

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

## QUÉBEC CITY

# OLD TOWN MARKET FEELS LIKE GERMAN CHRISTMAS

By Elizabeth Warkentin  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Strolling the large space outside City Hall filled with neat lines of little wooden huts, we stop at one booth or another to sample Stollen, steaming hot pretzels, gingerbread, and, of course, the celebrated Glühwein. Jewelry designers, wood sculptors, glassmakers, and other artisans chat happily with us about their work. The air is redolent with the aromas of roasted almonds in cinnamon, hot chocolate, crepes, and sauerkraut. In the background,

a recorded voice croons in German, “Tomorrow Santa Claus will come,” as sleigh bells jingle in the background.

This German Christmas market resembles others that I’ve visited in Germany. Yet we’re not in Germany. Or Europe. We’re not even in New York or Toronto. We’re in Québec.

I’ve come to the capital of Québec to try to recapture some of the magic of Christmas I discovered when I lived in Germany. Since I can’t afford to fly to Europe this year, I thought I’d return to Québec

City, North America’s urban Winter Wonderland, where I spent Christmases as a child visiting my mother’s family.

No Christmas in Québec City would be complete without a visit to the storybook Château Frontenac, so we decide to base ourselves here for the duration of our stay. On Saturday morning, my mother and I have breakfast in the Château’s dining room, seated in one of the glassed-in alcoves overlooking the Dufferin Terrace, a large wooden boardwalk which looks out to the mighty St. Lawrence River. After stuffing ourselves from the expansive buffet, we go our own ways. My mother goes off for a day with her childhood friends, and I head out on my own, on foot to the Basse Ville — the lower town, and the prettiest part of Le Vieux Québec.

The area known as the Petit Champlain, named after French founder and explorer Samuel de Champlain, is a maze of charming cobblestone streets, narrow two- and three-story greystones with dormer windows, gabled roofs and large chimneys. Place Royale, from which several streets radiate, is the historic administrative center of the city where Champlain originally set up camp. Today the square is dotted with pretty boutiques, bistros, and restaurants, but there are still people residing in the

apartments above. Adding to the Old World France feel of this area, I spot a resident with a baguette under his arm.

Despite it being unseasonably warm for December, and though bundled in layers and ski pants, my toes, nose, and fingers are cold. Time for a hot chocolate. The Café Maison Smith in the square is bright and welcoming. I sit facing the windows, so I can watch the people go by and indulge in my warm drink and an almond croissant.

Fortified, I make my way back toward the rue du Petit Champlain. At the bottom of the Escaliers Casse-Cou, on the rue du Petit Champlain itself, young carolers sing to passers-by. The atmosphere is festive and the narrow pedestrian street is chockablock with people happily strolling arm-in-arm, popping in and out of artisan shops and galleries whose storefronts are adorned with Christmas decorations and illuminated fir trees. It’s easy to see why this street was recently voted Canada’s prettiest.

It’s 4 p.m. now and almost fully dark. Rather than trudge back up the little hill to the Haute Ville — the upper town — I decide to take the Funiculaire. Opened in 1789, the funicular railway is 210 feet long and 194 feet high and travels at a 45-degree angle, linking the lower town with the upper town.

Back in the Haute Ville, I’m tempted to return to my beautiful room with its view of the St. Lawrence, but I’m drawn to the fairy tale spirit of the German Christmas market (pictured below). Things were relatively quiet on Friday evening, but on Saturday the market is hopping. There are couples and groups of friends and young families lining up at various kiosks to buy German sausages and sauerkraut, maple ice wine shots, Lebkuchen, Glühwein, apple strudel with whipped cream, and hot punch for the kids. Negotiating a pathway becomes difficult in the tight space of City Hall’s gardens, and inside the heated BMW “alpine chalet” there isn’t a single available seat.

While most of the vendors at the market are Québec-born, many are European. One German-born vendor I chat with is Peggy Gunther Paquet, an artist and ceramicist who has her own shop in Québec City. Paquet, who was born in former East Berlin, came here “for love.” As soon as the East German borders opened up, she left to go traveling and met her Québécois husband on the road. She’s been in Québec 24 years.

Québec City is not known for having a large German population. In fact, there are only about 2,000 German-born residents in the capital. But what

the city’s German community lacks in numbers, it more than makes up for in enthusiasm.

Britta Kröger is president of the German Community of Québec City and has been involved in the organization of the German Christmas market since its modest beginnings in a church basement eight years ago. She says, “Amongst our committee, despite coming from different corners of Germany, we all have the same childhood memories of the Christmas markets, and it’s this magic we want to re-create.”

And this they have done with aplomb. If anything, Québec’s German Christmas market seems more authentic than its Old Country predecessors. Perhaps that’s because it remains small. There is no glitz here. No Ferris wheels or other amusement rides. Yet. The mayor has plans to expand and imitate the Brussels model. Kröger wants to take things slowly, so that the original spirit of this magical little market is not destroyed.

Let’s hope tradition wins out.

**QUÉBEC CITY GERMAN CHRISTMAS MARKET** *Thu-Sat 11 a.m.-8 p.m., Sun till 6. Through Dec. 20*

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ELIZABETH WARKENTIN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## HERE

### SKATE OR CHILL AT HISTORIC PROVIDENCE HOTEL

Take your family on a getaway to the historic Providence Biltmore Hotel and enjoy an ice-skating adventure and then a relaxing night in a newly renovated suite. The hotel’s Skate and Stay Package, which runs through March 5, includes admission and ice skate rentals for two children and two adults (a savings of up to \$48) at the Providence Rink, located just outside the hotel’s lobby, and \$20 for a treat at the onsite Starbucks. Then kick back in a 625-foot suite that comes with two king beds, a living area, a refrigerator, and panoramic city views. The 1922 hotel, located in the heart of the city, offers easy access to the Providence Place Mall and the Providence Children’s Museum. Rates start at \$189 per night, based on availability, including accommodations, free Wi-Fi, access to a fitness center, and free transportation within 3 miles of the hotel (does not include parking fee). 401-421-0700, [www.providencebiltmore.com](http://www.providencebiltmore.com)

### GLIDE ON A BIG BOSTON RINK

The Boston Harbor Hotel also offers ice skating to the general public through Feb. 21 as part of its Winter on the Wharf program. Slip into a pair of skates and glide around the 2,500-

square-foot Rotunda Rink, which is located outdoors under the hotel’s iconic archway, and offers beautiful skyline and harbor views. Rent skates (\$8 children, \$10 adults) or bring your own. Admission is \$5 for children, \$10 for adults (Mon-Fri 3-8 p.m., weekends 10 a.m.-8 p.m.). Beginners can sign up for four-week Saturday programs that run throughout December, January, and February, 9-10 a.m., and are suitable for all ages (\$110 per person, includes skate rentals). The hotel’s special family package includes one night’s accommodations, four tickets to “Once the Musical” (Dec. 18-20, and 26-27), overnight parking, and breakfast at Rowes Wharf Sea Grille; rates start at \$735 per night. 617-439-7000, [www.bhh.com](http://www.bhh.com)

## THERE

### PERU TOUR FOCUSES ON CULTURAL AND NATURAL EXPERIENCES

Stay in a treehouse lodge in the Amazon rain forest, visit the largest sand dune in the world, interact with indigenous communities along the Amazon River, and visit UNESCO World Heritage Sites on a new Peru trip that’s offered by Big Five Tours and Expeditions. On the 13-day luxury tour Peru: Amazon, Andes, and the Coast, you can meet members of the Jaldar, Jiba-

ro, and Kukama communities along the Amazon and learn about their traditions, ride the Vista Valle train to Machu Picchu, see the terraced slopes of Caraybamba, and visit Cerro Blanco, the world’s tallest sand dune at 6,686 feet. Also see the remarkable Nazca Lines, a series of geoglyphs on a high plateau in the Nazca Desert, and visit the famous Ballestas Islands, a marine life sanctuary with penguins, sea lions, and flying fish. Rates start at \$9,670 per person, double occupancy; flights not included. 800-244-3483, [www.bigfive.com/tour/peru-amazon-andes-the-coast](http://www.bigfive.com/tour/peru-amazon-andes-the-coast)

### GET DOWN FOR OYSTER FESTIVAL, SOUTH CAROLINA STYLE

Grab your shuckers and head to Boon Hall Plantation in Charleston, S.C., Jan. 31 for one of the world’s largest oyster festivals. The Lowcountry Oyster Festival, which serves more than 80,000 pounds of oysters, includes oyster-shucking and oyster-eating contests, live music, and a fun children’s area that celebrates oysters’ natural habitats. Buy a \$12 bucket of oysters (about three dozen oysters), or try options from local restaurants and food trucks. Admission runs \$17.50 in advance, or \$25 day of the event; children under age 11 free with paying adult. VIP admission costs \$100 and includes quick entry through the VIP lane, and

VIP access to food, beverages, and oysters. 843-577-4030, [www.charlestonrestaurantassociation.com](http://www.charlestonrestaurantassociation.com)

## EVERYWHERE

### A NUTRITION BAR THAT COULD FEND OFF YOUR NAUSEA

Nibble on a nutrition bar to help prevent nausea from motion sickness on your travels. A team of Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduates and Harvard Medical School faculty has developed the Anchor Nutrition Bar, which can help people of all ages fend off nausea (and moms deal with morning sickness) while traveling by car, boat, plane, or other modes of transportation. Eat a bar 15 to 30 minutes before boarding, or after you’re in motion, to provide three to four hours of relief. The bar (pictured here) contains no drugs, and therefore has no side effects, but rather a proprietary mix of protein, ginger, and vitamins. It has a crispy texture and a light blueberry flavor. You’ll find it on Boston Harbor Cruises, or at Cambridge Naturals, the Bass Pro Shops in Foxborough, and other stores, or online. \$11.99-\$39.99 for three to 12 bars. [www.anchornutri.com](http://www.anchornutri.com)

### TURN YOUNG FELLOW TRAVELER INTO A FLEECE-WRAPPED SUPERHERO

Turn your toddler into a superhero, or at least a cozy little traveler, on future trips with SuperME’s My Pillow Cape. This fleece cape has Velcro to keep it in place and comes with a cushioned neck that serves as a built-in pillow in case your superhero falls asleep mid-adventure. It even comes with a superhero mask that tucks into a little pocket. The cape also doubles as a cozy fleece blanket; tuck the blanket-cape into its pocket and it becomes a travel pillow. \$29.90, a portion of which supports PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center. Comes in blue-red, and purple-pink. 866-787-3710, [www.supermehero.com](http://www.supermehero.com)

KARI BODNARCHUK

