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# THE GREAT FRENCH NORD

**In fall, the tourists fade and Quebec City starts to shine**

By JENNIFER CEASER

**I**N summer, any Quebec native will tell you that he avoids the tourist-clogged cobblestone streets of the fortified Old City at all costs. But come mid-October, when the last of the giant cruise ships have sailed and the sightseers vanish as the fall chill sets in, residents start to reclaim their charming historic center.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Vieux-Quebec is made up of an Upper Town and a Lower Town, linked by precipitous wooden stairways — one is named the Breakneck Staircase — or for the step-weary, a funicular. Head down, where the more interesting stuff is happening, in the Quartier Petit Champlain, Place Royale and Old Port area. Here are our picks for where to rub shoulders with the locals.

**Le Pape Georges** (8½ Rue de Cul-de-Sac, [papegeorges.ca](http://papegeorges.ca)) is a cozy, clandestine spot for enjoying a glass or two of wine and a plate of Quebec cheeses in the Petit Champlain quarter — some nights you'll be entertained by live music. Pop by for a pint in Place Royale's **L'Oncle Antoine** (29 Rue St-Pierre), a cave-like pub with stone walls and arched stone ceilings dating from the 1750s. Local brews like Tremblay and Unibroue are offered on tap, and are affordable, to boot, at around \$5.

Not every boutique is stocked with "local crafts" and moose paraphernalia: Shop for buttery-soft, locally-made leather goods at **m0851** (66 boul Champlain, [m0851.com](http://m0851.com)) in Petit Champlain; a few doors down, snap up super-nourishing soaps and lotions made from donkey milk (Cleopatra used to bathe in it!) at **Shamâne** (70 boul Champlain, [shamane-cosmetiques.com](http://shamane-cosmetiques.com)).

Fine dining is everywhere — after all, the Quebecois are French — but here are two not-to-be-missed restaurants. Set inside the super-chic Auberge Saint-Antoine hotel in the Old Port, **Panache** (8 Rue Saint-Antoine, [saint-antoine.com](http://saint-antoine.com)) is an inviting, lofty spot with stone walls and exposed wood beams. Chef Julien Dumas' ever-changing menu is locavore at its best: halibut with mussels, corn and saffron; Saint Apollinaire duckling, baked in pastry and accented with wild blueberries. Dinner is pricey but the prix-fixe lunch is just \$20 to \$25.

On any given evening, you'll find Rolande Leclerc, the co-proprietor of **Restaurant**



**Le Chateau Frontenac lords over the Old City; the rustic resto Panache (left) in the Old Port.**



**Local products from Shamâne.**

**Initiale** (54 Rue Saint Pierre, [restaurantinitiale.com](http://restaurantinitiale.com)),

warmly welcoming guests to her hushed, elegant Old Port eatery. It's the ideal setting for sampling one of three tasting menus from Chef Yvan Lebrun, ranging from a four-course, \$69 menu to \$129 for the nine-course Grand Menu. The signature dish at this Relais & Chateaux-designated

restaurant is the grilled mackerel — it's from the famed Gaspésie maritime region north-east of the city.

And if you want to see where much of the lovely local fish, meat, produce and cheese hails from, wander through the Old Port's year-round **Public Market** ([marchevieuxport.com](http://marchevieuxport.com)). Sample sparkling apple cider from nearby Ile d'Orléans, world-champion Cinderella goat cheese from the northwest part of the province and foie gras of every kind — from the usual goose to bison, emu and goat.

## STAY

Dominating the skyline and lording over the Old City is the iconic, 120-year-old **Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac**, a 618-room luxury hotel that's currently undergoing a massive, \$66 million renovation, due to be completed next June. The Rockwell Group is overhauling the public areas, spa and restaurants, and currently 150 rooms have gone from staid to ultra-sophisticated (from \$199, Nov. 1-30 from \$139; [fairmont.com/frontenac-quebec](http://fairmont.com/frontenac-quebec)).

Once housing the National Bank of Canada, **Hotel 71** is a 60-room, family-owned boutique property in the blissfully quiet Old Port area. The simply decorated rooms and suites feel remarkably spacious, thanks to exceedingly high ceilings and large windows (from \$219, [hotel71.ca](http://hotel71.ca)).

**GETTING THERE** Delta recently launched direct service from JFK; sample roundtrip fares in October from \$455.



**Sleek, newly renovated rooms at the Fairmont.**