



Auberge des Peupliers is a historic inn and dining room in La Malbaie, Charlevoix. TOURISME CHARLEVOIX/AUBERGE DES PEUPLIERS

CHARMING PEUPLIERS A STAR OF CHARLEVOIX FOOD ROUTE



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

Hospitality steeped in history meets contemporary cuisine at Auberge des Peupliers, one of the oldest year-round inns in Quebec.

Peupliers is a charming white clapboard Normandy-style farmhouse overlooking the Saint Lawrence River in the town of La Malbaie in Charlevoix. The main building dates back nearly two centuries and it speaks eloquently of its past with original hardwood floors, pine window frames and ceiling beams.

The inn hasn't lost its vintage air, but for comfort and convenience, a lot of the spaces have been updated, particularly the dining room, which was redecorated in 2016.

Peupliers has been operating as a guest house or an inn for more than 80 years, in the hands of one family. Today, Claude Dufour and Anne Rochette — she's a descendant of the original innkeeper — are the owners. It has 22 lodgings in three buildings, with three categories of comfort ranging from basic, rustic rooms above the restaurant to more polished spaces with fireplaces. They all have private bathrooms, duvets



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covered in white sheets and simple country furnishings.

THE CUISINE

Charm and tradition aside, the cuisine is a star attraction.

Executive chef Anthony Nart arrived about six months ago from Belgium with creative new menus and a dedication to local products.

"I think Anthony is one of the best young chefs in the region," Dufour said. "He has studied to be both a chef and a sommelier, so that complements our private-imported wines and Charlevoix's fine ingredients."

A stone fireplace and candlelit tables create a romantic air. Nart's fine cuisine and a wine list of private-imports set an epicurean note. What is striking is that Nart pairs the vintage surround-

ings with contemporary presentations and progressive fusions.

Delicate slices of duck tataki with wasabi are served on slate, and quail is served on large square plates. Some of the other memorable dishes include roasted scallops in grapefruit butter, prosciutto crostini, onion soup with Charlevoix beer and cheese, and such main courses as haddock with anchovy butter, braised pork or venison osso buco.

FLAVOUR TRAIL

Auberge des Peupliers is one of 40 food producers and restaurants in Charlevoix that make up the Flavour Trail/La Route des Saveurs, a tantalizing gourmet tour of the countryside.

The cheese, chocolate, meat and liqueurs of Charlevoix are on some of the most respected

menus in Quebec. With a handy Flavour Trail map as a guide, you can visit the farms and ateliers that are the source of the bounty, as well as dine on "cuisine terroir."

A FEW HIGHLIGHTS

La Malbaie

The snow-sports paradise of Le Mont Grand-Fonds is on the outskirts of La Malbaie, and Champignons Charlevoix is a half-kilometre from the ski area.

Here, Danielle Ricard and Jean-Pierre Lavoie cultivate oyster mushrooms and transform them into tangy pesto, marinades and sauces.

At the centre of La Malbaie, the castle-like landmark hotel Fairmont Le Manoir Richelieu is a leader in the gourmet community.

Executive chef Patrick Turcotte, president of La Route des Saveurs, creates tasting menus of foie gras, emu, beef, lamb and duck at Le Charlevoix Restaurant, where 75 per cent of the ingredients are regional.

The Gala des Grands Chefs, held every November, brings together some of Quebec's top cuisine artists for a weekend of festivities including a cocktail party, demonstrations, recipes and a gourmet dinner.

St-Urbain

Heading north, Route 381 winds through the rich farmland between Baie-St-Paul and the great outdoors centre Parc national des Grands-Jardins.

Maison Maurice Dufour, where the well-known Le Migneron cheese is crafted, is on Route 138, and among the food stops nearby on Route 381 are La Ferme Basque, a foie gras and duck producer; Charcuterie Charlevoisienne; and Centre de

IF YOU GO

The Charlevoix town of Baie-St-Paul is about a four-hour drive from Montreal, and La Malbaie is one hour more.

La Route des Saveurs/Flavour Trail: 800-667-2276, routedesaveurs.com

Tourisme Charlevoix: 800-667-2276, tourisme-charlevoix.com

Fairmont Le Manoir Richelieu: 800-441-1414, 418-665-3703, fairmont.com/richelieu-charlevoix. Auberge des Peupliers: 888-282-3743, aubergedespeupliers.com

Dinner: appetizer, main course, and dessert/cheese, about \$47-\$55 per person, plus wine.

Lodging: With continental breakfast (until May 31): \$59-96 per person, double occupancy, including hot tub, sauna.

Gastronomy Package adds four-course dinner, \$114-\$151 per person, double occupancy. From June 1 to mid-October, with breakfast, it's \$70-\$110 per person, double occupancy; adding dinner, it's \$125-\$175 per person, double occupancy. Children under five stay for free.

Packages available with massage, Casino de Charlevoix, Train de Charlevoix, hiking or ice fishing in Le Parc des Grands-Jardins, skiing at Le Mont Grand-Fonds; snow sports at Les Sources Joyeux (snowshoeing, snow tubing, cross-country skiing, skating); in summer, sea kayaking on the St. Lawrence and whale-watching in Tadoussac.

l'Émeu, which produces low-fat, high-protein emu products like kebabs, chateaubriand and terrine, as well as body care lotions made with restorative emu oil.

Baie-St-Paul

Art-centric rue St-Jean-Baptiste pulses with shops, galleries and food treasures. Chocolaterie Cynthia blends Charlevoix products—cheese, beer, maple, fruit, cheese—with creamy, 72-per-cent cacao. Pralines, truffles and chocolate-coated berries make beautiful gifts and Cynthia's café turns into a kiddie paradise serving 12 types of hot chocolate, plus crêpes and ice cream.

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