Eagle-Eye Tours

Quebec in Fall: Birds & Whales Itinerary

Link: Quebec in Fall: Birds & Whales

Tour Overview

Fall is a fine time of year for birding and whale-watching in la Belle Province, Quebec!

Our Quebec tour begins in the provincial capital, Québec City. Heading east, we visit Cap Tourmente National Wildlife Area to explore its varied habitats and look for migrating Snow Geese, waterfowl and songbirds. We continue along the St. Lawrence through the Charlevoix region, enjoying the autumn scenery and visiting Île aux Coudres to look for shorebirds and seabirds

Tadoussac is our base for four nights as we explore the north shore's forests, wetlands and coastal birding sites. At the Tadoussac Bird Observatory, we watch for migrating songbirds and raptors. A whale-watching excursion takes us onto the St. Lawrence in search of Beluga, Minke, Fin and Humpback Whales. A separate pelagic birding excursion takes us in search of Razorbills, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Atlantic Puffins and Parasitic Jaegers.

After crossing the St. Lawrence, we return towards Québec City along the south shore, enjoying riverside communities, farmland and autumn scenery. Along the way, we explore salt marshes and tidal flats for migrating shorebirds and waterfowl.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Québec City



Québec City, a World Heritage City, is the beautiful capital of the province of Québec, situated on the St. Lawrence River. It will be the starting point for our Quebec birding and whale tour. We will meet for dinner to discuss our upcoming adventure. We encourage you to arrive a day before the tour to enjoy Old Québec City on your own. Night in Québec City, near the airport.

Day 2: Cap-Tourmente National Wildlife Area



We will head to Cap Tourmente National Wildlife Area early in the morning to explore the varied habitats of this important refuge: mixed-wood forests, ponds, fields, freshwater and saltwater marshes, and the St. Lawrence River. Our visit will include a stop at the banding station, where we will learn about its migration research and have an opportunity to see small passerines up close. Along the wooded trails, we will look for mixed flocks of migrating songbirds, including Yellow-rumped Warblers and Blue-headed Vireos. Cap Tourmente is an important stopover for Snow Geese, which feed and rest in the marshes and nearby fields during migration. We will scan for gathering flocks and watch for birds arriving or taking flight over the marshes, while checking the water for migrating ducks. We then continue northeast along the scenic shoreline of the St. Lawrence River to Baie-Saint-Paul. Night in Baie-Saint-Paul.

Day 3: Baie-Saint-Paul to Tadoussac



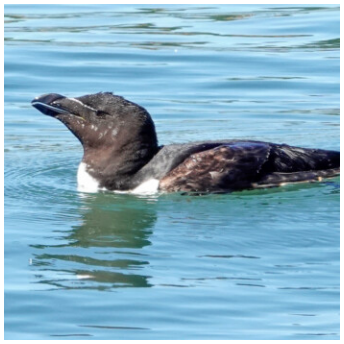
The area around Baie-Saint-Paul offers a variety of birding opportunities during fall migration. Today we will take the ferry to Île aux Coudres, where we will explore the island's shoreline in search of seabirds, waterfowl and shorebirds. At Pointe du Bout d'en Bas, trails around the point offer opportunities to look for Northern Harriers over open fields and Surf Scoters offshore. Back on the mainland, we continue northeast through the Charlevoix region, enjoying the fall scenery along the St. Lawrence. Before crossing the Saguenay Fjord by ferry, we will stop at the Pointe-Noire Interpretation and Observation Centre. From this viewpoint, we will watch for Harbour Seals, Gray Seals and Beluga Whales around the confluence of the Saguenay and St. Lawrence rivers. Tadoussac will be our base for the next four nights, giving us time to explore its varied birding sites and the nearby waters of the St. Lawrence. Night in Tadoussac.

Day 4: Tadoussac—Bird Migration and Whale Watching



We will begin at the Tadoussac Dunes, where migrating birds follow the coastline rather than cross the broad waters of the St. Lawrence. From the Tadoussac Bird Observatory's lookout, we will watch for Sharp-shinned Hawks, Broad-winged Hawks and Peregrine Falcons passing overhead. The numbers and variety change with the weather, making each visit different. In nearby wooded areas, we will look for Canada Jays, Boreal Chickadees and boreal finches. Weather permitting, we will head onto the St. Lawrence for a whale-watching excursion near the confluence of the Saguenay and St. Lawrence rivers. We will watch for Belugas breaking the surface and Minke and Fin Whales feeding in these productive waters, with the possibility of Humpback or Blue Whale and White-sided Dolphins. Seabirds also gather here to feed, giving us more to watch between whale sightings. Night in Tadoussac.

Day 5: Pelagic Birding and the North Shore



This morning we will head to Les Escoumins for a pelagic birding excursion on the St. Lawrence. We will look for Black-legged Kittiwakes, Razorbills and Black Guillemots, and watch for Parasitic Jaegers pursuing other seabirds. We will also scan for Red-necked Phalaropes and unusual gulls, with the possibility of encountering Atlantic Puffins. In the afternoon, we will make stops along the north shore of the St. Lawrence for shore-based birding, looking for gulls and waterfowl. Bonaparte's Gulls can congregate in large numbers, and we will scan offshore for Common Eiders. We will also take a walk at the Cap de Bon-Désir Interpretation and Observation Centre, where we will scan the St. Lawrence for seabirds and the spouts of whales surfacing offshore. Night in Tadoussac.

Day 6: Lac Beaulieu and Pointe à Émile



Today we will explore a mix of inland and coastal habitats northeast of Tadoussac, including Lac Beaulieu and Pointe à Émile. Around Lac Beaulieu, we will check the lake and surrounding vegetation for waterfowl and migrant landbirds, including Swamp Sparrows and Golden-crowned Kinglets. Nearby country roads provide opportunities to explore farmland, woodland edges and open fields. At Pointe à Émile, we will explore the sandy shoreline and patches of coastal vegetation, looking for Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs and American Pipits. We will also search for shorebirds, including Pectoral Sandpipers, and scan the offshore waters for seabirds. In the evening, we will aim to attend an owl-banding demonstration, with the possibility of seeing a Northern Saw-whet Owl up close. This activity is subject to weather and the banding station's activities. Night in Tadoussac.

Day 7: Tadoussac to Rivière-du-Loup



We will make another visit to the Tadoussac Dunes this morning. Migration varies with the weather, so returning gives us another opportunity to watch birds moving along the coast. We will look for passing Merlins and flocks of Pine Siskins, spending time at the lookout or exploring nearby trails according to conditions. Depending on the ferry schedule, we may make additional birding stops to look for migrant songbirds, including Wilson's and Tennessee Warblers. We will cross the estuary by ferry from Les Escoumins to Trois-Pistoles, watching for seabirds from the outside decks and keeping an eye out for whales, porpoises and seals along the way. Once on the south shore, we continue to Rivière-du-Loup. If time permits, we may stop near town to look for gathering waterfowl before settling in for the evening. Night in Rivière-du-Loup.

Day 8: Gros-Cacouna and the South Shore to Québec City



Today we will explore selected birding sites along the south shore of the St. Lawrence as we make our way back to Québec City. We will stop at the extensive salt marshes around Gros-Cacouna in Parc côtier Kiskotuk, which support abundant waterfowl and large numbers of Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. Continuing along the coast, we will make additional birding stops at Kamouraska and Rivière-Ouelle, scanning the shoreline and river for migrating birds. Along the way, we will enjoy the autumn scenery, riverside communities and farmland of the south shore. We return to Québec City for our farewell dinner and a chance to reflect on our journey around the St. Lawrence. Night in Québec City.

Day9: Departure

Our Quebec birding and whale tour ends today. Breakfast is available at the hotel, but you can leave anytime. You may have a chance to experience a little more of Québec City before reluctantly heading home.

What to Expect

Overview

The Quebec in Fall tour is a moderate-paced birding tour focused on fall migration, coastal birding and some whale watching. Expect early starts, generally around 6:30–7:00 a.m., and long days in the field.

Food

We generally have an early breakfast at the hotel before we head out for the day. We often take a picnic lunch in the field, but will occasionally stop at a restaurant for lunch. Dinner is usually at the hotel or a nearby restaurant. Each evening after dinner we compile the day’s checklist, review the day’s activities, birds, mammals and other observations, and plan the next day’s activities.

Accommodation

Generally we stay in pleasant hotel rooms in locations close to where we want to go birding.

Walking

Walking is generally easy to moderate, with a combination of woodland trails, wetland dykes and coastal paths. Some sections are steep or uneven, and some walks are on sand.

Although many walks are relatively short, several birding stops can add up to a substantial amount of walking over the day (up to 8-10km or 5-6miles in a day). The longest walks are 4km (2.5 miles) at Cap-Tourmente and 3km (1.85 miles) at the Tower trail at Tadoussac. Other walks will be shorter in duration and mostly flat. Please note that the whale-watching tour involves a steep ramp to get up to the dock.

Driving

Most days have a small to moderate amount of driving going from the lodgings to birding sites. The longest drive is Riviere-du-Loup to Quebec City, at 2.5 hours total. We will take many rest stops along the way.

Climate

Weather in late September and early October is usually pleasant, with warm days and cool nights/mornings. Be prepared for variable conditions, including rain and wind. Layers and waterproof outerwear are recommended. Waterproof footwear is useful for shore and wetland areas.

Conditions on the St. Lawrence can feel considerably colder than on land, particularly when the boat is moving or the wind picks up. Please refer to the boat trip information below.

Boat Trips

The tour includes a whale-watching excursion, a pelagic birding excursion and a ferry crossing of the St. Lawrence.

It is important to dress very warmly for these excursions. Even in early fall, temperatures on the water can be cold. We strongly recommend bringing plenty of warm layers, including a thermal base layer, fleece or insulated jacket, windproof and waterproof outer layers, warm hat, gloves, and a scarf or neck warmer. Temperatures can feel significantly colder on the water than on land, so please come prepared for chilly conditions. Even on a mild day, prolonged wildlife watching on the water can be cold.

The ferry is comfortable, with sheltered areas and plenty of seating. However, warm clothing is also recommended if you plan to enjoy wildlife viewing from the outside decks.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- All accommodation (Good quality)
- All meals and soft drinks
- Two whale-watching boat trips into the St. Lawrence River
- Ferry crossing across the St. Lawrence
- Guides (4 - 8 participants with one leader, 9 - 12 with two)
- Ground transportation (typically one or two 12 or 15-passenger vans)
- Park and entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Travel to and from start/end location
- Travel Insurance
- Items of a personal nature
- Alcoholic beverages
- Taxes (5% GST)
