



TICKET TO **RIDE**

QUEBEC

CANADA

PEDAL POWER OFFERS ONE OF
THE BEST WAYS TO SEE THE
NATURAL BEAUTY OF CANADA

WORDS **PAUL HANSFORD**

definitely think you're seeing some of the best nature in Canada on this trip," said my guide Gilles, as we made our way along a riverside path, the mountains in the background glowing with green, gold and red-leaved maple trees.

I might have agreed with him if I wasn't focusing all my attention on the ground in front of me.

You see there's nothing like mountain biking over slippery rocks, twisting paths and massive tree roots to turn the travel journalist side of the brain off and have the self-preservation instincts kick in.

"Sure, Gilles, this place is beautiful," I thought. "I just don't want to meet any of it face-first at 25km/h."

To be honest, after a period of acclimatisation, I did get to ride with my head up and take in the stunning

beauty of Vallée Bras-du-Nord near the village of Saint-Raymond, an hour outside Canada's Quebec City.

Ex-Canadian Masters mountain bike champ, Gilles Morneau, and a team of passionate locals have worked tirelessly to turn this beautiful landscape into some of the best mountain bike trails in the region. With tracks for all skill levels, they run through leaf-littered forests, skirt along raging rapids and pass through maple forests with networks of criss-crossing plastic tubes that take the syrupy sap out of the tress with a little help from gravity.

I had my own issues with Newton's discovery during the day but any aches or pains disappeared as I stood at the bottom of Chute à Gilles – a waterfall named after the man who discovered it – and finally got to take in



the scenery in my own time. For those who like their scenery served at a less frenetic pace, taking le Train du Massif to the Charlevoix region is a great option. Owned by Cirque Du Soleil founder Daniel Gauthier, the luxurious train – replete with five-star dining and interactive maps via an iPad on every table – takes a route along a coastal inlet to the beautiful town of Baie-Saint-Paul.

Once there you can relax in the surrounds of Gauthier's new hotel, La Ferme, or take a tour of the local shops and art galleries. My guide Jean and I grabbed bikes and headed to Laiterie Charlevoix, Microbrasserie Charlevoix and Chocolaterie du Village – the holy trinity of cheese, beer and chocolate – and tried to burn off our excesses with pedal power. 

With its surrounds offering excitement and luxury in equal measure, Quebec City itself is a fantastic place to spend some time, featuring the most photographed hotel in the world – the Hogwarts-esque Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac – and boasting an old town so proud of its history and tourism industry that it's reminiscent of The Rocks on steroids.

Perfectly laid out to discover by foot – if a little hilly in places – 'QC' has some very explorable suburbs. Nouvo Saint-Roch is the revitalised home to the Quebec Jazz Festival, rue Cartier is all flashy restaurants and

trendy bars and the Saint-Jean neighbourhood is edgy, hipster cool. A must-see there is Epicerie JA Moisan, a deli/café/inn/old-world supermarket that sells coffee with complimentary spoons of chocolate spread.

However, Vieux Quebec – the old city – is where most travellers visit and for good reason. Steeped in history which harks back to a time when Quebec City was the most influential settlement in the world – control of Quebec in the 18th century meant control of the lucrative fur trade routes of North America – the town is full of quaint, cobbled streets, museums and hidden-away eateries. As the heartland of French Canada, the Gallic influence is unavoidable and the locals take great pride in their roots. For the full experience, head to Chez Temporel, a cafe where FLQ separatists used to meet in secret during the 1960s.

And no trip to Quebec City is complete without a taste of traditional poutine – a combination of french fries, gravy and squeaky cheese curds – which can be bought at any self-respecting local restaurant. Unlike the local biking scenery, this one is best attacked face first and at high speed. 

*Paul Hansford travelled as a guest of Tourism Canada,
<http://au.canada.travel/>*

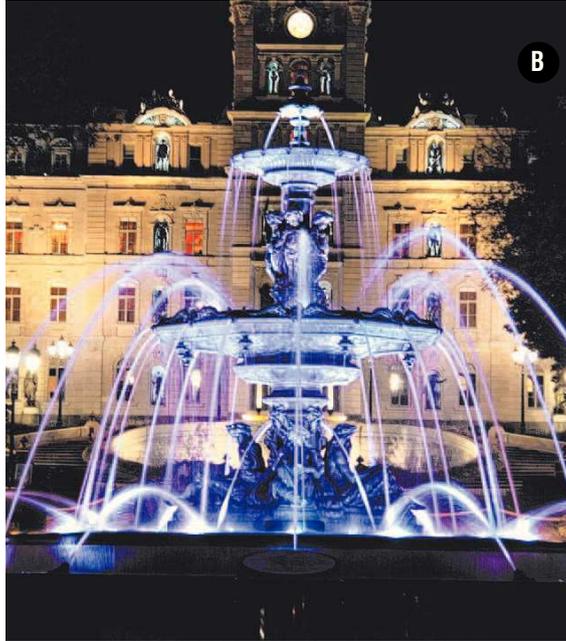




A Paul Hansford takes to a mountain bike to discover some of the best scenery in Canada.

B Fontaine de Tourny.

C Le Chateau Frontenac in Quebec City.



FAST FACTS

GETTING THERE

The writer travelled Air Canada, which operates daily flights from Sydney to Québec City, via Vancouver and/or Toronto. Jean Lesage International airport is 20km from downtown Québec City, with taxis costing a flat fee of \$34.25. There is also a bus service that runs Monday to Friday. aircanada.com

STAYING THERE

Auberge L'Autre Jardin is situated in the up-and-coming Saint-Roch neighbourhood and is the only 100 per cent fair trade hotel in Canada. Rooms from \$CAN96 per person, including buffet breakfast. autrejardin.com

SEEING THERE

The Québec City skyline is dominated by Château Frontenac and a walk around Old Québec is a must. quebecregion.com/en