



NEIGHBORHOODS

Quebec City: Funky St. Roch

by [Jacqueline Ostrowski](#) • October 27, 2009 •



An exhibit at Le Cercle (photos by Jacqueline Ostrowski)

Black-clad teenagers cruise down St. Joseph-Est in the St. Roch neighborhood of Quebec City, heading for the DJs and late-night punkers of Le Cercle, one of the city's premier jazz clubs. A few blocks away, a gorgeous, fashionable crowd flirts over cocktails, sashimi, and cotton candy (served with sparklers on the side for special occasions instead of cake) at the unconsciously chic Versa. Across the street at Boudoir, revelers sing along with a guitarist strumming his way through The Flaming Lips' "Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots."

There is not a tourist in the bunch and the only English to be heard is coming from the sound system. This crowd is decidedly local.

St. Roch is not your travel guide's Quebec City. Over the past decade, the neighborhood, just northwest of downtown, has undergone a resurgence. You'll find none of the tourist tchotchkes, brazenly-priced bistros or horse-and-carriages typical of Quebec's walled city. Though St. Roch is only a 20-minute walk from Old Upper Town, it feels much farther away; those seeking a more authentic urban scene will be rewarded.

The heart of St. Roch is compact, walkable, and easily covered in an afternoon. We began in the center of the neighborhood, where the neo-Gothic architecture of Eglise St. Roch commands attention, and browsed the boutiques across the street. Baltazar has two floors filled with sleek modern furnishings and Benjo is a kids' paradise with an in-store train that tours an endless array of stuffed animals.

Inviting boulangeries such as Le Croquembouche or Brulerie St-Roch provide café au lait, croissants and people-watching. Down the block, the sunny corner bistro Le Café du Clocher Penché offers an inventive brunch and artsy ambience. Bring your French dictionary to translate the cheeky menu descriptions.

We didn't stay at the Hotel PUR but recommend a peek, at the very least, into this starkly modern, almost austere hotel, constructed in defiance of traditional Quebecois architecture typified by the Chateau Frontenac. Some rooms feature views of the Eglise for a jarring juxtaposition of past and present.

The walk to and from the city center involves fairly steep hills and staircases, which can be demanding after a long day of sightseeing. But we found our second wind and, as dusk fell, joined the throngs once again. Surrounded by the chatter of the bar-bound Quebecois, we fell into the rhythms of this younger, hipper Quebec City.



At Le Cafe du Clocher Penché: buckwheat waffles with poached egg, greens, mushrooms, ham, Brie and bechamel cheese

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