British Influences in Québec’s Historic Capital

Québec is a singular city with a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Its French identity as the cradle of French North America and capital of New France is well known, but people are less familiar with its British heritage, which is still very much in evidence. This self-guided walking tour of Old Québec, designed as part of the London Calling exhibition, takes you on a Sherlock Holmesian quest for clues to discover 10 different points of interest that reveal Québec’s historic ties to London and Britain. But this exercise in observation barely scratches the surface, leaving ample opportunity for further discoveries. Enjoy your walk!

The London Calling exhibition is held at the Musée de la civilisation from May 17, 2018 to March 10, 2019.

Many historic sites and establishments offer guided tours that will unlock a world of amazing and fascinating things to discover!

Ask around.
Feel free to follow the guide and indulge your curiosity about the history of Québec City!

Our thanks to the St. Alexandre Pub, lender of the black cab featured in the London Calling exhibition.

Thanks also to historian David Mendel for his collaboration on this itinerary.

The London Calling exhibition is held at the Musée de la civilisation from May 17, 2018 to March 10, 2019.

With the collaboration...
CHÂTEAU FRONTENAC
The world’s most photographed hotel is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year. The Château’s main interior architectural and ornamental elements were designed by Montreal architects Edward and W.S. Maxwell, who enlisted the help of the Bronsgravet Company of London in the 1920s. This acclaimed British workshop, known for such iconic designs as the magnificent Buckingham Palace gates, had opened a studio in Montreal in 1911. In the 1920s, the guild’s talented craftsmen, most of whom were British, created all the models for the wooden, iron, bronze, and plaster ornamental pieces at the Château.

HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL
It houses one of the official residences of the Governor General of Canada and has served as headquarters of the Régiment de la Chaudière with loopholes, and two older buildings date back to the 18th century, with its firewalls, high chimneys, and vaulted cellars. After suffering heavy damage during the Conquest, it was rebuilt in 1762 and continued to be used for business purposes under the English Regime. Lord Dufferin, Canada’s Governor General from 1872 to 1878, insisted on preserving the walls and instead suggested that new and wider medieval-style gates be built to facilitate traffic. The St. John Gate was rebuilt in 1863 (and later demolished and rebuilt in 1939) and the St. Louis Gate in 1878. That same year, Queen Victoria contributed to the construction of the Kent Gate, named after her father, an infantry commander in Québec from 1791 to 1794.

SAINT ANDREW’S CHURCH
This historic church, which was built in 1809 and named in honor of Scotland’s patron saint, is home to the oldest Presbyterian congregation in Canada. Its first members were mainly Scottish soldiers from the 78th Fraser Highlanders who arrived with General Wolfe’s troops in 1759. One of its outer walls bears a crest adorned with a St. Andrew’s cross; the latter is filled with George Rex, or King Georges III (1758–1820) in tribute to the king who donated the land on which the church is built; and a thistle, the symbol of Scotland.

SAINT ALEXANDRE PUB
This iconic London pub is the world’s first British-style pub in 1987. Today the building features the warm and cozy atmosphere of a traditional British pub complete with mahogany paneling, a 12-meter-long bar, brass taps for beer (including imports), and the Union Jack proudly on display out front. You can take a seat on one of the wooden benches from the former Québec City courthouse, featured in Alfred Hitchcock’s movie I Confess, and enjoy a plate of fish & chips while dreaming of driving an authentic London Black Cab, a 1967 Austin FX4 originally purchased in England and on loan at Musée de la civilisation for the London Calling exhibition.

MAISON CHEVALIER AND THE LONDON COFFEE HOUSE
Built in 1752 for shipowner and merchant Jean-Baptiste Chevalier, Maison Chevalier is a study in the urban architecture of New France, with its firewalls, high chimneys, and vaulted cellars. After suffering heavy damage during the Conquest, it was rebuilt in 1762 and continued to be used for business purposes under the English Regime. As the city grew into a flourishing hub for trade with England, the house was converted into an inn, the London Coffee House. Known for its fine cuisine, the well-respected establishment was in operation from 1806 to 1906.

RUE ST-PIERRE, THE WALL STREET OF CANADA
At the end of the 19th century, banks, insurance firms, and insurance offices attracted by the bustling and lively atmosphere of the Chambers, in Old Québec. These homes were often set on fire by soldiers during military exercises, and their walls are built of cut stone in the Neo-Renaissance style in vogue at the time. It is also known for the large and ornate fireplaces, some featuring elaborate mantels with intricate carvings. The café is still in operation and offers traditional Québecois fare. It also features a museum dedicated to the history of the café and its role in the city’s cultural and economic development.

RUE ST-JEAN
This street is known for its historic buildings, including the Château Frontenac, one of the most famous hotels in the world. The Château was built by Canadian hotelier William van Horne in 1909 and opened in 1912. It was designed by the Canadian architectural firm of Ross and Macdonald and is considered a masterpiece of Renaissance Revival architecture. The Château is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is a major tourist destination in Québec City.

RUE D’AUTEUIL
Near the corner of St. Louis and d’Auteuil, and named for its fine cuisine, the well-respected establishment was in operation from 1806 to 1906.