

# Massif du sud to offer heli-skiing

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE NOVEMBER 17, 2011



Massif du Sud this season will offer both cat-skiing and helicopter skiing. The high-elevation back country, 3½ hours northeast of Montreal, often receives nine metres of dry powder snow in a season.

**Photograph by:** Massif du Sud, Massif du Sud

In January, Massif du Sud, a snow sports area southeast of Lévis, will become the only downhill area in Eastern North America offering helicopter skiing (and snow-boarding).

The area's operators still are refining the program, but say there will be helicopter departures from at least three venues: the base of the mountain, a heli-pad in downtown Montreal and La Cache à Maxime, a nearby resort.

Besides the new Héli-Safari, which will take skiers into the hill's snowy backcountry, Massif du Sud already offers a Catski Safari: powder skiing or riding using a snowcat as a lift.

Massif du Sud has a significant peak altitude, 917 metres above sea level, making it the highest-elevation lift-serviced skiing in Quebec, although it is not the highest vertical drop.

On the traditional-downhill side, it offers outstanding tightly knit glades and a snowpack in the woods.

And its spectacular, scenic Nordic trail called La Grande Randonnée winds 17 kilometres from summit to base and back up again.

Le Massif du Sud is not to be confused with Le Massif in Charlevoix, which is on the north side of the St. Lawrence River, about a four-hour drive from Montreal. Massif du Sud is in the Chaudière-Appalaches tourism region of Quebec on the south shore, about a 3½-hour drive from Montreal or 45 minutes south east of Lévis.

The allure of both helicopter skiing and cat-skiing is the rare chance to experience downhill sports in deep nature, away from lifts and crowds, in tranquil open land and snow-laden forests inhabited by wildlife, which here includes lynx, cougars, deer, moose, bears and many species of birds. And then there is the snow – abundant, light, untracked powder.

"You are guaranteed to create your own tracks," said Alain Contant, Massif du Sud's owner. "You are dropped on top of a mountain that has not been skied. True, our vertical is not comparable to the vertical out west, but the total vacation experience is intimate, the region is authentic and our regional Quebec food is great."

The mountain annually records an impressive seven to nine metres accumulation of snow at its base and one to two more at the summit and in back country.

"It snows almost every second night here," said Contant. "Also, our relatively high elevation means low humidity, and we're not near any large bodies of water, so the snow is dry and light."

The helicopter will travel 10 to 12 kilometres into the back country. Between two and six skiers will alight in a wilderness of snow-laden terrain. The excursion still is in the experimental stage, but you can expect three to five descents in a day. Each run will be 250 to 350 metres, which is about one-third to one-half of the vertical at Mont Tremblant, although Massif du Sud is steeper and more challenging. Excursions will go out only approximately every two days so that skiers can be virtually assured of fresh, untracked snow. In the Catski Safari, the rollicking tractor-like vehicle travels two to three kilometres from the summit and there are as many as eight to 15 descents, each with about 250 metres of vertical. The trips are suitable for advanced intermediate or expert skiers.

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The Héli-Safari and Catski Safari are pricier than lift-serviced skiing, but they have a lot included, such as guides, special powder-skiing skis or snowboards, helmets, whistles for safety and lift passes so that you can take warm-up runs. Everyone breaks for a convivial lunch of bison or elk stew at a mountaintop cabin or a tent. There's afternoon skiing and then an après-ski gathering during which the participants are given a souvenir CD of photos of the day.

#### **IF YOU GO**

St. Philémon is a 3½-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 20 east to exit 348 (St. Michel de Bellechasse) and Route 381 south and Route 216.

Le Massif du Sud: 877-869-3676, [massifdusud.net](http://massifdusud.net); opens Dec. 9; 226 skiable acres plus back country; two terrain parks; two lifts; 415-metre vertical drop. Slope-side lodging available at Hébergement Massif du Sud; adult day ticket, \$43.

Héli-Safari: (by reservation only, contact Le Massif du Sud): starts at \$350 p.p. from the base of the mountain; from La Cache à Maxime, starts at \$450 p.p., round-trip with heli-skiing, but no meals, lodging or spa; from downtown Montreal, will start at \$2,500 p.p. for round trip transport and heli-ski; Catski Safari (by reservation only) starts at \$ 250 p.p.

La Cache à Maxime: 418-387-5060, [lacacheamaxime.com](http://lacacheamaxime.com), 45 minutes by car from Massif du Sud, 265 rue Drouin, Scott, offers delectable Quebec cuisine du terroir, a vineyard and a new Nordic spa and chalets. New two-bedroom chalets start at \$200 Sun.-Thurs., or \$380 on Fri.-Sat., per night, for up to six people (or \$280 per night on a two-night stay). Spa visits, meals and skiing are extra.