

The Suburban

magazine

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Want to avoid a 16-hour drive? Try a direct flight from Plattsburgh to Myrtle Beach

By Mike Cohen
The Suburban

PLATTSBURGH - For our recent summer family holiday to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina we decided that a 16 hour drive from Montreal was not on our wish list. There is a viable alternative in Spirit Airlines and we happily took advantage of it, flying directly to our destination via Plattsburgh, New York. This has long been a favorite stop for Montrealers, given its close proximity. The city beaches and camp grounds are packed all summer long and it is also a spectacular place for boating, wind surfing, or fishing.

We left a day early and checked in at the Comfort Inn, spent a few hours at the Champlain Mall and enjoyed a nice dinner at the Butcher Block Restaurant. It was the right decision for we did not have to worry about being held up at customs and got to sleep in a little before our 2 p.m. flight. We landed at 1 p.m. on the return home and following

a stop for groceries we were home for supper.

Spirit is known as the ultra-low cost airline of the Americas and home of the Bare Fare. What this means is that fares are unbundled, reflecting the cost of taking customers to their destination without any extras. Every customer gets frill control: the ability to choose what perks and options you'd like to add, independent of the choices of other passengers. Officials at the airline maintain that by structuring fares this way, every passenger has a chance to fly for less than any other airline. Spirit currently operates more than 380 daily flights to over 57 destinations within the U.S., Latin America, Caribbean and Canada.

We were very happy with our Spirit experience and the flight to Myrtle Beach was just over two hours. The planes have wider seats in two by two seating configuration with extra-large leg room. Spirit calls them the Big Front Seats, which are about the size of a first-class seat, but available for around \$25. Make sure to check in online 24 hours

before the flight and print your boarding pass from home or your hotel. If you wait until getting to the airport, that will result in an extra \$10 charge per booking.

Spirit, recognized as the fastest growing airline in the Americas, recently received a respected, independent endorsement that being different makes them one of the best. Air Transport World named Spirit as the Value Airline of the Year at its 41st annual Industry Achievement Awards ceremony. This marked the first time Spirit had received the award. The air carrier known for its bright yellow planes and humorous emails, has only been operating in the low-cost space since 2007.

According to the Department of Transportation statistics, Spirit fares are, on average, 40 percent lower than other airlines. Even after adding additional items like seat assignments, bags, and refreshments, Spirit's total price is 35 percent lower.

Spirit recently introduced five international and four new domestic routes to its ever expanding network. "Spirit's growth continues to be focused on places our customers want to fly to for less" said Mark Kopczak, vice-president of Network Planning. "Our bare fares™ plus frill control™ allow our customers to customize their travel experience while saving money, whether it's for a trip to Latin America from Houston, to visit friends and family in one of the new cities that Spirit will add from Atlanta this summer or for an excursion from Latrobe/Pittsburgh to see the sights in Chicago. Cost-conscious customers can save on travel to more places than ever with Spirit."

Plattsburgh Airport

Myrtle Beach is a year-round tourist destination and as such the direct route from Plattsburgh International Airport is a successful one. "We have had Myrtle Beach service since 2008, first with Direct Air and then with Spirit Airlines," says airport manager Chris Kreig. "Myrtle Beach is a popular destination for travelers using the airport."

Created from the former Plattsburgh Air Force Base, the airport it is quickly establishing itself as a multi-purpose aviation and aerospace complex serving the entire Plattsburgh/Montreal/Lake Placid region, including northern New York State, southern Quebec and Vermont. A massive, multi-modal facility, the airport has an established record of success as a fully operating industrial airport and aerospace park, handling large and small aircraft daily for its tenants and others. We left our car at the airport. Republic Parking charges only \$8 a night and it is free if you are there for six hours or less). Just steps from the terminal, a free shuttle service is available to and from the lots.

Amber Parliament, a spokesperson for the Adirondack Visitors Bureau, a division of the North County Chamber of Commerce, notes that the airport is currently in the middle of a \$55 million expansion with an expected two year construction project. The airport is proud to have bilingual signage, aimed at making it easier for Quebec travellers.

Kreig says he anticipates the terminal expansion project, with the exception of the Customs facility, to be complete by late summer/early fall 2016. "Once completed, the expanded terminal will resolve capacity issues that currently exist and will accommodate future air service growth," he says. "Completion of the Customs facility will allow for international air service from the airport."

Kreig says he does not have exact data on Montreal-specific traffic, but in the broader spectrum, approximately 70 percent passenger traffic comes from Canada, with passengers traveling from as far north as Quebec City and as far west as Ottawa. The catchment area for the airport is quite large due in part to the combination of the destinations served, ease of access, and pricing.

The official title of the Airport is the Plattsburgh International Airport. The Plattsburgh-North Country Chamber of Commerce, which is contracted by the airport to provide marketing support, uses the term "Montreal's U.S. Airport" as part of their marketing efforts, but Montreal is not part of the official title of the Airport.

Where to stay

The Comfort Inn and Suites at 411 Route 3 has tended to be our "go to" spot in Plattsburgh over the years. They have one bedroom suites, which includes a fairly large bedroom, work desk and television and a separate living room containing a

Owner Jim Murray and his partner Terry Meron opened the locale in 1988. Murray was a teacher by profession. Meron owned an Italian restaurant. He wanted to get into the hotel business and asked Murray to come aboard. Before you could say "reservation" they had a Comfort Inn franchise, which they have expanded substantially over the years. It has a games room, party room and banquet facilities. They secured the Perkin's franchise in 2006 to give customers another reason not to have to leave the facility. Canadian clients come to Plattsburgh for the great merchandising deals.

If you forgot to bring along any necessities, the front desk has a magic drawer complete with tooth-



pullout couch, a TV, sink and a microwave and fridge.

There is a free hot and cold breakfast. If you sleep in, a new Perkin's Restaurant is attached to the facility. There is also a Boulangerie Café, a lobby coffee shop featuring Starbucks™ Coffee and fresh baked pastries. Legends Sports Bar is the place to catch the latest game on the tube. The hotel is now in the midst of doubling Champy's Fun Zone, their family entertainment center, to 12,000 square feet. They will add a two story lazer tag arena, an elaborate two storey soft play full of the latest innovations, Lazer Maze, indoor bumper cars and a Build a Bear area. This is in addition to their current 18 hole indoor mini golf, miniature bowling alleys, redemption games and video games. Outdoor bathing cages and mini golf are planned for some time in 2016.

You might want to find time to check out the hotel's health club and fitness center, entertainment room, indoor heated pool complete with a waterslide and other features young children will particularly enjoy. Of their 114 rooms, 28 are suites. They come complete with fridges, microwaves and a kitchenette sink. A gigantic Walmart Super Store is literally in the parking lot while the Champlain Mall and Price Chopper supermarket are a short walk away.

brushes, toothpaste, shaving cream and razors.

For more information you can log on to their website at www.plattsburghcomfortinn.com

The Butcher Block

One of the perks of staying overnight in Plattsburgh is a chance to dine at the Butcher Block, which has been around for decades at 15 Booth Drive. While the menu includes scrumptious chicken, pasta, and other quality delights, seafood and beef still grab most of the headlines. They have a nice kids menu as well. On the night we were there you could hear the French language emanating from many tables.

Since opening in 1975, the Butcher Block has become a mainstay of the restaurant trade. The menu is eclectic and unpretentious, but done with flair. Daily featured entrees are written on a board in the lobby and repeated at the table by the wait staff. This place has an excellent soup, salad and bread bar. It comes with all main entrees or can be ordered as a meal. I highly recommend the prime rib. For fish lovers, the maple Dijon salmon is top-notch. As a side, the loaded mashed potatoes are a good option. If you have room for dessert, consider a hot fudge sundae.

You can access the entire menu at www.butcherblockrestaurant.com.