

Tremblant condo-hotel caters to families

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE FEBRUARY 9, 2012



Le Sommet des Neiges, adjacent to Mont Tremblant's South Side gondola and Magic Carpet lift, is loaded with kid-friendly facilities. The entertainment is low-tech. "Here, we hope fresh air trumps Facebook," says manager Lucia Medeiros.

Photograph by: Inrawest, Inrawest

Kids are kings at Le Sommet des Neiges and, with Tremblant's spring break lineup of happenings, they're in for an entertaining reign.

Le Sommet is one of nine condo-hotels known as Les Suites Tremblant, which accommodate about 5,000 visitors. Built up the south side of the mountain, these lodgings embody a range of styles and price points. The three-star complex La Chouette is the most economical choice. The five-star Le Westin Resort and Spa is a swish, contemporary luxury hotel.

Le Sommet is an upscale, four-star country lodge with lots of essential services for families. It is a handsome, sturdy stone building with such conveniences as indoor parking, fast elevators and a back door that opens onto the slopes. Indoors, it is decorated in warm colours of cinnamon and saffron with dark furniture and lots of wood trim. The lobby is a series of intimate spaces – a library, a television lounge and a coffee corner – all fanning out from a central fireplace that sets a welcoming tone for a ski chalet.

It's the kind of place that you should settle into for at least a few nights, if only because the price drops considerably for visits of two or more days and special deals pop up sporadically. Not to mention that, by the time you have unloaded all your gear, you will want to feel that you are home for a while.

At Le Sommet, you can go strictly self-serve, transferring skis and boards to the locker room, unpacking groceries and ferrying the family's belongings to your suite on a luggage cart. Or, you can turn to Nathalie Juster, Le Sommet's seasoned concierge. She recommends calling ahead so that she can set up an effortless visit. That might mean nanny service and baby equipment, catered meals or a stocked refrigerator, and such activities as birthday parties, snow-sport lessons or a day at Aquaclub La Source, the on-mountain indoor water park.

Le Sommet's apartments are comfortable and relatively spacious – the smallest is a one-bedroom with two televisions, a washer-dryer, a kitchen, a dining table for four and a living room that converts into a sleeping area. More modern must-haves: the fireplace is gas-fuelled and the televisions are flat-screens. All units have been renovated with new mattresses, curtains, sofas and refinished furniture. If peace and quiet are paramount, you are better off facing the front of the building, but I think the units facing the mountain are the most fun, because they overlook the pedestrian village and the ski action.

Le Sommet's specialty is children, from babies to teens. If your priority at Tremblant is snow sports, the location couldn't be better. The lodge is a few metres from Tremblant's South Side gondola and also the bunny hill learning zone.

"Once kids see the action on the Magic Carpet ride, they get excited and lose a lot of hesitation and fear," says Lucia Medeiros, Le Sommet's manager. "And the ski-in-ski-out feature is a big comfort and convenience for parents," said Medeiros, who should know because she is raising five of her own – quadruplets plus one.

Families can opt for together time – or not. If grown-ups want to ski, shop or sample Tremblant's new package with Spa Scandinave, they can drop their children off at the Snow School or the Kids' Club daycare, which is in the same building as Le Sommet. The newest program is the Mother Nature Camp, in which kids split their day between indoor play and learning to ski and ride. If everyone wants to be en famille, one new lesson teaches parents how to ski with their children.

Indoors, Le Sommet's kids' stuff is low-tech. A large, bright playroom for toddlers is stocked with loads of toys, a drawing table, a mini-slide and a cabin for hide and seek. Older children have their own hangout with denim sofas and table games like hockey and pool.

"We keep it simple because there are so many things to do outdoors," says Medeiros. "Here, we hope fresh air trumps Facebook."

Particularly for young people, all visits include snow tubing at night, bonfires around the pedestrian village, ice skating with rentals, plus Tremblant is planning an extravaganza of activities including: a Mardi Gras evening, Feb. 21, at 8 p.m., with music and masks in an open-air carnival. During Feb. 18-26 and March 3-18, special children's activities include: Meet Toufou, daily at 3 p.m., photos and play with Tremblant's roving mascot; Crazy Games, Mon.-Fri. 3:30 p.m., team games with an animator;

Saturday Night Fever, open-air dance floor and live music, Saturdays at 8 p.m.

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IF YOU GO:

Mont Tremblant is a 90-minute drive from Montreal via Laurentian Autoroute 15, Route 117 north to Tremblant's St. Jovite sector and Montée Ryan.

Les Suites Tremblant: 88-Tremblant / 888-736-2526, tremblant.ca; visits include snow tubing, bonfires, skating, First Tracks access to lifts at 7:45 a.m. and village entertainment. Starting prices are for two adults and two children (6-12), for a two-night Ski-and Stay: (Prices vary with kids' ages and the date).

A one-bedroom condo at the three-star La Chouette starts at \$740 (about \$92 p.p. per night), with skiing for four. The five-star Le Westin Resort and Spa, with outdoor heated pool, full spa, starts at \$850 in a deluxe room (about \$106 p.p., per night) or about \$1,048 (\$131 p.p.) for a one-bedroom suite and skiing. Le Sommet des Neiges' one-bedroom condo includes daily housekeeping, play rooms, whirlpool, gym, sauna, starting at \$850 (about \$106 p.p., per night.)

Extras organized by Le Sommet's concierge include nanny service, baby equipment and massages, 819-681-3000, Local 46949. Kids Club (ages 1 to 6) and Mother Nature Day Camp (ages 3 and 4), 866-783-5633. Tremblant's Activity Centre, 819-681-4848, for dog sledding, ice-climbing, helicopter rides, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, sleigh rides.

Mont Tremblant ski-ride: without lodging, an adult ticket costs \$75; vertical drop of 645 metres; terrain: 654 acres; three snow parks.

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