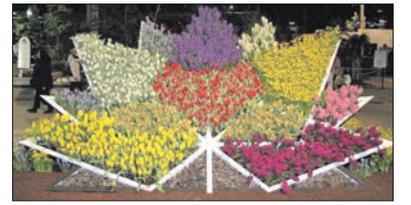


FARMLIVING

CELEBRATE CANADA 150

The Canadian population includes a rich blend of cultures. Canadian landscapes are also diverse, offering a wide array of native and edible plants. | Page 18



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EXPLORING CANADA

Wandering through Authentic Quebec

TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

The biggest challenge in travelling to Quebec is deciding where to go. As Canada's largest province, the array of attractive possibilities can be overwhelming.

A great place to start is a region identifying itself as Authentic Quebec, a blending of some of the best that La Belle Province has to offer, but in a manageable size.

Situated between Montreal and Quebec City, and a bit to the north, it stretches from the rich agricultural plains of the St. Lawrence River Valley to the lake-studded forests of the Laurentian Mountains.

Away from the big cities, but close enough to be accessible, it's part rural, part cottage country and part wilderness, with a healthy dose of history and traditional culture.

Postcard views pop up around every turn and dairy farms dot the rolling hills. Farther north we find a series of forested parks and nature reserves, the largest being La Mauricie National Park.

The region has about 30,000 lakes and a vast network of rivers and streams. Driving between villages, we often came across wild white water and impressive waterfalls close to the road.

Agritourism is big in the area north of Montreal. Suggested driving routes guide you to everything from fruit orchards to honey producers, wineries and places to buy locally produced meats, maple syrup, chocolates and more.

A highlight is enjoying the many locally made cheeses.

Our most memorable stop was at a monastery. The Abbey of Val Notre Dame sits on a beautiful forested plateau overlooking the Assumption River. The Trappist



CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT: The view from the Hotel Sacacomie was breathtaking. | KARPAN PHOTOS

A visit to the local chocolate shop satisfied the sweet tooth.

Monks from the Abbey of Val Notre Dame are known for their Oka cheese.

Guests enjoy one of the many waterfalls.

monks first became famous as founders of Oka Cheese.

Abbott Father Andre said the order is required to be economically self-sufficient. Cheese making fit the bill for many years, but as the business grew and the number of monks declined, they sold the cheese operation, moved to this secluded location and built a smaller monastery to accommodate the 24 monks.

They turned to chocolate making, and soon gained a reputation for specialties like haskap chocolates. They also process and package natural forest products such as Labrador tea and dried mush-

rooms, and offer lessons on how to find edibles in the wild.

Their signature product is fruit cake, made with green tomatoes. They have been successful in convincing people that fruit cake should be eaten anytime, not only at Christmas.

The modern wooden building was designed to blend into the forest, with the interior carefully engineered for acoustics.

An interesting idiosyncrasy of the order is that the monks do not speak during the day, yet they sing several times a day in choral prayer.

Throughout the area, the underlying theme is getting close to

nature, but doing it in comfort, while enjoying a stay at any of the lodges and hotels in attractive settings.

One of the best views we had was from the Hotel Sacacomie, a hilltop log complex overlooking Sacacomie Lake, with a backdrop of forested hills in the Mastigouche Wildlife Reserve.

Guests come for a range of activities from fishing to canoeing, hiking and wildlife viewing. But the hotel's star attraction is its guide, Gaspard Bourke, a larger-than-life character and local legend.

The former trapper and wilderness expert's job is to introduce

visitors to the flora and fauna and help them appreciate nature.

He dresses the part of a quintessential traditional woodsman, with a red checkered lumberjack-style shirt and feather-adorned floppy hat. We followed Gaspard along forested trails to a trapper's cabin where he spoke about the life of a trapper in the bush and how nature can refresh your spirit.

"Listen. Let nature speak to you," he often said.

For more information, visit www.quebecauthentique.com.

Arlene and Robin Karpan are well-travelled writers based in Saskatoon. Contact: travel@producer.com.

NEW IMMIGRANT

Sask. farmers help Ukrainian family put down roots

Hired hand is grateful for the opportunity to escape his country's political and economic instability

BY CRISTALEE FROESE
FREELANCE WRITER

GLENAVON, Sask. — One Saskatchewan farmer's labour shortage opened doors to a brighter future for a Ukrainian immigrant and his young family.

This spring, Glenavon grain farmer Dave Iluk counted himself lucky for having had a dedicated hired man for nearly two decades, but that arrangement was coming to an end.

"(Tony Sebastian) was in his late 70s and still climbing up a bin,"

said Iluk.

A valued worker, he worked long hours during seeding and harvest and remained on call in the off-season as needed.

"Tony was honestly doing it for fun," said Dave's wife, Karen.

To find a new worker, the Iluks

turned to the International Labour Centre, which presented the couple with several resumes to choose from.

A Skype interview followed with the chosen candidate, Sergii Mashchenko.

The 31-year-old Ukrainian agri-

cultural graduate was not a stranger to the international workplace, having worked in Denmark, Sweden and the U.S. as part of his plan to try to get to Canada.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE >>