

FARM LIVING

Saguenay Fjord worth the road trip

TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

Fjords rank among nature's most impressive landscapes.

Formed by glaciers, these deep, narrow inlets from the sea extend far inland and are often lined by steep cliffs.

Mention fjords (a word with Norse origins) and places like Norway or Greenland spring to mind. However, this summer we were surprised to find that one of the world's larger fjords is not only in Canada but is also easily accessible as part of a scenic road trip.

The Saguenay Fjord is less than a three-hour drive north of Quebec City. From its mouth on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, the fjord extends inland for more than 100 kilometres to the city of Chicoutimi, where the Saguenay River flows into the fjord.

In places, the cliffs rise more than 400 metres, and the depth of the water averages more than 200 metres. The navigable fjord is a popular destination for cruise ships.

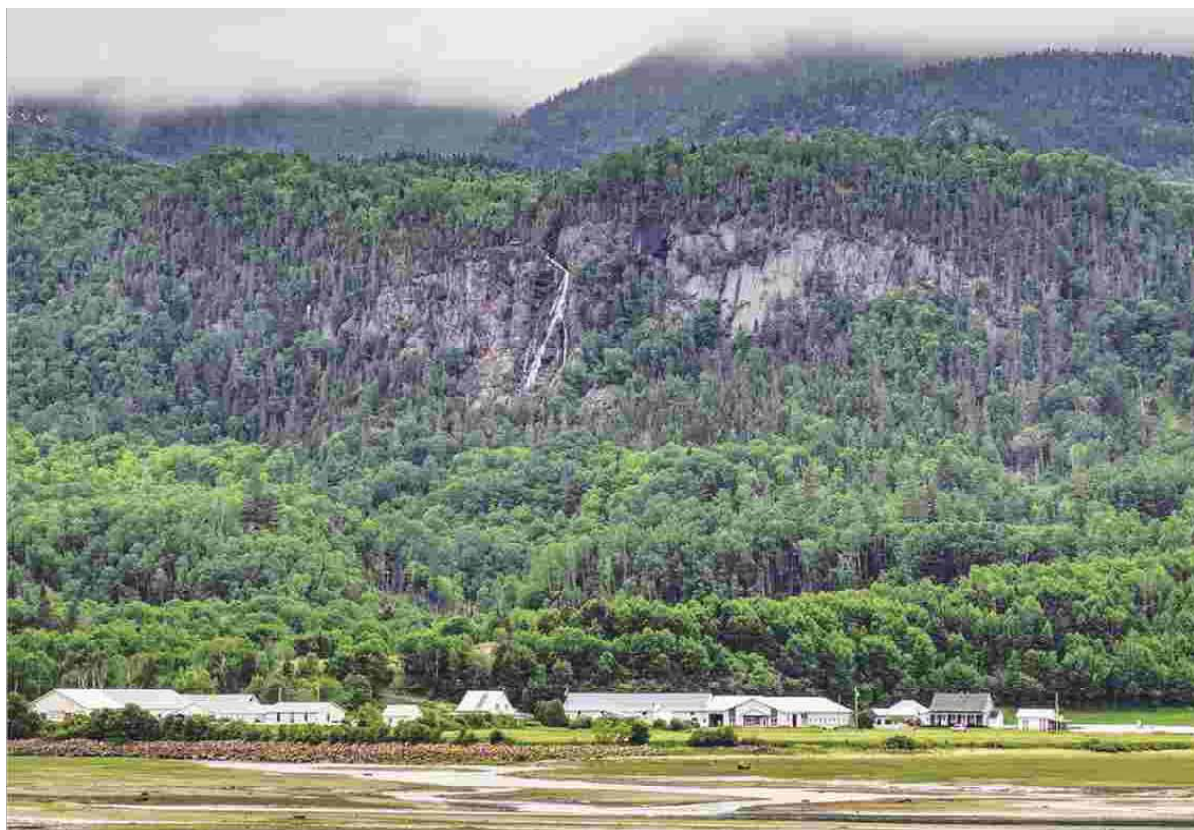
The most southerly fjord in North America, it's unusual for being inhabited, unlike most others in remote settings. Roads run along both sides.

There are two main ways to cross the fjord — over a bridge at Chicoutimi or the free ferry service across the 1.3-km span along the mouth of the fjord. Signs along the way indicate the Fjord Route, guiding tourists to the main points of interest.

Chicoutimi and its surrounding communities provide most visitor services and attractions such as museums, including the unusual Little White House Museum.

It harkens back to 1996 when the city experienced a disastrous flood caused by heavy rain. The dam eventually burst, destroying 800 homes and taking 10 lives.

Though almost 20 years ago, we remember seeing coverage on the national news. What stood out was that in an area where every building was completely washed away, one little white house defied the odds and remained standing in the deluge.



A waterfall tumbles off the walls of the Saguenay Fjord in Petit-Saguenay. PHOTOS: ROBIN & ARLENE KARPAN



The Little White House Museum tells the story of the 1996 flood in Saguenay.

Now restored as a museum, it tells that fascinating story. Even today, it is surrounded by water.

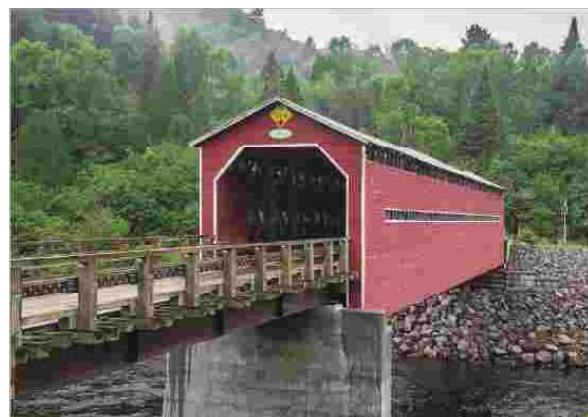
Most of the mountainous fjord is preserved in parks. Scenic viewpoints abound, with more hiking trails than you can shake a walking stick at.

Protection extends beyond the land. The waters are part of the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park, known for its rich marine ecosystem caused in

part by a mix of seawater and fresh water from rivers flowing into the fjord.

Seals and minke and beluga whales frequent the area, and the mouth of the fjord near the town of Tadoussac has a reputation as one of the top whale watching spots in Canada.

Outside the Chicoutimi area, the communities around the fjord are small and almost always in picture-perfect settings.



The Louis Gravel covered bridge along the Saguenay Fjord Route dates back to 1934.

We especially enjoyed tiny Petit-Saguenay, its waterfront in a dramatic setting overlooking soaring cliffs with a plunging waterfall. The access road along a river valley was lined with wildflowers and had beautifully situated picnic sites.

Quebec excels in having plenty of rest stops and picnic stops along highways and in most communities.

Another scenic village is L'Anse-Saint-Jean, where you can drive

over an historic covered bridge and take a short walk to a viewpoint with a thousand-dollar view — literally. This scene over the cove on the edge of the village was used on the Canadian \$1,000 bill.

The trees are taller now, obscuring part of the covered bridge, and a few more houses have been added, but the scene still looks much the same.

SEE NEXT PAGE »

Food rescuer redirects surplus to those in need

GERALYN WICHERS
GLACIER FARM MEDIA

LANGHAM, SASK. — What do you do with an extra 1.5 million pounds of potatoes?

If you're Second Harvest, you pick them up from the farm, parcel them out and ship them to non-profits across Canada to provide groceries for families in need.

The potato farmers are "happy to know that their hard work is not just being put into the ground. It's feeding hungry people," said Emily Owen, Second Harvest's senior food-raising manager for the Prairies.

Second Harvest, billed as Canada's largest food rescuer, was on hand at the outdoor farm show Ag in Motion near Langham, Sask., to connect with farmers and raise awareness of their presence on the Prairies.

Initially founded in Ontario in 1985, the non-profit expanded across Canada in the last few years as the COVID-19 pandemic and economic forces increased food insecurity, Owen said.

Second Harvest essentially acts as a logistics manager for community groups and organizations that feed people. Farms, bakeries, grocery stores, restaurants and other members of the



Emily Owen, left, and Katherine Hepp staffed Second Harvest's booth at the recent Agriculture in Motion farm show. PHOTO: GERALYN WICHERS

food supply chain contact Second Harvest to let them know they have food.

"Anything that a human can eat," Owen said, though there are a few food safety caveats.

Second Harvest has an app through which companies can tell

them they have food to donate.

The organization will then pick up the food and find a non-profit, food bank or community group that needs it. They'll rehome the food locally if they can. The donating company, meanwhile, gets a tax receipt.

In the case of the 1.5 million lb. of potatoes, which were donated in Manitoba, those were split up into 2,000 lb tote bags, and some were taken for packaging. Owen said Second Harvest sometimes works with local processors to wash and package potatoes.

Some of the potatoes were sent to northern Manitoba. Some went to a storage facility in Ontario and as far as Montreal. Quite a few went into Saskatchewan.

Canadians throw away enough good food to feed more than 17 million people, Second Harvest's website says. Meanwhile, food insecurity has spiked in recent years.

Food Banks Canada reported there were more than two million visits to Canadian food banks in March 2024 — at the time, it was the highest number in history and a 90 per cent increase from 2019. High food inflation and housing cost inflation were named as key causes.

In Saskatchewan, Second Harvest has seen a growing number of nonprofits, but also schools, churches and day cares, said Katharine Hepp, operations manager for Saskatchewan.

"Schools are saying we have more and more kids coming to school hungry," she said.

Second Harvest rescued 3.5 million lb. of food in Saskatchewan last year.

"You can see that the need is going up on the nonprofits' end, and these donors are amplifying what they're doing in order to help meet that need," Hepp said.



The Saguenay Fjord provides plenty to do, such as relaxing on the rocks at low tide.

» CONTINUED FROM LAST PAGE

Sainte-Rose-du-Nord, on the north side of the fjord, was named among the most beautiful villages in Quebec. We descend a winding road past an agricultural valley to the community sandwiched between the mountains and the beach, with cliff-lined shorelines just beyond.

After spending the night in Sainte-Rose-du-Nord, we woke up to rain and fog on July 1, Canada Day. Despite the weather, the village still had a Canada Day procession with

people dressed mostly in red and white, waving Maple Leaf flags and singing O Canada.

We had planned a kayaking excursion that morning and decided to go ahead in the rain. It was reasonably warm, and the water remarkably calm.

Fog and low clouds hanging over the cliffs added to the mystical feeling. It turned out to be a great ending to our wanderings around Canada's most accessible fjord.

Arlene and Robin Karpan are well-travelled writers based in Saskatoon. Contact: travel@producer.com.



Kayaking is one of the many activities available in the Saguenay Fjord.