New France', as the colony was originally called.

A fine statue in his honour stands proudly by the wide boardwalk overlooking the river in the Upper Town, while behind it rises the fairytale-like, Disney-esque façade of the incredible Chateau Frontenac – not, as the name might suggest, a former home to royalty or aristocracy, but a hotel. No ordinary hotel, however, it was originally built in 1893 by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, with its architect inspired by castles in France and Scotland. It has played an important role in history, as Winston Churchill, Franklin D Roosevelt and Canadian prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King met here at the Quebec Conferences of 1943 and 1944 to discuss strategy for the Second World War. Today it's run by the Fairmont chain, and has hosted many

other starry guests, from Leonardo DiCaprio to Stephen Spielberg, Paul McCartney and the Queen; to get a taste of that A-list feeling, I take a seat by the window at the bar and order a cocktail, which comes with the perfect view.

The delight of a city this small is that it's very easy to walk around, and the following day I pass a happy few hours getting lost in the narrow streets of Vieux Quebec. Starting in the Lower Town, I head for the Place Royale, which has a bronze bust of Louis XIV in the middle. This was erected in 1686, and, because it would have faced the sea – the shoreline has since extended, created by landfill – it was a sign to French sailors to let them know they'd arrived safely in New France. Strolling along nearby Rue Sous le Fort I reach the lively Rue du Petit Champlain, lined with shops, bars, cafes and restaurants; some of the buildings still have original-style painted tin roofs, which replaced the white shingle ones everyone used to have, giving QC its former nickname, the White City.

I end my walk at the Plains of Abraham, a beautiful stretch of parkland where people are playing sports, walking their dogs, or just sitting in the sunshine. Its official name, however, is Battlefields Park, because it was here, in September 1759, that the British fought the French in a bid to take over their Canadian territories. Legend has it that the skirmish lasted less than 30 minutes, as the British had the advantage of surprise; they then ruled until 1867.

Both QC and Montreal give a great snapshot of Quebec's past, present, and even its future; and most importantly of all, they're great fun. ■

Wow Air (wowair.co.uk, 0118 321 8384) flies to Montreal from Edinburgh via Reykjavik three times a week, starting from £169.99 one way. Rooms at the Hotel Monville, Montreal, start from around £150 per night, hotellmonville.com. Rooms at the Delta Hotel by Marriott, Quebec City, start from around £187, Marriott.co.uk. For more information on Quebec, quebecoriginal.com/en-gb. For more on Montreal, mtl.org/en.



The streets of Quebec City's Old Town

SHORT HAUL



Photographs: Gilly Pickup

Manx for the memories

Visit the Isle of Man for its mix of history, scenery, museums – and wallabies, writes Gilly Pickup

Part of the British Isles and a British Crown Dependency, but not part of the UK or the EU. Our Queen is head of state, yet the island self-governs through the Tynwald, the world's longest running parliament, which is more than 1,000 years old. Welcome to the Isle of Man, a stargazing destination with its own language still taught at Bunscoill Ghaelgagh, the world's only Manx Gaelic primary school. It has its own currency too, though sterling is accepted everywhere. What's more, the islanders are proud as punch to have been awarded UNESCO status as a world biosphere region – the first entire island nation to gain this accolade.

I hadn't reckoned on the wallabies though – after all, this is an island in the middle of the Irish Sea, not Australia. I was on a guided wildlife walk in the Ballaugh Curragh – the latter is a Gaelic word meaning marshland or wetland – the region encompasses the remnants of an ancient lake which formed centuries ago in the lowlands between the Bride hills and the Manx upland. It's a marvellous place to see butterflies of all descriptions and birds including hen harriers and peregrine falcons. An abundance of wild flowers also

grow there. I didn't believe the guide at first when he said there are around 120 wallabies living here too – until I saw a couple for myself that is. These herbivores thrive because there are no predators and a lot of habitat. The reason they are on the island is because a couple of them managed to escape some years ago from a wildlife park in the island's north.

My base was the grand Victorian Regency Hotel in Douglas, the island's capital, a captivating town with grand terraces, wide, sweeping beach, palm trees and a laid back atmosphere. One of the Isle of Man's charms is its time-warped feel – I embraced that and enjoyed a ride on the Snaefell electric mountain railway which has pootled up and down the island's highest peak since 1896. At the top on a clear day you can see Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales and get an idea of the island's varied scenery. Probably the most glorious parts of this are found in the 17 officially designated National Glens.

They do like their railways here and the narrow-gauge steam railway is said to have inspired *Thomas the Tank Engine*. Then there's the Douglas Bay horse tram which travels the length of the prom from May to September. The horses, known as 'trammers,' have an average working life of 15

years. Horse lovers like me need have no concerns about the welfare of the Shires and Clydesdales as I was told their working day comprises two return trips along the prom during the summer season with the rest of the year off. On retirement they move to the Home of Rest for Old Horses on the outskirts of Douglas. I went to visit the Home too, which also has a gift shop, café and small museum. The horses have a sweet temperament and many visitors buy them bags of horse food from the gift shop – you get a large bucket full for £1 and a small one for 30p.

On the west coast of the island is

At the top of Snaefell on a clear day you can see Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales

Peel, one of Britain's oldest cathedral cities and home to an ambitious heritage attraction, the House of Manannan, named in honour of an ancient sea god. This interactive museum has reconstructions of sailmakers and cooper's shops while characters tell stories from the island's past. Peel has a great maritime tradition and is known for its oak-smoked Manx kippers. Close to the kipper factory is the Manx Transport Museum, smallest of the

Clockwise from main: Douglas seafront; boats moored up; Snaefell Mountain Railway

island's museums which is brimming with unusual exhibits including the P50 car from 1962. This is the world's smallest road-legal car ever made.

Peel Castle, right by the harbour on St Patrick's isle, was originally built by Norsemen in the Viking age. Inside the walls, I climbed to the gatehouse tower from where you can take in fabulous views right across the bay. Now in ruins, the castle has housed some celebrated prisoners including Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester, who was accused of treason and sorcery against King Henry VI. Now they say her ghost haunts the cathedral crypt.

This pretty island with hospitable locals, undemanding pace of life, interesting visitor attractions and heritage transport is a unique, close-to-home destination. I look forward to coming back to the Isle of Man again to soak up the soothing balm of island life. ■

There are daily flights from a number of UK regional airports as well as ferry services from England and Ireland. www.steam-packet.com. Airport car hire: <https://aspcarhire.com>. Wildlife walks and crafts: www.willowmann.im. For more information see www.visitisleofman.com.

48 HOURS IN

Konstanz, Germany

Friday, midday
Check into the calmly luxurious RIVA Hotel (doubles from £275, www.hotel-riva.de). This oasis on the banks of Lake Constance is awash with chic design and light, airy public spaces.

1pm
Enjoy lunch on the terrace at this five star hotel soaking up the views of Germany's largest lake, which is also shared by Austria and Switzerland, with Liechtenstein just back from its shores too.

2pm
Delve into the Niederburg district, the historic quarter of this university city. There are wee shops and inns dotted amongst the medieval townhouses.

3pm
You cannot miss the vaulting spire of Konstanz Cathedral. This sweeping structure incorporates Romanesque, Baroque and Renaissance into its rich architectural cocktail.

7pm
Enjoy traditional German fare, such as sausages and the local goulash, in characterful Landgasthof Kreuz (www.landgasthofkreuz.com).

Saturday, 9am
Take one of the RIVA Hotel's bikes and ease around the lake. You can gaze across the waters shimmering off into the distance to where the rugged crumple of the Alps takes over.

Midday
Drive or cycle on to the green oasis of Mainau Island. If you dine at Restaurant Schwedenschenke (www.mainau.de) you can park right at the



heart of the island – their schnitzel is a standout.

1:30pm
Lose the rest of the day exploring the magical 45-hectare island oasis of Mainau. Highlights include its castle, one of Germany's largest butterfly houses, the rose garden and the views out over Lake Constance.

7pm
Settle in for one of Germany's finest culinary experiences at the incomparable Michelin two star Ophelia at the RIVA Hotel. Head chef Dirk Hoberg works creative wonders with Lake Constance fish and ultra local fruit and vegetables.

Sunday, 9am
Take it easy with a massage at the hotel, enjoy a dip in their rooftop swimming pool or enjoy a last stroll along the shores of Lake Constance. ■
Robin McKelvie

Swiss (www.swiss.com) fly to nearby Zurich from Edinburgh from £156 return. A car is the best way to get around – Holiday Autos can arrange, www.holidayautos.com; www.lake-constance.com

BARGAIN BREAKS

Rhodes to sunshine

Prices start from £357pp, based on two sharing, for a seven night holiday in Rhodes with Travel Republic. This includes B&B accommodation at the four star Sunshine Rhodes Hotel and return flights from Glasgow departing on 28 September. Call 020 8974 7200 or see www.travelrepublic.co.uk

B&B Stay and Cruise package for £750, or the dinner (on your private terrace or in the restaurant), bed and breakfast Stay and Cruise package for £850. Both include a 90 minute cruise on the lake. Two night minimum stay at weekends. Call 015394 47111 or see www.storrshall.com

Boathouse in The Lakes

Four-star Storrs Hall, on the shores of Lake Windermere, has launched an Autumn Boathouse experience. Guests will stay at their boathouse, which features a steam room and outdoor Jacuzzi. Choose from the

Beautiful Barcelona
Visit Barcelona with Jet2CityBreaks, staying for three nights at the Aranea hotel. The offer includes flights from Glasgow on the 4 October, all for £319pp, based on two sharing. Guests will stay at their boathouse, which features a steam room and outdoor Jacuzzi. Choose from the