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Travel Postcard: 48 hours in Quebec City

Thu Aug 21, 2008 11:08pm IST

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By Mickey Goodman

QUEBEC CITY (Reuters Life!) - Known as the cradle of French civilization in North America, Quebec City has the ambience of Europe without the Euro.

This year the city celebrates its 400th anniversary with parades, light shows, fairs on its narrow, cobblestone streets and concerts by stars such as Paul McCartney and Celine Dion.

The festivities run through Oct. 19. But the city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, boasts friendly, bilingual residents and historic buildings all year round.

Here's how to spend 48 hours in Quebec City.

3:30 p.m. - Reserve a horse-drawn carriage through Caleches Royales du Vieux-Quebec. The driver will pick you up at your hotel to trip through the old city, pointing out places of interest in French or English.

5:00 p.m. - Ask the driver to drop you at Au Petit Coin Breton on rue St-Jean for cafe au lait in a two-handed bowl.

6:00 p.m. - Stroll to Largo on rue St-Joseph in the St. Roch district for cocktails and dinner of bouillabaisse Marseillaise. The modern art provides a counterpoint to the restored building with its high ceilings and chandeliers.

8:00 p.m. - After dark, join a 90-minute walking tour with Ghost Tours of Quebec (reservations recommended). Poor weather only adds to the eerie tales of murders, executions and ghostly sightings.

10:00 p.m. - Return to Largo for a nightcap and live jazz.

9:00 a.m. - Breakfast at Casse-Crepe Breton on rue St-Jean. Sip a bowl of Viennese coffee topped with whipped cream while you ponder the choice of more than 20 crepe fillings. Arrive early to avoid a long wait.

10:30 a.m. - The "Louvre in Quebec" exhibit at the Musee National des Beaux-Arts (through Oct. 26) is entitled "Art and Life" and spans Egyptian, Oriental, Islamic and European art. Play in the tactile gallery, handling molds of works like Venus de Milo and the Borghese Gladiator. The exhibits are on loan from the Louvre Museum.

12:00 - Lunch at Cafe Le Saint-Malo, a cozy bistro among antique shops on rue St-Paul. The table d'hote menu might include delicacies like mussel soup, rabbit with sauce moutarde or blood pudding. Then admire the abundant flowers and public plantings while strolling through the antique shops.

2:00 p.m. - Browse in the Musee de la civilisation, then step into the Notre-Dame de Quebec cathedral where bishops are buried in the crypt.

4:00 p.m. - Head for the Enrico Chocolate Factory and Museum and drool over a fabric-covered treasure chest filled with Belgian- and French-style chocolates made in the factory.

5:30 p.m. - Linger over cocktails at Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac's St. Laurent bar before claiming your reserved table at Le Champlain, the hotel's four-diamond dining room overlooking the St. Lawrence River. Don't forget to save room for the flaming strawberries prepared beside your table.




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10:30 p.m. - Drop in at Bar Les Voutes Napoleon for late-night music. Tucked behind outdoor cafes on Parliament Hill, the cave-like cafe has stone arches and low ceilings. Tiny tables and a postage-stamp stage add to its charm.

8:30 a.m. - Head by rental car to Parc de la Chute-Montmorency for brunch at Manoir Montmorency. Request a table with a view of the 272-foot (83-metre) Montmorency Falls that rise 98 feet (30 metres) - higher than Niagara Falls.

10:00 a.m. - Work off breakfast with a hike to the suspension bridge that spans the falls and provides a spectacular view. In winter, the freezing spray sent up by crashing water builds a mountain of white ice at the base called the pain de sucre (sugarloaf).

1:00 p.m. - Pick up meat, pate, fresh fruit, and fresh bread from the city market. The cheese shop alone is worth the trip.

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