

WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

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YOUR PERFECT WEEKEND

C'est magnifique

Your all-season, town-and-country guide to a relaxing weekend in Quebec City



Above: The Château Frontenac hotel looms large over Quebec City.

PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF

CHRISTOPHER MUTHER



Right: A cat gets cozy at Café Félin Ma Langue Aux Chats, a cat cafe located in Quebec City.

I learned long ago that places aren't as quaint when I'm stuck in a long line, or circled by an army of selfie sticks. Thanks to this tactic, my husband and I had a glorious fall day on the petite, rural Île d'Orléans. We consumed ice cream dipped in homemade chocolate that hardened as it dried. We sipped wine at a vineyard amid the burgeoning foliage, and ate a late lunch at a farm that produces 50,000 bottles of black currant spirits a year. There's a reason why Île d'Orléans is called the garden of Quebec. Farm stands, the kind with carefully hand-painted signs, were everywhere selling criminally tumescent vegetables and

QUEBEC CITY

offering orchards swelling with pick-your-own apples. If you visit Quebec City during more temperate months — particularly summer and early fall — you're going to need to spend time on Île d'Orléans. Don't fight me on this one. If you opt to go during the winter, time your arrival with the February Winter Carnival. No matter when you go, it's simple to pull together a weekend itinerary that doesn't feel rushed or overwhelming. It's a compact city and generally easy to get around. It's close enough to Boston to plan a return trip if you don't have an opportunity to tick all the boxes. What, you may ask, does a perfect weekend in Quebec City look like? Please read on.

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Spend a day or so strolling around the Old City, which is like walking into a Disney movie set in 1600s France, minus the talking animals and all that singing. If you're the kind who is prone to dawdle in little shops and galleries, give yourself plenty of time to mosey in this area. The stores

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Old Walkerville's whiskey heritage



CLAUDIA CAPOS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Visitors enjoy a whiskey tasting at the Hiram Walker distillery.

By Claudia Capos
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

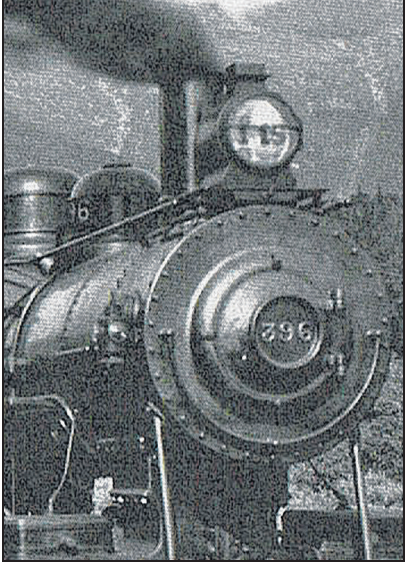
WINDSOR, Ontario — For decades, the gleaming white grain solos of the Hiram Walker & Sons Ltd. Distillery have anchored the Windsor skyline along the Detroit River, an international waterway flowing between Michigan and Ontario. During our previous visits to Windsor, we often cruised along Riverside Drive past the ornate red-sandstone "Whisky Palace," formerly Walker's Canadian Club headquarters, and through the fortress-like complex of red-brick distillery buildings connected by a labyrinth of overhead pipes. For years, we drove right by Hiram Walker's sprawling enterprise — the largest whiskey distillery in North America — on our way to someplace else. We never realized what we were missing.

Granted, we knew little about the

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Inside NEW HAMPSHIRE HIGH POINT

The Mount Washington Cog Railway celebrates 150 years
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Enjoy a perfect weekend in Quebec City

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range from tacky-tacky to chichi to posh. Those who are more task-driven should start at the Museum of Civilization. Traveling exhibitions here embrace pop culture and make for a fun couple of hours of exploring. The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec tells the story of the province through art, with more than 20,000 works produced by Québécois artists.

For newbies, take the obligatory Old Quebec Funicular ride, stroll La Promenade des Gouverneurs and visit the Citadelle of Quebec. I beseech you, and I don't beseech often, to visit outer neighborhoods such as Saint-Roch, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and Montcalm. It's where you'll find more independent shops and adventurous restaurants. Please add Quebec's cat café, Café Félin Ma Langue Aux Chats, to your list of activities, along with the Marché du Vieux-Port, which, as Francophones know, means the Old Port market. Here, farmers from across Quebec sell seasonal harvests (time your arrival for June strawberry season).

ÎLE D'ORLÉANS

You can take a bus tour of Île d'Orléans, but if you have a car in Quebec City (you can rent one for a day quite easily), I would recommend making the trip yourself. It's a 15-minute drive from the city, and nearly impossible to get lost. A map of the island's attractions, which you can find online or pick up at most businesses, will tell you where to go. I fell in love with Cassis Monna & Filles, which grows black currants and uses them liberally at its restaurant. There's also a dairy bar and wine cellar on site. La Chocolaterie de l'Île d'Orléans has fantastic homemade ice cream, hot chocolate, and a shop where you can buy treats for the drive. Confiturerie Tigidou makes jam from locally picked fruit. You can visit the factory during summer and early fall, or just taste the output until your sweet tooth is satisfied, or falls prey to



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF

From top: The view from the observation tower on a cloudy day on Île d'Orléans; a room at the Auberge Saint-Antoine in Quebec City; the MacFly Bar Arcade in Quebec City.

cavities.

CARNIVAL

It's something you need to experience at least once. The annual February Carnival in Quebec City means people rowing on the icy St. Lawrence River, a very trippy parade, ice fishing in igloos, and many bottles of the official party drink of the festival — Caribou. This potent hooch is only sold by Quebec's liquor board and is made of red wine, hard liquor, and maple syrup or sugar. But the recipe is a carefully guarded secret. Is that brandy or vodka? After a few shots (best consumed from glasses made of ice), it's hard to tell, but at least your snow globes will no longer feel frostbitten. It warms you as you walk through an enchanted city twinkling under lights and snow.

WHERE YOU'LL EAT

At Légende par la Tanière, chef Chef Frédéric Laplante's Nordic-inspired menu is strictly farm-to-fork. In Quebec, farm-to-table requires creativity and Laplante does not disappoint. The menu is always changing, but look for the Cornish hen or elk Carpaccio. La Renard et La Chouette is a coffee bar by day, inventive restaurant by night. The shareable dishes are hearty (chicken pot pie for four people!) and



AUBERGE SAINT-ANTOINE



flavorful (kofta of grilled lamb, tzatziki, pita, and pine nuts). I've tried, and recommend, restaurants such as L'affaire est Ketchup and Le Clocher Pen-

ché, but on my last visit I was craving something truly old school, and that itch was scratched at Restaurant Le Continental. It bills itself as the oldest

gourmet restaurant in Quebec. Waiters in white dinner jackets and bow ties mix Caesar salads and flambé filet mignon tableside. It's throwback dinner theater, and worth the cost of admission.

WHERE YOU'LL STAY

Every photo of Quebec City sports the imposing Château Frontenac looming over the town. As a result, many make the assumption that's where they should stay. I'm here to correct that assumption by pointing you toward the slightly less conspicuous Auberge Saint-Antoine. It's become my go-to Quebec City lodging option. Hundreds of relics from French and English settlers were found on the site where the Auberge was built, and they are displayed with museum-like crispness throughout the hotel. Rooms are minimal and chic, but also quite comfortable. The hotel is connected to two of my favorite Quebec City hang-outs. The lobby bar called Artefact (where you can find a very respectable bowl of poutine) and a top-notch French restaurant called Chez-Muffy. In the off-season, you can easily score rates under \$200 a night.

WHERE YOU'LL IMBIBE

When I hear the 8-bit theme song for Ms. Pac-Man, my hand twitches and reaches for a joystick in true Pavlovian fashion. When I'm hanging out at MacFly Bar Arcade and I hear the familiar tune, one hand reaches for the joystick, the other reaches for a wine glass. As a child of the 1980s, MacFly Bar is my happy place. All the retro arcade games and pinball machines are free, the staff is friendly, the drinks are fantastic, and, wait for it, there's a grilled cheese menu. As Frankie Goes to Hollywood once said, "Welcome to the pleasure dome." You say you're not into video games, and grilled cheese. Fine, I get it. In that case head to the circular bar at Le Sam Bistro Évolution at the Château Frontenac. The sophisticated, circular bar collects hotel guests and locals in a boozy, spherical diorama that is bright during the day, but feels lustrous and opulent at night.

By now you're likely thinking, "But where can I grab a beer and watch a hockey game with the locals?" Normally my answer to such a question would be, "Who do I look like, Don Sweeney?" However this time I have a useful answer. Taverne Jos Dion is one of the oldest watering holes in Quebec. It's a no-fuss Québécois tavern where you can help yourself to popcorn, watch the game, enjoy a beer, and brush up on your French.

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Savoring the whiskey heritage of Old Walkerville

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larger-than-life legacy of whiskey baron Hiram Walker, a Boston-born businessman who made a vast fortune distilling and selling Canadian whiskey, and even built his own company town called Walkerville. The whiskey industry's excesses later set the stage for Walkerville's notorious rum runners who crisscrossed the Detroit River with their bootleg booze during American Prohibition.

This time, our weekend visit to Windsor in early April is different. Instead of whizzing by the Walker distillery, Doug and I park our car and walk across Riverside Drive to the J.P. Wiser Experience Centre, where we have booked a two-hour distillery tour.

The "bready" aroma of drying distiller's grain scents the spring air that afternoon. Stepping through the center's glass doors, we are whisked back in time 160 years to an era when whiskey was king and four major distilleries were waging a turf war in Canada for control of the industry.

Hiram Walker left his home in East Douglas, Mass., at age 22, and arrived in Detroit in 1838 to work in a grocery store located on the spot where the General Motors Company headquarters now stands. By 1854, Walker owned and operated his own store where he bought moonshine to make charcoal-filtered, blended whiskies, which sold for five cents a gallon. Several years later, the young entrepreneur purchased 468 acres of land on the Canadian side of the Detroit River near what was then the village of Windsor and built the Hiram Walker & Sons Ltd. Distillery, which opened in 1858.

"A big part of Canada's history and heritage was built on whiskey," says tour guide Brittany Anderson, leading us across the distillery grounds to a production building and up three flights of stairs to the fermentation area. The round domes of giant fermenters surround us like a squadron of flying saucers.

Anderson opens the hatch of one tank. We peer down at the frothing wash where yeast is fermenting the



PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA CAPOS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



Above: Willistead Manor was built for Hiram Walker's son, Edward. Left: Tour guide Brittany Anderson explains the whiskey fermentation process to visitors at the Hiram Walker distillery.

If you go . . .

For more information, go to www.visitwalkerville.com and www.visitwindsoressex.com.

2019 Walkerville events: Art in the Park (June 1-2), Walkerville Art Walk (July 19-20), Buskerville Festival (Aug. 9-11), Whiskytown Festival (Aug. 10) and Windsor Craft Beer Festival (Oct. 18-19).

Pike Creek 10-year rum-barrel-finish whiskey, Linda Hunter, from Chatham, Ontario, remarks, "This is the greatest history we have in Windsor, and it's right here on the beautiful riverfront."

Hiram Walker & Sons Ltd. has changed ownership several times. It is now a wholly owned Canadian subsidiary of Pernod Ricard S.A. and produces two-thirds of all Canadian whiskey.

Hiram Walker's vision for his whiskey empire included planning and building Walkerville, a self-sufficient

town with rental housing for employees, retail stores, a school, a bank, a post office, fire and police protection and amenities such as lighting, water and sewage. Today the boundaries of Old Walkerville, which was merged into Windsor in 1935, extend from the Detroit riverfront (north) to Walker Road (east) to Ontario Street (south) to Hall Avenue (west).

After our distillery tour, we drive through the Walkerville residential area. Along Monmouth Road we pass handsome red-brick row houses built for Walker's distillery workers. On Devonshire Road, we find elegant limestone-and-brick Tudor Revival-style mansions, many of them constructed for Walker family members and company executives.

Walkerville's crown jewel is Willistead Manor, a palatial 36-room Edwardian mansion on Niagara Street, which was designed by American architect Albert Kahn as a residence for Hiram Walker's son, Edward Chandler Walker, and his wife, Mary.

"This is as close as you get to Windsor (Ontario) royalty," says our guide Nikolas Telford, showing us the 1906 home's spacious wood-paneled living, dining and billiard rooms. No expense was spared on the hand-carved woodwork, decorative plaster ceilings, elegant crystal chandeliers and trick door panels leading to hidden passages. The 15-acre estate is now a city-owned events center and park.

Hiram Walker also ventured into beer brewing and opened the original Walkerville Brewery in 1890, promising to provide his workers with an "honest lager." The current Walkerville Brewery, located in a former Walker rackhouse on Argyle Road in the heart of the Distillery District, continues that tradition by making small-batch, hand-crafted, unpasteurized brews.

On Friday night, every table is filled with trivia players who are eager to taste the brewery's new Belgian Strong Ale. "There's an infinite number of things you can do with beer, but the quality has got to be right," says brewmaster Ian Gourlay, a partner at the brewery. Walkerville native Mike Brkovich, a

former Michigan State University basketball star and teammate of Magic Johnson, purchased the brewery and other historic buildings in an effort to restore and preserve Walkerville's architectural heritage.

"The treasures are here — Hiram Walker's legacy, Prohibition history and many beautiful buildings," Brkovich says. "This is a place where people can step back in history."

After sampling a flight of craft beers, we stroll along Wyandotte Street past boutiques, antique shops, bookstores, taverns and the Walkerville Theatre, which presents live rock concerts. For dinner, we order the Twisted Apron's stuffed meatloaf special before returning to Ye Olde Walkerville Bed and Breakfast.

The next morning, actor Mark Baker shows up at the B&B, sporting a 1920s-era brown pinstripe jacket and felt fedora. With him is actress Michelle Mainwaring, wearing a vintage dress, rhinestone necklace and feathered hat.

Baker's Encore Productions of Windsor presents the Rum Runners tour, which transports visitors back to the Roaring Twenties when bootleggers flourished in Walkerville. He plays Blaise Diesburg, a Canadian rum runner who supplied illicit liquor to Chicago mob boss Al Capone. Mainwaring portrays Bertha Thomas, who ran the Edgewater Thomas Inn speakeasy.

"My grandmother was a rum runner who would take a few bottles over to Detroit," Baker tells us. "During Prohibition [1920 to 1933], Americans were willing to pay top dollar, and 75 percent of the illegal alcohol came through Windsor."

Canadian Harry Hatch, who bought the Walker distillery in 1926, assembled a fleet of 450 boats, a.k.a. Harry's Navy, to transport hooch across the river, according to Baker.

"We can never forget our roots," Mainwaring says. "Everyone has a family member who was involved in our whiskey and rum-running heritage."

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