

## Gift cards for inns make holiday shopping easy

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE DECEMBER 16, 2011



Winter guests sometimes arrive by ski-plane at Manoir du Lac William, near Victoriaville.

**Photograph by:** Manoir du Lac William, Manoir du Lac William

The trials of holiday shopping just got easier. The Hôtellerie and Champêtre group of lodging establishments is making the annual ritual an effortless affair. The buyer, typically plagued with second-guessing and slogging through slushy streets and crowded stores, now need only go as far as the telephone or the Internet. The lucky one on the receiving end will unwrap a choice of vacation getaways with dinners of filet mignon, bubbling hot tubs, sublime massages and frolicking in the snow, instead of another pair of pyjamas or a sweater that doesn't fit.

The organization has created a gift card, a vacation passport for use at any of its nearly 30 inns, hotels and resorts in Quebec, for lodging, dining, spa life or such activities as skiing.

"It is a bit like having a credit card," said Yannick Beaupertuis, the director of Hôtellerie and Champêtre. "A full 18 members have spas, so you can use your gifts to spoil yourself with massages, and other resort hotels work with ski areas."

"One really valuable aspect of the gift card is that it doesn't expire – ever. It's good for a lifetime. So if your 'giftees' don't want to brave a winter vacation, they can wait for next summer at a hotel with a lake or a golf course. Or save it for a special occasion."

The members of Hôtellerie and Champêtre, a.k.a. Quebec Resorts & Country Inns, vary widely in setting and style. The common factor is that they offer appealing, quintessentially Quebec experiences.

For example, Le Village Windigo is a modern resort with an outdoorsy style in the snowy near-wilderness of the Upper Laurentians, where guests enjoy Nordic skiing and dogsledding. In contrast, Auberge La Grande Maison is a Victorian manor in Baie St. Paul where the attractions include art galleries, the cuisine of Charlevoix and skiing at the distinctive Le Massif, which overlooks the St. Lawrence River. Le Grand Lodge Mont Tremblant and Estrimont at the foot of Mont Orford both offer deals with downhill skiing, fine dining and spa life.

Two members that joined Hôtellerie and Champêtre this month are in the Mauricie region: Auberge du La Pourvoirie du Lac Blanc, a rustic resort where family life revolves around ice-fishing, dogsledding, snowshoeing and snowmobiling; and Auberge Le Florès, a charming 34-room inn with a spa, in the artsy, historic village of Ste. Flore de Grand-Mère.

Mostly three- and four-star country lodges, Hôtellerie and Champêtre members also include one five-star destination, the genteel Auberge Ripplecove in the Eastern Townships, and two urban hotels – Auberge Le Pomerol in Montreal and Le Grande Allée Hôtel et Suites on Quebec City's lively strip of bars and bistros.

Another good place to use the gift card is Manoir du Lac William, which embodies the beauty of the Quebec countryside in the heart of maple country near Victoriaville. It is a resort on the shore of a tranquil lake, surrounded by forests and mountains, so it is equally popular in summer for swimming and boating or in winter for snow-sports.

This is a refreshing destination, a medium-sized hotel with a lot to offer, in an unspoiled region. The hotel recently doubled in size to 55 rooms and suites, with some offering fireplaces, air-jet tubs and

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The Manoir was already well-known for its Spa Détente. Lac William's expansion included a large indoor swimming pool, so the small resort has big appeal, even when the trees are bare, the wind is sharp and the lake is a forbidding grey.

You can use a Hôtellerie and Champêtre gift card at the spa, perhaps for its newest treatment, which is perfect for winter, when cold and dry weather can ravage your skin. The Apple Cider Elixir uses vitamin-rich crystals for a body exfoliation, followed by a light massage with a hydrating cream.

Or perhaps gastronomy is your thing. Lac Williams's dining room focuses on such local ingredients as maple products, homegrown delicacies like cheeses and foie gras with berries. If you choose a platter of charcuterie, don't miss out on the delectable crispy chips fried in duck fat.

Visits to the Manoir can include snowshoeing on the hotel's two kilometres of trails, cross-country skiing at the nearby Clé des bois centre, with 30 kilometres, and skating on a groomed rink that runs for one kilometre on the lake.

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## **IF YOU GO**

Hôtellerie and Champêtre: 514- 861-4024, hotelleriechampetre.com or quebecfinestinns.com.

Manoir du Lac William in St. Ferdinand is a 2½-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 20 east toward Quebec City, and Exit 228 to Route 165. 800-428-9188, manoirdulac.com, 3180 rue Principale, St. Ferdinand.

Price: A one-night package with breakfast and five-course dinner costs \$131-195 p.p., double occ., on Saturdays; on Sundays to Fridays it dips to \$99-162 p.p. (add \$18 p.p. from Dec. 25 –Jan. 2), all including wireless Internet, indoor pool, hot tubs, snowshoe and cross-country trails, skating on the lake. Some equipment is available for use by guests.

In summer, there are walking trails and such lake activities as canoeing, kayaking, walking trails and pontoon boat rides. Prices will increase in June 2012.