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SPRING/SUMMER 2019

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DREAMSCAPES

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10 MEET ONE OF ADVENTURE CANADA'S FINEST

Adventure Canada prides itself in selecting top-notch Expedition Leaders to head up its award-winning excursions.

BY JOSEPH FREY

14 WHEN ADVENTURE CALLS

Discover a different side of our nation's capital.

BY LAURA BYRNE PAQUET

20 IN AND AROUND VICTORIA

Cycling and walking tours expose visitors to more intimate encounters in this West Coast city.

BY BRUCE SACH

24 MORE FUN, LAUGHTER AND LEARNING

SeaWorld Orlando and Busch Gardens Tampa Bay invite you to join in the celebrations.

BY KEVIN FRITZ

28 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Our travel choices can make a huge impact.

BY CYNTHIA DAVID



COVER: L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Newfoundland. Photo: Michelle Valberg



OTTAWA TOURISM



28

BEE + HIVE



34

NOEL HENDRIKSON

30 AN ACTIVITY-FILLED GETAWAY IN CHARLEVOIX

This Québec gem offers a host of activities and amazing scenery.

BY JOHANNA READ

33 CELEBRITY TRAVEL CORNER

Get acquainted with the Germain allure.

BY BRUCE SACH

34 TRAVEL SLEUTH

Where to catch a glimpse of your favourite celebrities.

BY JANE STOKES

37 ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Plan your perfect summer USA road trip.

BY JOSEPHINE MATYAS

38 TRACING BERGMAN'S FOOTSTEPS IN STOCKHOLM

Film buffs may want to check out the Swedish director's favourite haunts.

BY WAILANA KALAMA

42 TRAVEL GALLERY

News you can use.

BY CYNTHIA DAVID



38

VISIT STOCKHOLM

WIN A CRUISE FOR TWO FROM ICELAND TO GREENLAND

COMPLIMENTS OF  **ADVENTURE CANADA**



19

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AN ACTIVITY-FILLED GETAWAY IN CHARLEVOIX

YOU'VE LIKELY SEEN
CHARLEVOIX BUT HAD
NO IDEA WHAT YOU
WERE LOOKING AT.

By *Johanna Read*

As you're driving along the Trans-Canada Highway between Québec and the Maritimes, Charlevoix is on the other side of the St. Lawrence, about an hour east of Québec City. You've probably looked at the river's northern banks and thought, "That's pretty. I should go there someday." Here's what you've been missing.

The heart of Charlevoix lies within a massive crater. The region's rolling forests and mountains—including Le Massif—are dotted with cute little towns perfect for exploring. Charlevoix's two main centres are La Malbaie, population 9,000, and Baie-Saint-Paul, with just 7,000. It's the perfect

place for a long weekend getaway, experiencing the region's culinary, cultural and natural highlights. Le Train de Charlevoix connects the two towns.

NATURE IS EVERYWHERE

Charlevoix's extraordinary scenery—its diversified flora and fauna received UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status in 1988—is a prime reason to visit in any season. Thanks to the crash landing of a massive meteorite 350 million years ago, Charlevoix has a unique landscape. Mountains rim the 54-kilometre-wide crater, discernible from a helicopter ride or the peak of a mountain hike.



Explore the region's forests, lakes and mountains in hiking boots, snowshoes or on skis. Enjoy a picnic next to the huge tides of picturesque Baie des Rochers. Get aerial and climb a rock face, try the via ferrata or a zip line. Fly like a bird aboard a paraglider or with Héli-Charlevoix. There are plenty of water options, too, whether you prefer sailing, kitesurfing, kayaking or stand-up paddleboarding.

One of the prettiest ways to appreciate the scenery is by train. Le Train de Charlevoix hugs the northern bank of the St. Lawrence along the more than 125-kilometre route between Baie-Saint-Paul and La Malbaie. You'll see forests, small villages, the sea-like St. Lawrence and, at two particular spots, perhaps even some belugas in season.

TOO MANY WHALES TO COUNT

Whale watching is a Charlevoix highlight. The whale-watching hot spot is at the mouth of the Saguenay, north of La Malbaie at Tadoussac, where St. Lawrence estuary whales are most active from May through September.

On our September afternoon trip, we quickly lose count of the number of humpbacks we see. It's easier to count the number of perfect whale tail photos we capture instead. After we spot at least a dozen minke whales, our captain only bothers to stop the boat if they're really close to us.

I'm surprised to see a fin whale—the second largest animal in the world after the blue whale. Its immense size dwarfs the 60-passenger Zodiac in the distance. At the other end of the size spectrum are belugas. Boats aren't allowed to stop when they see the endangered white whales as a measure to protect them. All the same, it's pretty thrilling to see their white backs glint in the sun as they arch through the brilliant blue river.

CULTURE TRIP

Save time in your Charlevoix long weekend to explore the region's arts and culture. Baie-Saint-Paul, the birthplace of Cirque du Soleil, has become a magnet for young entrepreneurs and artists moving from the too-expensive rents and busy-ness of Montréal and Québec City. This results in a cultural scene far beyond what you'd expect for a town of 7,000.

The town is full of art galleries and shops selling creations from the region. The Musée d'Art Contemporain de Baie-Saint-Paul, housed in an old cinema, showcases both a permanent collection and rotating exhibitions to tempt visitors. Every year they host a contemporary art symposium featuring 12 Canadian and international artists who explain their creative processes.



OPPOSITE TOP: Hiking in Parc national des Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Rivière-Malbaie. © Region tourisme du Québec/Steve Deschênes **LEFT:** Cycling in the Charlevoix area of Québec. © Region tourisme du Québec/Outpost

BELOW: Sample the *Famille Migneron de Charlevoix's* award-winning cow and sheep milk cheeses. © *Region tourisme du Québec/Gaëlle Leroyer* **RIGHT:** *Le Massif de Charlevoix* in Québec. © *Region tourisme du Québec/Pierre Lambert/Claude Parent* **BOTTOM CENTRE:** A humpback in the *St. Lawrence River*. *Johanna Read* **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Horseback riding in *Les Haflinger du Fjord, Charlevoix, Québec*. © *Region tourisme du Québec/Guillaume Poitra*



An electric bike is an ideal way to explore Baie-Saint-Paul's countryside and not be concerned about the occasional hill. Keep your eye out for permanent and temporary sculptures that are commissioned annually.

Want to explore Québec culture in a more relaxing way? Le Germain Charlevoix Hotel & Spa's Nordic spa is the spot for you. Sit back and relax in their outdoor pools as you gaze upon the surrounding gardens and fields, complete with grazing alpaca, sheep and highland cattle.

FLAVOUR TRAILS

You'll dine well throughout Charlevoix. Restaurants go out of their way to feature Québec products and, of course, wines. Combine your culture, culinary and nature interests by following the Charlevoix Flavour Trail gastronomy route. You'll sample some of the region's unique products and can purchase edible souvenirs to take home. The trail, updated annually, features over two dozen local producers and

restaurants highlighting the delicacies of Charlevoix.

A unique Flavour Trail stop is Omerto. Owner Pascal Miche makes certified organic wines from heirloom tomatoes, the first and (for now at least) only producer in the world. He also makes syrups and provides recipes to turn them into unique cocktails.

Pair your tomato wine with some local cheese. Surrounded by fields with grazing sheep, taste the *Famille Migneron de Charlevoix's* award-winning cow and sheep milk cheeses. The farm even produces a milk vodka. It was begun as a bit of an experiment on how to deal with the whey byproduct of cheesemaking (Québec's laws prohibit it from being poured into the ground or water system). Once distilled, the whey is turned into a lactose- and gluten-free vodka.

Or, visit an organic lavender farm. At the

pretty Azulée farm, admire rows of the fragrant plants, the 1844 farmhouse and picturesque shop. Be sure to take home some of owner Louise Vidricaire's recipes along with her lavender.

WHERE TO STAY

In Baie-Saint-Paul, we already recommended Le Germain Charlevoix Hotel & Spa, which is right next door to the station for Le Train de Charlevoix. Just wheel your bag over to the platform from the lobby.

In Baie-Saint-Paul, nothing beats the Fairmont Le Manoir Richelieu, which hosted the 2018 G7 meeting. Canine ambassador Roux often greets guests when they arrive at the resort, which sits on a hill above the St. Lawrence. The views from the 27-hole golf course are sure to distract you from your game. [US](#)

TRAVEL PLANNER

For more information, visit CharlevoixTourism.com and TrainDeCharlevoix.com.