

Biking and boating with Latitude 45 Nord: a truly special way to discover Québec

By Gilles Morneau



« What are we going to learn today, Dad? » My six year-old princess Léa asked that question after a few days into our one-week tour of the Suroît region with latitude 45 Nord. Indeed, we did learn a lot in that holiday, thanks to the incredible knowledge of our guide Ronald. Ronald Houde and Anne Perreault just started this new venture, adapting - for the first time in North America - a concept already existing in the Netherlands, where you ride your bike from place to place, sleeping in a boat that follows the same route.

Their ship, the Latitude Amsterdam, became our home for the week. Each morning, we would eat breakfast, prepare our lunch boxes and hop on our bikes - we ride tandems adapted for the kids - eager to follow the wheel of Ronald for another great ride. The ship would follow us and arrive just in time to climb back aboard and enjoy a hot shower. There was still some time left to relax in our cabin or play on the sun deck, before being treated to an excellent dinner. The four-course « slow food » cuisine was created by our cook Catherine, using seasonal farm products from Québec. The evenings would be spent playing chess at the lounge bar, or experiencing the busy night life of Old Montreal at the beginning and end of the tour, or the more peaceful cities and villages encountered on the way. A visit at the wheelhouse was also mandatory, to say hello to Captain Michel. That way of traveling is fantastic. You pedal weightless, never have to worry about anything, and best of all, you never have to pack or unpack. Oh, and if one day you don't feel like riding, you just stay on the boat and enjoy the sun and the navigation on the St-Lawrence seaway.

The Lock Keeper's Tour we chose took us on the shores of the St-Lawrence river, south of Montreal. Cycling on cozy bikepaths or on the Route Verte is the best way to discover the historic past of this region, organized around the extensive canal system that was built in the 19th and 20th centuries in order to circumvent the rapids that blocked the passage of trade. In the many historic sites we visited, we learned a lot about locks and navigation, but also about fur trade, native culture and way of life, or archeology. We saw the inside of a beehive, we paddled in a marsh that looked like lentil soup, we gathered enough rocks to start a museum back home. Ronald had all the answers to the many questions of the kids. On the seven hours or

so we spent each day away from our floating home, we were riding maybe three hours and stopping for visits – or an ice cream – or a poutine! - the rest of the time.

This was perfect for our kids, even though this tour is not specially intended for young riders. In fact, Latitude 45 Nord perfectly tailored this package with the « contemplative » cyclist in mind, somebody who doesn't ride thousands of miles each year, who likes riding but wants a more inclusive experience. They even provide the bikes, thanks to their fleet of brand new Rocky Mountain Hybrids. Seasoned riders can choose one of the other packages, like the one that goes from Québec to Montreal, or back. New trips are also being designed for 2009, including a visit to Ottawa for Canada day, and a venture in the Thousand Islands area. Check out the Website for more details.



Most Tours include:

- 6 nights on the ship, in private cabins (2 twin beds + private restroom and shower)
- all meals
- a 24-speed hybrid bicycle
- all tours and connecting travel (ferries, shuttles, etc.)
- a certified cycling leader and guide
- route maps

You can book directly www.latitude45n.com
or via a travel agent www.ekilib.com