

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TIP

## CAMPING WITH CARIBOU

Quebec zoo offers an overnight adventure amid bison and elk and bears! Oh, my!

By Kim Foley MacKinnon

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**S**T-FÉLICIEN, Quebec — After seeing the black bear nursing her two cubs, her back settled against a tree with her head turned to the side and her giant paws resting on top of their heads as if in benediction, I could easily have gone home happy. What could possibly top that?

And just like that, any reservations I might have had about spending the night at Zoo Sauvage in St-Félicien were gone. Frankly, I'm not the world's biggest fan of zoos. My daughter is a vegetarian. We have rescue pets. I usually find animals in captivity depressing, but this Quebec zoo was something else.

The Nature Trail Park section is the unique part. Here animals native to the region, such as elk, bison, and deer, roam free on more than 800 acres and the humans are in cages. True, the main part of the zoo is more traditional, with polar bears and tigers, but the Nature Trail Park was the draw for me.

Visitors can take a special "train," (more like attached trolleys with bars for protection), on a 4-mile ride to see what North American mammals they can spot. Whether you see any is entirely up to chance; the bison, black bears, caribou, and other animals have plenty of places to hide.

When I saw the mama bear with her cubs, I was participating in the zoo's overnight "Adventure in the Land of the Caribou." There are no promises of wildlife spotting here, either, and certainly not of nursing sows, but the chances are better. The package includes touring the park in a private van with an experienced guide who goes off the main trail. And that's just one part of the 26-hour package.

Our small group (limited to 12) started by dropping off our overnight gear at the zoo at 11 a.m., then we watched a brief movie about the region. Soon we headed out in a van with our guide, Gabrielle Paré, to drive through the park, learn about the animals, and see what we could spot. We stopped at a colonial farm, a sort of living history exhibit, where we enjoyed a simple lunch of soup and bread and blueberry pie while a costumed zoo interpreter, who stayed in character, told us about life on the farm in the 1800s.

As we ate, the zoo's

train drove by and we waved at the regular visitors, feeling a bit smug at being part of the exhibit for a time. Then we were back in the van. We entered a gated region inside the Nature Park for a short hike, where our guide discussed the flora. We knew there were moose and caribou around, but none showed themselves.

Eventually, we headed to our camp for the night, where prospector tents were set up, complete with sleeping bags on beds of balsam needles. After touring the facilities (an outhouse, no showers), we headed back outside the gated zone for a canoe ride on a small lake where caribou were drinking. Since this section was out of the safe area, we had to stick close to the guide and be alert for bears.

Besides being our driver, naturalist, and tour guide, Paré was also our cook. While we unpacked and settled into our tents, she began making our meal, which we followed up with sitting around the campfire and discussing the day's sights. Paré wasn't done yet, though — she brought out night-vision goggles, which we used to look for caribou around the camp. The caribou in this part of the park are used to people and wander through the camp at will. It doesn't hurt that the guides put out food for them.

In the morning, I awoke to a caribou walking right by my tent. As we had coffee and fruit, some caribou lounged just outside the food tent, seeming as tame as dogs, but if you got too close, they'd walk away. The final part of the outdoor experience was a walk to look for moose — which we found close by — and then it was time to head back to the zoo, where we could stay as long as we liked.

Though it was amazing to see caribou so close, as well as the musk ox, wolves, prairie dogs, and other animals that live in the park, the bear was most memorable for me. Paré said she'd never seen anything to rival it, and she'd been on plenty of these trips. It felt like a once-in-a-lifetime thing, but that wouldn't stop me from going again. Who knows what I might see next time?

**WALKING ADVENTURE IN THE LAND OF THE CARIBOU** Zoo sauvage de St-Félicien, Quebec. All-inclusive package June through mid-October \$315 per person (\$280 for children 14 and younger). 418-679-0543, [zoosauvage.org/en/](http://zoosauvage.org/en/)

Kim Foley MacKinnon can be reached at [kimfoleymackinnon@gmail.com](mailto:kimfoleymackinnon@gmail.com).



A black bear sow nurses her cubs at Zoo sauvage de St-Félicien, Quebec.

KIM FOLEY MACKINNON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



HERE

**NANTUCKET DAFFODIL FESTIVAL AND PACKAGE** Spring blooms in cheerful yellow for Nantucket's annual Daffodil Festival Weekend (April 24-26). Pack your daffiest hat and join in festivities that feature a parade of antique cars bedecked in daffodils; tailgate picnic; Nantucket Garden Club's Daffodil Show; scavenger hunt; dog parade; children's parade; 5K race; and other celebrations of winter's thaw. The Nantucket Club is offering a special daffodil package that includes breakfast buffet for two; use of new fitness center and spa; pickup and drop-off service to the Steamship Authority or Hy-Line high-speed ferries; Kid's Club programs; outdoor heated pool, and more. Rates from \$310 per night for hotel room; from \$445 per night for suite (two-night minimum stay). 508-228-4747, [www.thenantuckethotel.com](http://www.thenantuckethotel.com)

**STURBRIDGE FAMILY FARM FEST DEBUTS** Old Sturbridge Village is

celebrating spring with its first annual Family Farm Fest (April 18-26). Kids of all ages can ogle cuddly newborn heritage breeds, and learn what it was like to raise farm animals in the 19th century. The Freeman Farm offers hands-on opportunities to learn about historical tools and agriculture practices, including a chance for children to churn butter, plant seeds, and help with other seasonal chores. Throughout the village, family-friendly entertainment will feature music, storytelling, and puppet shows. (Adults \$24; age 55 and over \$22; 3-17 \$8; under 3 free.) 800-733-1830, [www.osv.org](http://www.osv.org) Special weekend accommodation packages (check in April 17-19, or 24) include one night at the Old Sturbridge Inn or Reeder Family Lodges; two-day admission for two adults and two children to Old Sturbridge Village; two vouchers for the

Hands-On Craft Center. Weekend rates from \$179; weekday rates (check in April 20-23) from \$159. 774-304-1011, [www.osv.org/inn](http://www.osv.org/inn)

THERE

**JAZZ AND ART UNDER A SAINT LUCIA SUN** Pack your short shorts and sandals and head to the Caribbean for the 24th annual Saint Lucia Jazz and Arts Festival (April 30-May 10). The 12-day event features more than 50 internationally renowned performers and local entertainers who will strut their stuff at more than 15 venues. Musicians taking center stage this year include singer-songwriter Robin Thicke, two-time Grammy winner Jon Secada, Jamaican reggae musician Jimmy Cliff, Latin sensation Timbalive, American rapper Flo Rida, and

Paris-based pianist Alain Jean-Marie. Discover a renewed emphasis on the arts this year in the Arts Village, a site celebrating local culture and cuisine. The acclaimed fashion show "Hot Couture" returns as a showcase for both established and rising stars in cutting-edge design. All events take place against a backdrop of swaying palm trees and the shimmering sea. Tickets \$20-\$80. [stlucianow.com/jazz-festival](http://stlucianow.com/jazz-festival)

**FIVE-STAR DEBUT IN URUGUAY** For five-star accommodations at reasonable prices, head south — way south — to Punta Del Este, Uruguay. Known as the sexy seaside playground of South America, the area boasts beautiful beaches, chic nightclubs, and upscale accommodations, including The Grand Hotel. Situated directly on Brava Beach, close to downtown, the newly

opened, 120-room property commands attention with its all-glass triangular shape, evocative of an ocean liner heading out to sea. Most guest rooms offer ocean views, and amenities include a semi-Olympic-size heated outdoor pool, a 45-foot-long heated indoor pool, spa, theater, Roman baths, beauty salon, complimentary Wi-Fi, baby-sitting services, hotel transfers, beachfront services, restaurant, and concierge to assist with booking excursions. Seasonal rates start at \$260. 011-598-4249-1234, [www.puntagrand.com/eng/index.php](http://www.puntagrand.com/eng/index.php)

EVERYWHERE

**INNOVATIVE HEADREST FOR MOVING RELIEF** Keep your child's head upright and comfortable while napping during long car journeys with the Cardiff Travel Headrest.

Simply attach the soft padded unit to your vehicle's existing headrest and adjust the hinge. A flexible design fits users of all sizes, age 4 and up — including adults — and helps prevent neck pain caused by slumping forward or to the side. Perfect for children in booster seats. Removable sleeves are washable and easy to clean. Headrest locks in position when not in use, and flips up for out of the way storage. \$49.99. 888-518-3616, [www.cardiffproducts.com](http://www.cardiffproducts.com)

**GLOBAL TRAVEL ADVICE FOR WORK, STUDY, VOLUNTEERS** Students and travelers looking for overseas career opportunities, internships, graduate positions, and other programs may want to investigate HelpGoAbroad, an online platform that helps you connect with places to study, work, and volunteer while traveling around the world. You can also learn about language schools, degrees abroad — including high school studies — work and travel gap-year programs, and more. Online blogs and discussion boards provide opportunities to read about and discuss the experiences of fellow travelers while sharing your own as you prepare to live abroad. 917-677-2075, [www.helpgoabroad.com](http://www.helpgoabroad.com)



SHUTTERSTOCK/RICHARD GRIFFIN (TOP LEFT)

NECEE REGIS