

# into the Wild

The Canadians are proud of their country and have been something of pioneers in responsible travel. Aaron Cork visits Gaspésie Peninsula, a fine example of this ethos.



Moose, Parc de la Gaspésie



View of Percé



Canada's best kept secret is tucked away in a remote corner of Québec. Gaspésie is a stunningly beautiful peninsula, blessed with untouched wilderness, a rich and varied culture, very few roads and abundant wildlife. Flanked by the mighty St Lawrence River, Gaspésie is well known among Québécois, but remains relatively undiscovered by the wider world. From the outset the area's tour operators and hotels have been determined to embrace the responsible travel ethos.

During my recent visit to the region, I spent a relaxing few days at Chic-Chocs Mountain Lodge, a remote and very comfortable property whose approach to sustainability is particularly thoughtful. Perched high on the slopes of the Réserve Faunique de Matane it overlooks a breathtaking panorama of mountains, lakes and waterfalls. Its immediate surroundings are rich in wildlife, including moose and caribou.

At the lodge the local environment and community are given priority. Firstly, the lodge employs local guides who know the region intimately and have a vested interest in preserving it for years to come. In an area that is slowly losing its younger generations to the lure of Montréal, I found this local touch to be an important part of my Canadian experience. My bilingual guide, Luke (in his early twenties), grew up on the Gaspésie Peninsula and I found his enthusiasm and knowledge of the local area contagious.

It was good to see that only biodegradable soaps and recycled paper are used onsite. Even more impressive were the purpose-built peat-moss water treatment system and the energy-efficient glycol electricity system which provide ecological and low-impact solutions to the inevitable problems of power and waste.



Chic-Chocs Mountain Lodge

Not surprisingly for French-Canada, meals are an integral part of the day and something to really look forward to. In true Gaspésian style, meals are shared around large tables with fellow travellers and staff alike. The lodge's policy even extends to the kitchen, where Chef Boucher prepares his fine cuisine using locally-grown organic produce including salmon, game and seasonal fresh fruit and vegetables. Pastries, breads, yogurt and desserts are all made at the lodge, reducing food miles. The chef's favourite nightly game was 'guess-the-flavour-of-the-ice cream'!

From Chic-Chocs Mountain Lodge I travelled along the perimeter of Gaspésie to Forillon National Park at the end of the peninsula, where the towering cliffs of the Appalachian mountain range finally drop away into the Gulf of St Lawrence. Here I joined a whale watching tour in the Bay of Gaspésie, and once more found the Canadians taking good care of their natural assets.

Within an hour we were coasting among several of the largest animals in the world... fin, minke and humpback whales, and the biggest of them all, the blue whale. Brought back from the brink of extinction, these gentle giants of the deep can grow up to 33 metres long and are a truly inspiring sight. Strict guidelines ensure the animals weren't disturbed and the guide's commentary was intelligent and informed.

The nearby Rocher Percé and Bonaventure Island are amongst Québec's most recognisable natural sights, two irresistibly photogenic rocky outcrops that are home to North America's largest gannet colonies, with up to 60,000 birds. Tourism on the island is tightly controlled by Parcs Québec, and visitors are briefed on how to observe the wildlife without impacting or affecting the birds' behaviour. Due to the fragility of the local flora and fauna, my local guide and park warden was

committed to finding a balance between tourism, sustainable development and conservation in this unique region.

Responsible travel is not about restricting what you do when abroad. It is more a matter of learning more about your surroundings: with an understanding of the local situation it's natural to want to make a positive impact. Often, the experience is more rewarding and authentic, providing a benefit to both the host community and the traveller alike. My experience in the remote Gaspésie region of Québec was certainly made all the better by the pervasive environmental ethos and I believe it has set a very high standard against which my future travels will be judged.

**Aaron Cork**  
Canada Specialist

## Competition winner

Thank you to the large number of people who entered our heli-hiking competition. The winner, drawn randomly from the correct entrants, was Elizabeth Layhe from Scotland. Elizabeth wins a week-long trip heli-hiking in the Columbia mountains.

The answers to the quiz were:

- 1: Canada's first national park was Banff National Park.
- 2: The UNESCO-recognised fossil beds are the Burgess Shale in Yoho National Park.
- 3: Mount Edith Cavell in the Rocky Mountains are named after a WWI nurse.
- 4: Mount Robson is the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies.
- 5: The four mountain ranges that make up the Columbia Mountains are Cariboo, Monashee, Selkirk and Purcell.

## FACT FILE

A two-week self drive trip to Gaspésie costs from £2,400 per person based upon two people sharing. Prices include return flights, car hire and 14 nights' accommodation, including three nights at Chic-Chocs Mountain Lodge. For further details please contact Aaron on 01993 838 709.

