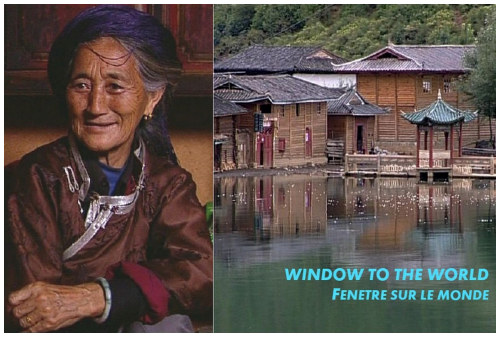

CANADA/Québec: WHALES WORTH THEIR WEIGHT IN GOLD

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Summer 2000 in the little harbour town of Tadoussac (Quebec). Just as during every summer, tourists gather on the banks of the river Saint Laurent, on motor boats that noisily leave quay side or on more sedate ships that take them out. All this excitement just to see "them". They blow and dive, they glide around slowly under the applause of the spectators, the cries and camera flashes of delighted tourists. However, behind all this good-natured appreciation lurks a solid business, not a shop in sight that does not offer the obligatory blue whale t-shirt or a stuffed version of it. Whales have become a tourist industry... and everyone goes for it, even the most reticent visitors. But recent scientific studies have come up with worrying facts: all this traffic, particularly the boats, disturb the whales. What can be done? Who profits most from this "attraction" and how to reconcile commercial interests for the area - that produces overcrowding - with the protection of the whales and the environment?

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