

Left then clockwise: Quebec City's unique funicular permits genteel travel between the upper and lower towns.

Readers of novelist Louise Penny's book *Bury Your Dead* will be thrilled to reach the Morrin Centre, a former prison that now houses a library, in Old Quebec. Daphne and Morn at Montmorency Falls. Diana Ballon photos

Websites: lebonneentente.com;
bistroentrepont.com
lesaintsulpice.com;
fairmont.com/frontenac-quebec



Travels with Mum

Mother and daughters bonded in Montreal and Quebec City, following in the footsteps of author Louise Penny and ending a stimulating journey with a toast to dad

By Diana Ballon

With cobblestone streets, outdoor markets, great restaurants and galleries, and handsome French men, why leave the continent? You can have just as much fun in Montreal and Quebec City – what many consider to be Canada's Europe.

After my father died recently, my first instinct was to plan some exciting mother-daughter travel. It turned out to be mother-daughter-daughter travel – my sister Daphne would travel with us – so all the better!

So three women, ranging in age from 49 to a spry 81, with sensible rubber-soled shoes and a spirit of adventure took off.

Montreal

We began by travelling to Montreal. We stayed at Le St. Sulpice, a charming, award-winning boutique hotel in Old Montreal that artfully combines modern with classical using a black, white and wood decor – with punchy accents of red. With a spacious suite that could accommodate all three of us, this was a

perfectly elegant and friendly home base.

Located near the Old Port, we woke both mornings to the sound of horse-drawn carriages, or caleches, under our window. The first day, we visited the impressive Notre-Dame Basilica just up the street. For a meagre \$5 entrance fee, we got a 20-minute guided tour of its stunning blue and gold interior, the location of Celine Dion's wedding in 1994 and former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's funeral in 2000. (Be sure to check out its 7,000-pipe organ and the lovely Sacre-Coeur Chapel in back.)

We then visited DHC/Art, a small but striking contemporary gallery in Old Montreal and the wonderful Montreal Museum of Fine Arts near McGill University, which, among its many great exhibits, is featuring *Warhol Mania* until March 15.

The second day, my sister and I rented bikes at nearby Montreal on Wheels and toured around Isle Sainte-Helene and Isle Notre-Dame, easily doable in about an hour and a half, and a great and easy way to explore the islands and the Lachine Canal. That night, the three of us met a

friend at Bistro l'Entrepont, which is a quaint restaurant on a quiet side street on the plateau.

Quebec City

Our second trip was to Quebec City, where I worked hard to keep up my mother's and sister's pace, as we explored the many cultural and historical sites that the city has to offer.

Our cultural tour began with the National Museum of Fine Arts of Quebec, situated next to the Plains of Abraham, where the British and French did battle in 1759. The museum, which is in part a former prison, now houses a nice restaurant and several great exhibits: of particular note, Quebec painter Jean Paul Lemieux, whose painting *Death on a Clear Morning*, of a mother and daughter in mourning, carried personal resonance.

We then used my mum's hand-scrawled list of cafes visited by Inspector Gamache in Quebec mystery writer Louise Penny's wonderful book *Bury Your Dead* to guide our itinerary. Quite unexpectedly, we happened upon, on a small side street in Vieux Quebec, the Morrin

Centre. This place is a find. Not only is this where a corpse was discovered buried in the basement in Penny's novel, it's also the site of the city's first prison (where our tour guide momentarily locks my mum in a cell to get a sense of what incarceration might have felt like). It is also the location of a beautiful English-language library.

For the first two nights, we stayed at a fabulous five-star contemporary hotel, Le Bonne Entente, which is located in St. Foy, an 18-minute drive from Old Quebec. Although not in the main hub, it's easily accessible by car, or by the hotel's shuttle (a Mercedes van).

Day 2 we take a tour bus from Place d'Armes to visit the nearby Montmorency Falls, which, at 272 feet high, are slightly taller than Niagara Falls, though not nearly as wide. We take the gondola up and walk the 487 steps down, feeling the cool mist in our faces from the water's spray. In the afternoon, we visit the Musee des Ursulines de Quebec, which acted as both residence and school for the Ursuline nuns from early 1600s: the museum depicts the education of "young ladies" raised to be "cultivated women" but not scholars, separate from society.

Of course, with many visits to museums and churches, we did what all women do when they pass amicable time together: we ate. We visited two cafes that Inspector Gamache used to haunt in *Bury Your Dead*: *Chez Temporel*, where we enjoyed a simple but delicious lunch of buffalo meat pie and quiche, and Le Petit Coin Latin, for a dinner of comfort food – raclette, steak and mashed potatoes and salmon pie.

And finally, we loved our final night's stay at the historic Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac, the imposing green-roofed heritage resort high on the hill within the old city walls, with a view of the St Lawrence river and the city. Our studio guest room was a whopping 550 square feet, with sitting area and a spacious L-shaped bathroom.

At the end of the evening, we enjoyed a glass of wine at the Frontenac's circular 1608 Wine & Cheese Bar (also frequented by Inspector Gamache), and exchanged stories of my dad in a room that may well have the finest view of the river below. As we did so, it felt like there could be no better place to be. We were, after all, in Canada's Europe, gazing out on water where darkness hid so many of life's possibilities, and where we toasted my dad, who would have loved it here.