

Life & Culture

TRAVEL

**It feels like Europe,
but it's actually Quebec
— and it is amazing**



Historic Chateau Frontenac as viewed from Lower Town in Old Town Quebec City, Canada *Getty Images*

Nicole Pensiero *For South Jersey Times*

It's been described as "France without the jet-lag" — and for good reason. There's something magical about feeling like you've been transported to a charming French village, while still in America — less than two hours by plane from most Northeast U.S. cities. The capital of the province of Quebec, Canada — and the region's second biggest city (after much larger Montreal) — Quebec City, we soon discovered, continually enchants with its mix of fun, culture and cuisine.

Safe, walkable and home to about 600,000 residents, Quebec City is one of the oldest European cities in North America.

The ramparts surrounding what is known as Old Quebec (Vieux-Québec) are the only fortified city walls remaining in the Americas, north of Mexico. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Old Quebec comprises both city's Upper Town and Lower Town (and yes, they are on two levels).

The Lower Town, founded in 1608 by explorer Samuel de Champlain, houses countless cafés and boutiques in buildings dating to the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as some of the city's most famed attractions. Champlain chose the Upper Town as the site of Fort Saint Louis, which remains Quebec

City's military and administrative center because of its strategically elevated position. Most of the buildings there date to the early 19th century. The Upper Town also houses what is undoubtedly Quebec City's most famous landmark, the 600-plus room Chateau Frontenac, a castle-like hotel built by the Canadian Pacific Railway company, and opened in 1893. The frozen-in-time Chateau Frontenac stands sentinel over the city and draws hundreds of tourists each day, who wander down its halls and along the nearby riverfront boardwalk.

The beautiful Quebec City Hall, built in

1896, is also situated in the Upper Town, as was our unique and charming hotel, the C3 Hôtel Art De Vivre. With only 24 rooms in a restored historic home, we were surprised at how spacious our accommodations were. There was also a lovely continental breakfast (with waiter service) and a seasonal rooftop terrace, where you could enjoy roasting your own marshmallows (provided by the front desk staff). The C3 is located almost directly across the street from an acclaimed art museum, Le Musée national

SEE QUEBEC, B2

MOVIES

Q: Is the new 'Lion King' animated or live-action? A: It's complicated

Josh Rottenberg *Los Angeles Times*

In the run-up to the recent release of the highly anticipated remake of “The Lion King,” the film was generally referred to as a live-action reinterpretation of the 1994 animated classic, the latest in a string of such films Disney has released in recent years, including “Cinderella,” “Beauty and the Beast” and “Dumbo.”

But if you think about it for more than two seconds, that can't possibly be an accurate description, because — the last time we checked — lions, hyenas, meerkats and warthogs don't actually talk. Or dance. Or burst into song.

So "The Lion King" should actually be categorized as an animated film, albeit one using cutting-edge digital tools in pursuit of photorealism instead of the original film's stylized hand-drawn animation, right?

Well, that's not exactly it either. Yes, "The Lion King" was made entirely using computer-generated imagery, all 1,600 shots of it. But at the same time, the movie's creative team also used a range of live-action filmmaking tools and techniques — from lighting to camera movement to set dressing — that have been around for more than a century, as well as a few that are entirely new.

So ... it's both. Or neither. Or something else altogether. Even director Jon Favreau isn't sure what exactly to call it.

"There's so much confusion as to what the medium is," Favreau says of the film, which was developed through Disney's live-action division rather than Walt Disney

SEE 'LION KING', B2



**A still from
"The Lion
King."**
Disney

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**South
Jersey TIMES**

From the cover



Less than five miles from downtown Quebec City is the beautiful Ile d'Orleans, home to many wineries, "sugar shacks," fruit orchards and B&Bs ... not to mention plenty of photo-ready vistas. *Nicole Pensiero, for South Jersey Times*

Quebec

FROM B1

des beaux-arts, where we enjoyed the Miro in Mallorca exhibit — about famed Spanish artist Joan Miro and his final years as a painter — which runs until early September.

We spent our first afternoon in Quebec City strolling down the popular-with-locals Avenue Cartier. This street, with its colorful streetlights that literally looked like painted lampshades, was filled with upscale boutiques and open-air cafés. During our walk toward the Lower Town, we spotted Chocolats Favoris, which had a line outside the door. This place takes the concept of dipping an ice cream cone in chocolate to a whole new level; there is more than one location in the city.

Our first "proper" meal, however, was at the popular Le Chic Shack, where we savored terrific burgers and got our first taste of the region's famed poutine — a unique concoction of french fries, cheese curds and gravy. (As we soon learned, there is "upscale" poutine, like that served at the Chic Shack, and so-called "3 a.m. poutine," a more down-home version served in local bars and fast-food joints.)

Once we arrived in the heart of the shopping district, we enjoyed a visit to the

recently opened Immersion virtual reality attraction. A dazzling 90-minute look at the region's history — while wearing a 3-D virtual reality headpiece — Immersion also has competitive, historical games to enjoy. We got a kick out of it; this one would be especially fun for kids (about \$21 for adults; \$9-\$15 for kids and teens).

To get down to the Lower Town, we took the city's popular Funiculaire, which, since 1879, has transported visitors between the Lower and Upper towns. It runs seven-days-a week, from 7 a.m. to 11:30 p.m., and costs about \$3 U.S. each way. You can also take one of the nearly 30 sets of stairs that link the Upper and Lower Towns; the oldest and best-known are the very steep Breakneck Stairs, built in 1635.

On our first day, we enjoyed an inexpensive, quick ferry ride across the St. Lawrence River to Levis, where we could enjoy a beautiful view of the city from the water. Our first dinner in Quebec City provided us with not only a memorable meal, but also a memorable view: at the slowly rotating Ciel Bistro-Bar, located atop Le Concorde Hotel, which gives diners a full 36-degree view of the city in less than two hours. We savored an array of French-styled foods — country chicken with roasted veggies for me — and

found the quality and service impeccable. On a clear night, the real attraction is the view, which is beyond breathtaking.

Once of the nicest things about Quebec City is how close it is to the countryside. You can hop on a tour bus, and, for about \$35 U.S., arrive at the verdant Île d'Orléans (Isle of Orleans) in about 15 minutes. Known as the "bread basket" of the Quebec region, this a primarily agricultural island, home to about 10,000 residents, known for its many wineries, maple farms (i.e., "sugar shacks") and casual restaurants. We especially enjoyed a visit to the Cidrerie Verger Bilodeau, where we enjoyed samples of — and ultimately purchased — freshly made maple butter, apple butter and cider jelly.

On our way back to the city, we stopped at the famed Montmorency Falls, which, at 276 feet, are taller than Niagara Falls. There's a fun cable car that leads to the falls, and you can stop at the historic manor home once owned by a British royal (there's a popular restaurant there, too). We even made a quick stop at the new Grande Marche, a multi-million-dollar farmers market that opened in June, offering an array of culinary delights.

Perhaps the most unique experience of our trip — and one we are still talking about — was an hours-long visit to the Strom Spa

Nordique. Nestled along the St. Lawrence River, this multi-million dollar spa (open to the public) was the perfect way to wind down our trip.

For about \$40 per person, you can enjoy a full day there (from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., if you like) and enjoy what is called the "Thermal Experience," comprising visits to several thermal pools of varying temperatures. There was even a steam room and an area where you could scrub yourself down with sea salt before rinsing off. It was nothing like your typical U.S. spa — more similar in look and spirit to spacious indoor-outdoor spas commonly found in Europe.

The basic entrance fee includes the use of a locker, towels and a terry bathrobe, which you can even wear to enjoy a bite at the onsite café. They open the spa one morning each month for families, and there are various add-on packages available so visitors can enjoy bodywork or facials. We were totally transported during what ended up being a four-hour visit because we lost track of time. Relaxing in the spa's infinity pool, which overlooks the river, all I could think was "another magical experience in a magical city." We cannot wait to return.

For more information on Quebec City, visit quebec-cite.com.

'Lion King'

FROM B1

Animation Studios. "Is it a hybrid? Even that is misleading ... The trick here was to make it feel like an entirely new medium. Even though we use animation techniques, we wanted it to appear live-action. And that required a lot of technical and technological innovation."

On the most basic level, the film is indeed best described as animated, taking computer-animation tools that Favreau utilized on his 2016 remake of "The Jungle Book" — which, in turn, had built on what James Cameron had pioneered in "Avatar" — and extending them even further.

While "The Jungle Book" had one real, flesh-and-blood onscreen performer — Neel Sethi, who played Mowgli — surrounded by digitally created animals and environments, everything you see in "The Lion King" is the product of digital artists painting with ones and zeroes, down to the finest blade of grass on the African savanna. (Favreau did sneak one real, non-CGI shot into the film "just to see if anybody would be able to pick it up.")

"'The Jungle Book' was almost like a first go-round, and after that I felt like I was ready to take out the security blanket of removing the one human element," Favreau says. "Pulling the one kid out, we just jumped over to using similar techniques but now we were going to be completely animated and none of it was going to be live-action ... Every single shot, every performance, is key-frame animated. There's no motion capture. It's not like we scanned an animal doing it. It's artists hand-animating everything, just like 'Bambi.'"

But it's a little more complicated than that. In fact, the "Lion King" team devoted in critical ways from the typical CGI animation process, blending animation and live-action approaches in a unique and somewhat mind-bending way. All of the



The characters Zazu, left, voiced by John Oliver, and young Simba, voiced by JD McCrary, in a scene from "The Lion King." *Disney*

film's environments and animals were rendered digitally, and then those low-resolution computer-generated elements were subsequently loaded into a kind of virtual-reality movie set, where Favreau and cinematographer Caleb Deschanel set about working out how to film them as though they were making a live-action movie.

"We built an entire VR volume that an entire camera crew could be in," Favreau says. "We would pop on the headsets and we would all be there scouting this sort of video-game version of 'The Lion King' with pre-animated sequences and rendered environments. We would move around real dollies and those dollies and those wheels would be operating virtual cameras within VR. Everything was meant to emulate what the process would be like if we were filming this for real."

A HYBRIDIZATION

Visiting that set vividly brought home the way the film blurred the boundaries between animation and live-action, Sean Bailey, Disney's president of production, told the Times earlier this year.

"I think from a filmmaking perspective it's a fascinating conversation and a fascinating debate to have, because it really is a hybridization of techniques," Bailey said. "I remember commenting at one point to Caleb, 'Well, the great news is you can stop the sun when you get the ideal lighting.' And he said, 'No, we don't do that. We keep the sun moving just like we would on a normal day. We have to chase it. Because it's a live-action movie.' I said, 'But it's all digital assets.' He said, 'Yeah, but I'm covering it just as if I was there.'"

Ultimately, Favreau says, the film's

unique hybrid process was in service of creating an aesthetic that felt more like a live-action film than an animated one.

"Traditional 2-D animation has different advantages," says the director. "You can completely anthropomorphize characters. You can stylize the color palette and the settings and there is the wonderful emotional human touch to the way the characters' performances are depicted. But our advantage is that we can show the beauty and the naturalism of the world using these amazing technological breakthroughs."

POSITIONING FOR OSCAR

In marketing the film, Disney has carefully avoided defining "The Lion King" as either animated or live-action, instead describing it as "photoreal." For the purposes of the Academy Awards, however, the studio is expected to position the film as live-action rather than animated, as it did with "The Jungle Book," which ultimately won an Oscar for visual effects.

As it is, the studio already has two likely Oscar contenders for animated feature in "Toy Story 4" and the upcoming "Frozen 2."

However one categorizes the film, Favreau is proud that the process of making "The Lion King" brought together both filmmaking's past and its future. Call it the circle of life, Hollywood style.

"Often new technologies disrupt the whole industry, but in this case we really went out of our way to have a full crew of people who came up through traditional filmmaking, from grips to set dressers to assistant directors," he says. "Just because there's a new tool and a new technology doesn't mean you can't take advantage of the traditions and skills that people have learned over a lifetime. To have Caleb Deschanel sit down and explain how lighting works to a kid who writes code is, to me, a huge part of keeping our tradition alive."