

DRINK IN THE COLOUR FROM FORESTS AND ARTISTS
ON A FALL TOUR OF

Charlevoix, Quebec

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IMAGINE A 15-billion-tonne meteorite slamming into Earth. The landscape would be changed forever after it gouges a crater 56 kilometres across and more than a kilometre deep. But over time Earth would heal itself, the edges of the crater would soften and the raw scar would fade. After a while, you might not even know that a meteorite had hit.

That's essentially what happened on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, about 100 kilometres east of Quebec City. A giant meteorite carved a crater roughly the size of our Capital Regional District. Some of the ground rebounded immediately, creating a plateau flanked by deep gorges.

Fast forward 350 million years — *et voilà* — an enchanting

landscape of mountains and valleys, rivers, lakes and forests. All around is the inhospitable Canadian Shield. But inside the crater, moose, deer and caribou graze. The valleys are fertile ground for farming. This region, called Charlevoix, was designated a World Biosphere Reserve in 1989, partly because of its rich natural diversity.

We visited in September at the tail end of a trip to Quebec City. We arrived on a golden afternoon when the maple trees were just beginning to turn the hillsides red.

Travelling on Highway 138, known as the King's Road, we stopped at the top of the crater to get our bearings. In truth, the crater isn't obvious, or at least nothing like, say, Tanzania's Ngorongoro Crater, which has a distinctive rim. But the view