

From Quebec City to the Saguenay

Michel Sacco

A sailing boat passing by Pot à l'Eau-de-Vie lighthouse

INTRODUCTION

Harbour accessibility

Between Quebec City and the Saguenay, several pleasure-boat harbours are subject to silting and inaccessible at low tide. The only well-sheltered site with unrestricted access in this area is the Cap-à-l'Aigle refuge harbour on the north shore. At Havre de Berthier on the south shore, a boat with a draft of 1.80 m will have to wait approximately 1 h 30 min after low tide before trying to enter, and 1 h to 1 h 30 min after low tide to enter the basin of the Parc nautique de Saint-Jean-Port-Joli. The other pleasure-boat harbours on the estuary are accessible only between 2 h and 4 h before and after high tide. At Rivière-du-Loup, a service wharf is accessible at any time of the tidal cycle. So carefully plan your route and show up at the right time in the pleasure-boat harbours. Several sites are completely dry at low tide and the boats are then stranded in a gooey but harmless expanse of muck.

Mist and fog

In early summer, when a hot, humid air mass arrives over water and has not had time to warm up, it will create a sometimes persistent 'advection fog.' Not until a drier air mass arrives will it disappear. This phenomenon is especially common where the Laurentian Channel begins, near Tadoussac, because of upwellings of cold water. In August and September, the St. Lawrence's waters warm up and fog occurs much less often.

Watching sea mammals

Sea mammal watching is regulated on marine park territory. You cannot go looking for belugas in order to watch them. **You should not come within 200 m of a whale or within 400 m of a beluga.** If a cetacean comes to within 200 m of your boat, stay put and wait for it to dive before going on your way. The marine patrol of the Saguenay—St. Lawrence Marine Park monitors boats and ensures compliance with these rules.

Tidal currents

Because of its special topography, the St. Lawrence Estuary creates a funnel effect that greatly speeds up tidal currents. Motorboats that can maintain a cruising speed of over 12 knots in rough sea can buck the current, but sailboats and small craft must plan their itineraries in line with the tidal cycle. The tidal current velocity in the estuary usually ranges from 2 to 4 knots but exceeds 5 knots in three special areas: the North Channel off Île aux Coudres, the South Channel in the Traverse de Saint-Roch, and the area around Île Rouge. During spring tides, the current may reach 7 knots in these areas. When the wind blows there at over 20 knots against the direction of the current, the sea becomes choppy and even turbulent and dangerous. The Atlas of Tidal Currents provides very accurate information on current strength and direction on an

hourly basis. It's an invaluable reference book for all navigators. Please note that the time when the current reverses does not always correspond to the time of slack water. The following table gives the reversal times.

<i>Tidal Current Reversal</i>					
Place	Reference port	Flood current reversal	Ebb curr. reversal	Flood curr. duration	Ebb curr. duration
Quebec Bridge	Quebec City	3 h 00 before HT	1 h 20 after HT	4 h 30	7 h 55
Traverse du Nord	Quebec City	0 h 20 before LT	0 h 10 before HT	5 h 15	7 h 1
Baie-Saint-Paul	Pointe-au-Père	1 h 40 before HT	2 h 30 before LT	5 h 20	7 h 05
Saint-Joseph-de-la-Rive	Pointe-au-Père	2 h 00 before HT	3 h 00 before LT	5 h 20	7 h 05
Cap aux Oies	Pointe-au-Père	1 h 30 before HT	2 h 40 after HT	4 h 25	8 h 0
Île aux Lièvres channel	Pointe-au-Père	2 h 00 after LT	3 h 00 before LT	7 h 10	5 h 15
Traverse Saint-Roch	Pointe-au-Père	2 h 40 before HT	2 h 30 before LT	6 h 20	6 h 05
Île Rouge (upriver)	Pointe-au-Père	3 h 00 before HT	1 h 40 after HT	4 h 50	7 h 35
Île Rouge (downriver)	Pointe-au-Père	2 h 00 after LT	1 h 30 after HT	5 h 30	6 h 55

Distances

Quebec City/Tadoussac	111 nautical miles	Quebec City/Rivière-du-Loup	95 nautical miles
Quebec City/Île aux Coudres	52 nautical miles	Quebec City/Berthier-sur-Mer	20 nautical miles
Île aux Coudres/Cap-à-l'Aigle	20 nautical miles	Berthier-sur-Mer/Saint-Jean-Port-Joli	26 nautical miles
Cap-à-l'Aigle/Tadoussac	39 nautical miles	Saint-Jean-Port-Joli/Rivière-du-Loup	49 nautical miles

Charts and documents

- Charts 1316, 1317, 1203, 1233, 1234, 1235.
- Sailing Directions: St. Lawrence River, Île Verte to Québec and Fjord du Saguenay, ATL 111, third edition published in 2007.
- Canadian Tide and Current Tables Vol. 3.
- Atlas of Tidal Currents.

Vessel Traffic Marine Services frequencies

- From Quebec City to Île Blanche: Quebec City station VHF channel 12.
- From Île Blanche to the Saguenay's mouth: Les Escoumins station VHF channel 9.

FROM QUEBEC CITY TO THE SAGUENAY BY THE NORTH CHANNEL

Downriver from Quebec City, the St. Lawrence no longer looks like a river and takes on the shape of a broad strait 10 nautical miles wide at Tadoussac. Although the tide can be felt upriver from Quebec City, the water doesn't turn brackish until you reach the eastern tip of Île d'Orléans and then gradually becomes saltier further downriver. The north shore is mountainous and rugged as far as Tadoussac.

There are two possible routes starting from Quebec City.

The **Île d'Orléans Channel** rejoins the North Channel at Cap Tourmente. It is picturesque and marked by buoys and leading lights. It's narrow, however, and strewn with shoals, so more vigilance is needed. You won't meet any commercial vessels but there are no places to put in at.

The **North Channel** is the one used by commercial shipping. It's very well marked and its minimum width is 305 m. There are places where you can put in.

WARNING Rough and even dangerous sea forms in the North Channel, at Petite-Rivière-Saint-François and Cap Maillard, when the wind and current run in opposite directions, notably when a southwesterly wind runs counter to the flood current. The flood current splits into two currents at Île aux Coudres and come back together at Petite-Rivière-Saint-François.

When the wind blows from the southwest, you should stay on the east side and outside the channel where the sea is less rough. Conversely, when the wind blows strongly from the north, you should stay near the sheltering influence of the north shore.

PLANNING YOUR ROUTE

From Quebec City to Cap-à-l'Aigle

Cap-à-l'Aigle is the only harbour accessible at any time of the tidal cycle between Quebec City and Tadoussac. Île aux Coudres and Baie-Saint-Paul are dry at low tide and Pointe-au-Pic is off-limits. So you'll have to travel the 72 miles that separate Quebec City from Cap-à-l'Aigle with no stopovers. If your sailing boat can do 5 or 6 knots, you should leave Quebec City at least 2 h before high tide at that location. You'll be fighting the current at first, but you'll have a bit of a lead. Once the ebb current takes over, the sailing will be easy as far as Île aux Coudres. You must get through the Île aux Coudres Channel before the flood current returns. From there on, by sailing 3 miles off Cap aux Oies, where the flood current is very weak, and by proceeding to the Morin Shoal buoy, you can reach Cap-à-l'Aigle without really having to buck the flood current. During the last leg of this route, the flood current will be flowing across your path.

Speed	Quebec City departure time
5 to 6 knots	2 h 30 to 3 h before HT at Quebec City
8 knots	2 h before HT at Quebec City
10 knots and +	At HT at Quebec City

From Cap-à-l'Aigle to Quebec City

If your sailing boat can do 5 or 6 knots, you should leave Cap-à-l'Aigle 2 h after low tide at Pointe-au-Père. You'll reach the South Channel east of Île d'Orléans as the tide begins to change direction. If the ebb current makes your progress too slow, you can put in at Berthier-sur-Mer, Saint-Michel-de-Bellechasse, or Saint-Laurent on Île d'Orléans. If your boat travels at 10 knots, you should leave Cap-à-l'Aigle

when it's high tide at Pointe-au-Père. You'll be able to coast on the flood current all the way. To reach Quebec City without putting in anywhere, take the Traverse du Nord, where the flood current is stronger. The tide will first begin to change direction near the shoreline. So when leaving Cap-à-l'Aigle, and sailing as far upriver as Cap aux Oies, you should stay near land to benefit the most from the flood tide.

From Cap-à-l'Aigle to Tadoussac and the Saguenay entrance

At the Saguenay's mouth, the flood current lasts 4 h to 5 h and the ebb current 7 h to 8 h. When the tide changes direction, the currents form tidal ripples and eddies over the bar at the mouth.

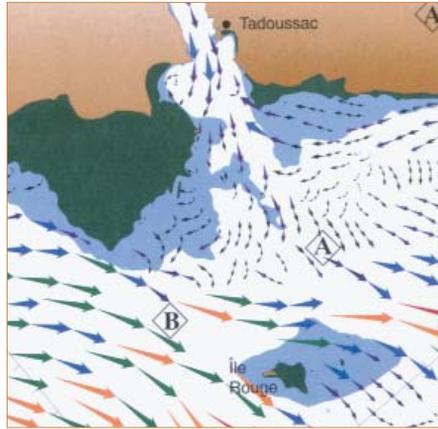
If your boat does 5 or 6 knots and cannot buck the current, you must reach the Saguenay's mouth when the water is slack at low tide or when the flood tide is just starting, i.e., about two hours after low tide at Pointe-au-Père. At 6 knots, you should leave Cap-à-l'Aigle about 3 h before low tide at Pointe-au-Père and leave Rivière-du-Loup about 1 h before low tide at Pointe-au-Père. When leaving Bergeronnes, schedule your departure after the slack water of low tide. Respect the tidal cycle and you'll enter the fjord with no trouble. Generally speaking, navigation poses no real problem when the weather is calm and visibility good. If the wind reaches 20 knots, you should expect rough seas.

Current velocity is important—the ebb current can reach 7 knots around Île Rouge at spring tide. Keep in mind that when the wind and the current go in opposite directions, the sea can become very rough and even dangerous. This is the case when a strong southwesterly wind runs counter to the flood current or when a strong northeasterly wind runs counter to the ebb current.

When sailing down the St. Lawrence to the Saguenay's mouth, you have an alternative to the marked channel that

starts at the Prince Shoal. At the K56 buoy, navigate at 310°V and proceed directly to the light on Pointe de l'Islet. Sail along the edge of the Batture aux Alouettes sand bank. The depth will be shallower, the current weaker, and the water smoother. This route, still called route des goélettes, will spare you the worst of the ebb current if you start before slack water. Its highly inadvisable with the coming of the flood tide, whose full force is felt on the Batture aux Alouettes.

If you're in the Saguenay's mouth during flood tide, you should instead navigate in the marked channel that begins at the Prince Shoal and steer clear of the Batture aux Alouettes because the current will hit you directly.



1 to 2 h after LT at Pointe-au-Père.

denly freed up and form steep and especially dangerous waves. This well documented phenomenon is called the b?uf du Saguenay.

2- When the wind blows from the northwest, the fjord's topography creates a tunnel effect that can generate violent winds and very rough seas during the flood tide (when the wind goes against the current).

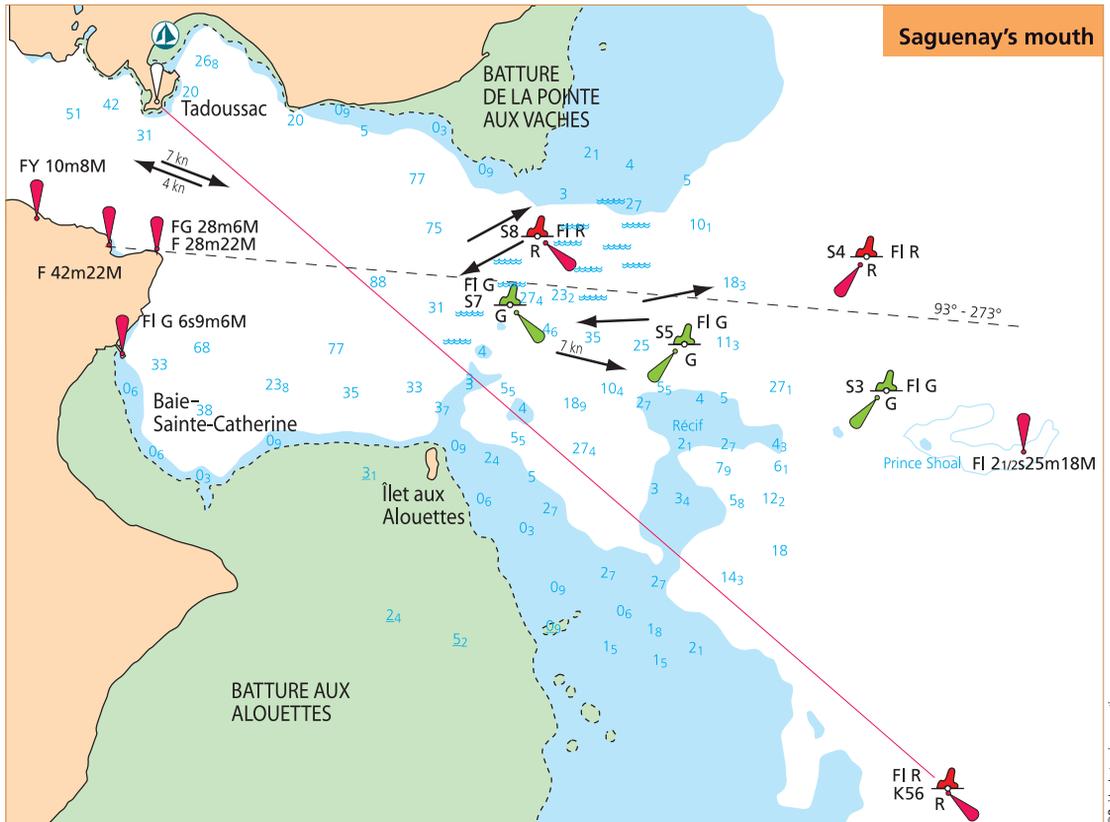
Leaving the Saguenay

If heading upriver and if your boat goes at 5 or 6 knots, you should leave Tadoussac 1 h 30 after low tide at Pointe-au-Père. You'll reach the Prince Shoal when the

tide begins to change direction. If heading to Cap-à-l'Aigle, give a wide berth to the Batture aux Alouettes (1 mile east of the K56 buoy) because the flood current will be flowing across your path and to this sand bank. If heading to Rivière-du-Loup, proceed to the rocky Gros-Cacouna headland and steer clear of the Île Blanche sand bank. Here again, the flood current will be flowing across your path and pushing you directly to the sand bank.

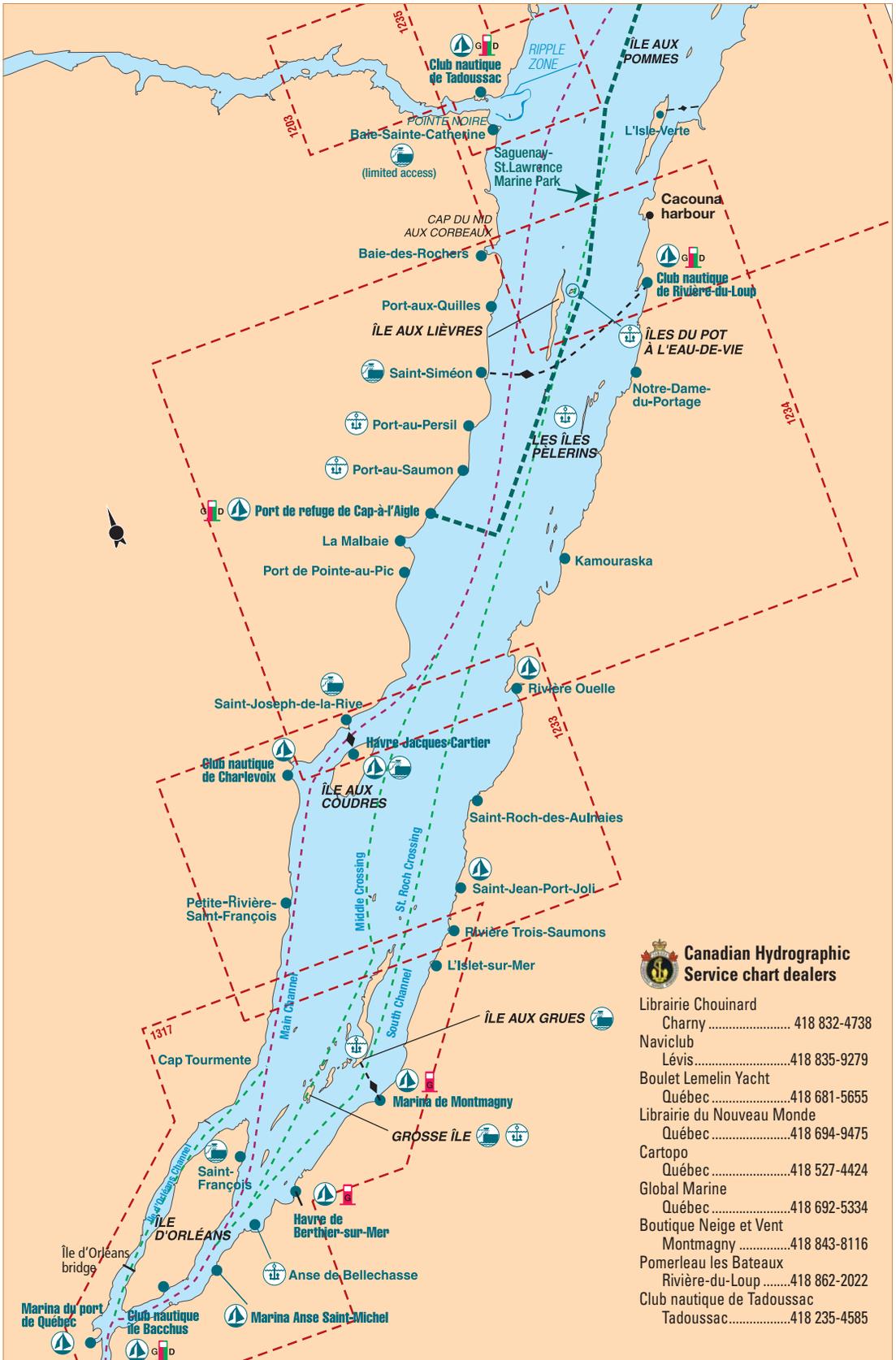
WARNING

1- You must absolutely avoid being in the Saguenay's mouth at ebb tide when the wind is blowing strongly from the northeast. At the end of ebb tide, when the current is weakening, the mass of water pushed by the wind but retained by the north shore current will be sud-



Saguenay's mouth

Not to be used for navigation- See note p. 4



- Canadian Hydrographic Service chart dealers**
- Librairie Chouinard
Charny 418 832-4738
 - Naviclub
Lévis.....418 835-9279
 - Boulet Lemelin Yacht
Québec418 681-5655
 - Librairie du Nouveau Monde
Québec418 694-9475
 - Cartopo
Québec418 527-4424
 - Global Marine
Québec418 692-5334
 - Boutique Neige et Vent
Montmagny418 843-8116
 - Pomerleau les Bateaux
Rivière-du-Loup418 862-2022
 - Club nautique de Tadoussac
Tadoussac.....418 235-4585

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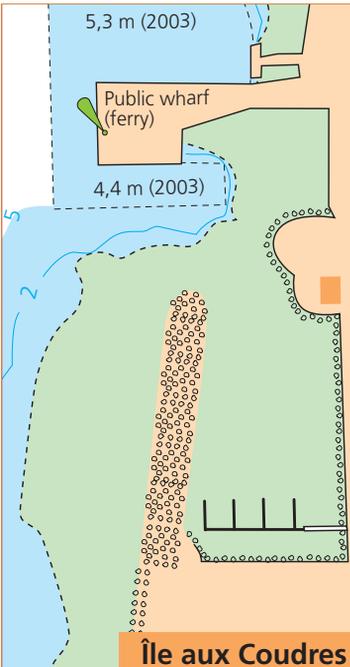
There is a small marina with around ten berths at **Petite rivière Saint-François** near the public wharf. The site is accessible only at high tide and can accommodate only boats less than 30 feet long. The natural surroundings are pleasant, but access requires familiarity with local conditions.

Baie-Saint-Paul

Club nautique de Charlevoix
 VHF 68 • 418 435-6030
 47°25.00'N – 70°28.10'W



You should approach exactly through the middle of the bay halfway between the headlands on each side. The belfry spire furthest to the west is a visible landmark that will show you the way into the harbour. In daytime, the line of red leading lights (private) at 309°V is hard to pick out. You'll see the white front of an inn that overlooks the basin. Leave the rock-fill embanked public wharf to your port side. Stakes will mark your access to the basin, which is dug into the mouth



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Île aux Coudres

Not to be used for navigation- See note p. 4

of **Rivière du Gouffre**. The bay is dry at low tide. If your boat has a draft of 1.50 m to 1.80 m, you should enter around 3 h before or after high tide, depending on the tidal range. Check the water depth before entering. Access is inadvisable when there is fog or bad visibility and you're unfamiliar with local conditions. The little basin doesn't completely dry at low tide, but boat keels will push down into the mud bottom. The site isn't often visited and has a very nice natural setting. The Belle Plage inn runs the boating club. Downtown Baie-Saint-Paul is 15 min away on foot.

- Access is restricted according to water depth
- Total berths/visitor berths: 15/3
- Depth: less than 1 m in the basin at low tide
- Services: water and electricity, rest-rooms and showers, refuelling on request (jerry can), restaurant, swimming pool, launching ramp, wireless Internet at the hotel.

Île aux Coudres

Havre Jacques-Cartier refuge harbour
 47°25.25'N – 70°23.60'W [Green light]



The site is accessible around 3 h before and after high tide and the basin is dry at low tide. The basin is southwest of the public wharf, which has a green light. A ferry stops at the wharf and you might be able to tie your boat up on the west side. The basin is well protected but busy with barges and tugboats. A single landing stage at the far end of the basin can take 5 or 6 boats. The restaurant and the harbour master's office are closed. Just upriver from the basin, you can drop anchor at Mouillage de la Prairie if waiting for a tide.

Saint-Joseph-de-la-Rive
 47°26.90'N – 70°21.90'W [Yellow light]

The **Île aux Coudres** ferry stops at the public wharf. You can always try to

moor on the east side by placing wooden boards on your boat's bumper to protect it from metal wave-breaks. The very high wharf is poorly suited for pleasure boats. It's also exposed to waves from ships and to easterly/northeasterly winds.

- Depth: 4.50 m at low tide.

WARNING
 The sea may be difficult off Cap aux Oies, especially at the end of the ebb tide when the wind is blowing from the east.

La Petite Malbaie
 Between two headlands, Cap aux Oies and Cap de la Corneille, is a nice daytime anchorage when the weather is fair. Drop anchor in front of the beach.

Saint-Irénée
 The public wharf has been embanked with rock-fill, but you can drop anchor nearby (in fair weather only). The water is 3 m deep.

Pointe-au-Pic
 47°37.0'N – 70°08.0'W [Red buoy (K64)]



Transport Canada prohibits docking by pleasure boats in the basin. The basin is accessible at any time of the tidal cycle and has 2.50 m of water at low tide. But it's highly exposed to north-easterly winds. You can seek refuge here only in an emergency.

Cap-à-l'Aigle refuge harbour ⚓⚓⚓
 VHF 68 • 418 665-3698
 47°39.70'N – 70°05.80'W [Red light]



Fisheries & Oceans Canada P. Dionne

Fisheries & Oceans Canada

Look for a flashing red light at the east end of the old public wharf and a private yellow light on the end of the breakwater. Both indicate an entrance channel that is northeast of the public wharf. A second private red light indicates the basin entrance. The harbour is well protected and accessible at any time of the tidal cycle. Access is trouble-free. The landing stage reserved for visitors (recently revamped) is to the right of the basin along the breakwater. The fuel landing stage is accessible at half tide. Superb facilities. A taxi is available at a preferential rate for rides to La Malbaie or Pointe-au-Pic. A new restaurant dining room has been opened recently.

- Unrestricted access
- Maximum length: 21 m
- Total berths/visitor berths: 67/25
- Depth: 3 m at low tide
- Services: water and electricity (30 A), gasoline, diesel, propane nearby, restrooms and showers, laundry, outdoor shower on the landing stages, toilet pump-out, restaurant and bar, small convenience store at the reception building, launching ramp,

mechanic nearby, sailing school, wireless Internet (free in the basin).

SAGUENAY—ST. LAWRENCE MARINE PARK

The waters protected by the Saguenay—St. Lawrence Marine Park stretch from Gros cap à l'Aigle to Les Escoumins and out to the middle of the river. The Park's waters have many species of sea mammals in large numbers. You cannot go faster than 25 knots in the marine park, nor can you go looking for belugas to watch them.



Port-au-Saumon

47°44.10'N – 69°56.90'W

In front of the village of Port-au-Saumon is a pretty spot where you can drop anchor in fair weather. An ecological centre is at the far end of the bay.



Port-au-Persil

47°48.30'N – 69°54.00'W

You can drop anchor in fair weather west of a ruined wharf. The bottom is gravel and the water 3 to 4 m deep. The launching ramp is in poor condition. The landscape is especially

FROM QUEBEC CITY TO THE SAGUENAY



attractive. There is a small Anglican chapel by the shore. An inn overlooks the bay.



Saint-Siméon

47°50.40'N – 69°52.40'W [Red light]

The public wharf is covered with metal sheet-piling. It can be used as a temporary stopover if you're waiting for a tide, but it's very high and poorly suited for the needs of pleasure boaters. The ferry from Rivière-du-Loup stops at the west wharf. The landing stages belong to four boats.



Port-aux-Quilles

47°53.30'N – 69°50.30'W

You can drop anchor off the mouth of a stream. Watch out for the sand bar when you approach.



Baie des Rochers

47°57.18'N – 69°46.60'W

This large bay is surrounded by high wooded cliffs and offers a remarkable natural setting but is largely dry at low tide. A landing stage, accessible at high tide, is installed at the far end of the bay for small boats.



WARNING

After Baie des Rochers, the ebb current directly runs into the **Batture aux Alouettes** sand bank, which extends 4 miles to the east. Look for the K58 buoy to get around this tidal mudflat.

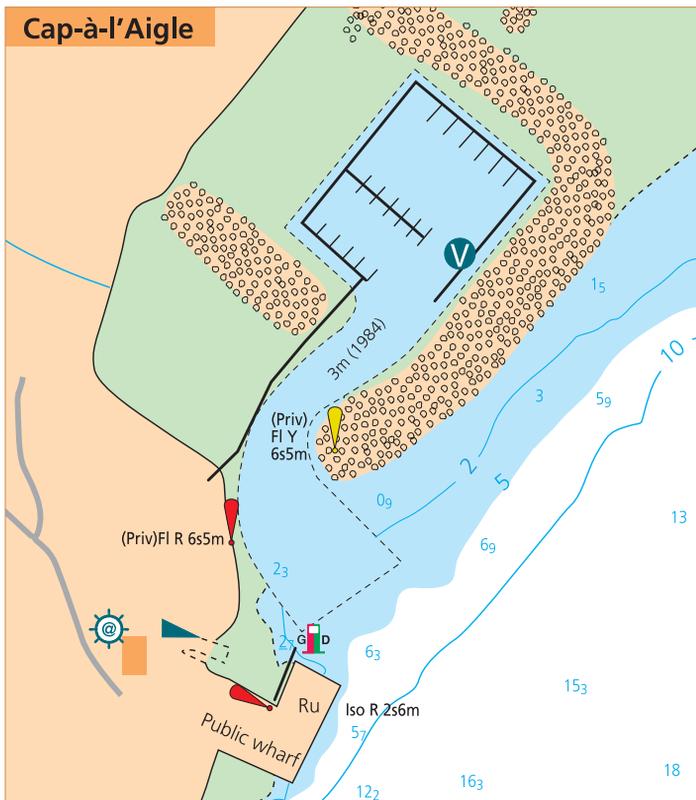


Baie-Sainte-Catherine

48°06.90'N–69°43.20'W [Green light]



A green light 0.5 mile southwest of Pointe Noire indicates the public



Not to be used for navigation- See note p. 4

