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5 Reasons Why Quebec City Might be the Most European City in North America

October 6, 2016 by Michele Laufik

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Sitting on the edge of the St. Lawrence River, Québec City exudes a certain vibe or, maybe more aptly, a certain *joie de vivre*. The provincial capital of Québec, Canada is a thoroughly modern city, but it also has the beautifully preserved romance of a centuries-old European town. From its French and British founders, the region inherited impressive architecture, rich food traditions, and a charming personality. We've recently written about other [cities around the world that remind travelers of Europe](#). Here are five ways that Québec City embodies its European past:

It looks like France.

Founded in 1608 by French navigator Samuel de Champlain, Québec City is one of North America's oldest cities and its architecture reflects that. Areas like the Place Royale and Petit-Champlain districts feature well-preserved, multi-centennial homes with dormer windows and gabled roofs, along with quaint, narrow cobblestone alleys reminiscent of charming European enclaves.

It has a tram.

Operating since 1879, the Funiculaire du Vieux-Québec transports visitors from the city's Upper to Lower Town areas, along the high cliff face that rises above the St. Lawrence River. It's one of the only funiculars (think of it like an inclined elevator) on the continent, and offers a quick, affordable ride, similar to popular ones in European cities like the Fløibanen funicular in Norway; the Zagreb funicular in Croatia; and the Glória Funicular in Portugal.

Here, cheese is almost an entire food group.

Thanks to the harsh winter months, Québec's cuisine features an abundance of hearty dishes with a French flair — think beer, butter, bread, fried potatoes, and mountains of cheese. The [1608 Wine & Cheese Bar](#) at the Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac, located in Old Québec, sells one of the largest collections of local cheeses in Canada and without a hint of foodie-style snobbery.

It has a castle — of sorts.

In the late 19th century, William Van Horne, general manager of the Canadian Pacific Railway, built the iconic [Fairmont Le Château Frontenac](#) as a stopover for rail passengers. Drawing upon the architectural styles of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the property looks like a towering castle along the St. Lawrence River, so much so that you might expect to see the dowager from *Downton Abbey* pop out. In 2014, the hotel underwent a multimillion-dollar renovation and restoration. It maintained its grandiosity and lavish detail, but now has expanded modern health facilities.

Everyone speaks French.

In the province of Québec, French — or Québécois as it's known there — is the predominant language, appearing on menus, signs, and posters by law. Plus, shop and restaurant employees will always greet customers with *bonjour*. But don't fret, *mon chou*, almost everyone speaks English as well, so ordering a plate of poutine won't be a problem. And thanks to influences from the British and the neighboring United States, Québec-style French includes a slew of adopted English words, called Anglicisms, that pop up in informal conversation.