

Montreal to the Gaspé Peninsula

Ride from Montreal following the north shore of the St Lawrence River to Baie Comeau, crossing to the scenic roads of the Gaspé Peninsula.

French-speaking Quebec is totally unique within North America. A province of contrasts, it blends old world and new, featuring stylish cities within an awe-inspiring wilderness. Stretching almost 2,000 km (1,243 miles) from north to south, the northern regions encompass enormous expanses of forest and tundra. Southern Quebec is easily accessible and split by the St Lawrence River, which flows from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean.

▽ *The busy skyline of Quebec City.*



Dine on fine, French cuisine and ride the Chemin du Roy, or 'Royal Way'. Follow the St Lawrence River on winding roads and through pretty villages along La Route des Baleines, or 'the Whale Route', then cross to the Gaspé Peninsula, which juts into the ocean for over 500 km (310 miles). This is a motorcycle ride that takes you through a land of mountains, vast lakes and mighty rivers, and with a good range of accommodation options and the choice of riding short daily distances, it is a journey that can be done at a leisurely pace.

The Route

The following route gives you a taste of the southeast region of this huge country. Ten days to two weeks will allow for time off the bike to explore the national parks.

From Montreal, motor along the Chemin du Roy. This route was built in 1735 to link Montreal, Trois Rivières and Quebec City, and for over a century conveyed mail and travellers by stagecoach or sleigh, via 29 relay stations. At full gallop the journey could be made in two days. Today it is an easy day's ride, as HW138 follows the old road for approximately 250 km (155 miles), meandering through beautiful scenery and picturesque villages along the north shore of the mighty St Lawrence River towards Quebec City, a capital that combines its modern French style with ancient cobbled streets and historic buildings.

From Quebec City, La Route des Baleines runs for 266 km (165 miles) to Baie Comeau, where you cross to the Gaspé Peninsula. Running through the beautiful UNESCO-protected Charlevoix region, which stretches from the Beaupre Coast to the Saguenay Fjord, the road winds through rural villages, valleys and rolling hills. At the pretty town of Baie St Paul take the coast-hugging HW362, which twists and turns through many hilltop villages.

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The soft landscape eventually gives way to more dramatic rocky outcrops and sheer cliffs, where the Saguenay River meets one of the world's longest fjords and smashes its way into the St Lawrence River. This mixing of the cold sea waters with the freshwater of the Saguenay River produces a rich crop of plankton, and in the summer months migratory whales flock to the area to feed. To see so many species of whale in one area is a magical and humbling experience.

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From Saint-Siméon the HW170 twists its way for 125 km (78 miles) to the Parc du Saguenay, hitting the enormous fjord after about 50 km (31 miles). There are no bridges until the crossing at Chicoutimi, where you can return along the opposite side of the fjord, picking up the HW132 again to follow it for another 200 km (125 miles) to Baie Comeau, passing lakes, forests and sandy inlets. A ferry crosses to Matane on the northern shores of the mountainous Gaspé Peninsula, where ravines cut through forested slopes and mountains tumble to a ragged coastline. This is superb motorcycle country, with enough riding and walking routes to occupy you for days. The road hugs the coastline around the peninsula, sometimes squeezing between the ocean and the mountains as it twists and turns, passing picturesque coves and coastal villages, through the Parc National de Forillon and on to Bay for fantastic ocean views to the point where, in 1534, French explorer Jacques Cartier 'discovered' the Gulf of St Lawrence which he named Canada.

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BIKE: It is possible to take your own bike into Canada. Bike hire is available in Montreal. There are operators offering bike-inclusive tours.

WEATHER WATCH: Mid-May to mid-October is the best time to visit.

EXTENDING THE RIDE: Head from Montreal to Vermont for a ride around New England, or from the Gaspé Peninsula ride through New Brunswick to Nova Scotia.

