

Francophile Family Travel Made Easier

by Kim Orlando, Traveling Mom

From Quebec, Canada, to Lafayette, Louisiana, French influence can be found across North America. Now, there's an easy way for a Francophile to find and follow the French: a new website travelers can use to discover where to find French culture. A few spots might surprise you. Get ideas to create your own personalized French-themed family vacation on the Francophone Trail.



Quebec City is a wonderful place to immerse kids into French culture. Photo Credit: Kim Orlando

Francophile Delight

Raising global minded, culturally sensitive kids is important to me and introducing them to more than one language is a gift. I believe there are incredible cultural experiences available everywhere and North America has an abundance of diverse opportunities.

Cities such as La Grang, Illinooh (La Grange, Illinois); Racine, Wisconsin, and Lexington, Kentucky, were founded by the French. They are just three of the US cities that have joined scores more in Canada and the Caribbean to form the [Francophone and Francophile Network of Cities](#). The website lists the association members (the website is in French, but you can click a button for the English translation).

While the website isn't as helpful as I would hope it to be (yet), it is a good place to start if, for example, you have a child who is studying French and wants to dive more deeply into French culture. You can find the list of cities on the website, choose one or two you would like to explore, then click around the web for more information about visiting. (For example, you could find these [9 free things to do in Lexington](#), or this one with the info you need to visit the [Quebec Winter Carnival](#), or this about [visiting Biloxi, Mississippi, with kids](#) all on TravelingMom.)



First selfie for the Mayor of Quebec. Photo Credit: Kim Orlando

The Francophile Network was announced with great fanfare in late 2015 at a summit meeting in Quebec City, one of my favorite cities. The meeting drew 335 representatives from cities with French roots.

Immersed in French Culture

Quebec City, the birthplace of French North America, is a wonderful place to be immersed in French culture, food and language. I brought my teen daughter with me to the Summit, so I saw first-hand how immersion in another culture can expand someone's world view.



Freshly made crepes- a delicious French treat. Photo Credit: Kim Orlando

My daughter took Italian in school, but she was swept away by her French surroundings. She journeyed out alone and found Quebecois — as the citizens of Quebec call themselves — to be friendly, happy to help her pronounce something in French or explain poutine or beaver tail. The city's streets are highly walkable and I had no worries about her taking solo jaunts.



Beavertail is a must in Quebec. Photo Credit: Kim Orlando

Neither of us speaks French, but we attended a dinner and music event that was hosted entirely in French and loved it. That encouraged us to attempt to speak French and eventually we got pretty good at it. Five top French musical artists gave us a sample of traditional French music, as well as more modern styles from across Canada. Even though we couldn't understand the lyrics we thoroughly enjoyed the universal language of music.

Creating a Francophile Itinerary

There are a lot of places to immerse in French culture in Canada. A few of my family's favorites:

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal). This is a must visit with a family, regardless of age. With nearly 500,000 works of art, the museum is the largest in Montreal with temporary exhibits and permanent installations. The children's area is hands-on and thematic—good for parents and kids who want to take a break and explore art.

The jail next door. Perfect for Halloween and older kids, we visited the renovated jail next door to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. It's said to be haunted. The reenactment videos are riveting and the reality of the tiny living quarters is disturbing.



Beautiful scenery on a walk through Montmorency Falls. Photo Credit: Kim Orlando

Montmorency Falls. Even in winter, this is a beautiful place to visit if you're in Quebec. It is taller than Niagara Falls and you walk or hike it, take a cable car, or even zipline if you're a bit more adventurous. The zipline was closed for the season on our visit but our view was still pretty.

Le Monastère des Augustines. Turning the old to new is something that Quebec does well. This hotel in the heart of Downtown Quebec is a great example. Once a hospital, the hotel is now a serene wellness center. Nine nuns still call the property home and you can celebrate or ignore the religious heritage of the hotel, but the beautiful chapel is nondenominational. The beds are covered by a handmade quilt topped with small messages of encouragement and quotes. The feeling was pure bliss. The restaurant served organic and vegan options including the most delicious red bean burger I have ever tasted. The cost of a weekend here is affordable relative to spas in the US. There are yoga classes, speakers, a library and gorgeous grounds to walk. I would like to return for a mother/daughter rejuvenation trip.



New Francophiles. Photo Credit: Kim Orlando

We did not leave Quebec City fluent in French but it has paved a desire to do more Francophone travel and when I want ideas, I can return to the Francophone Network of Cities website.