

Country Roads: Stay, and ski, with the one-per-cent at Tremblant

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE NOVEMBER 8, 2012



The village at Mont Tremblant Resort, which can accommodate about 6,300 visitors, shimmers at night. The lifts are scheduled to open Nov. 22.

Photograph by: Rochelle Lash

Decisions, decisions.

I am confounded perennially by the Byzantine choice of accommodations hugging the base of Mont Tremblant. How do people decide where to stay? The village and environs are home to condos and hotel rooms at all prices, plus deluxe mountain chalets. What about food? Do I need a hot tub? Should I splurge or save?

These questions and more plague me, so I met with Serge Dufresne, the general manager of Les Suites Tremblant, who walked me through the 'hood. We sorted out some options for the diehard sports lovers, the tourists and the families on vacation. And then Natalie Lapointe, director of Tremblant Platinum, purveyor of ritzy rented real estate, showed me how the one per cent live.

"Most people choose their holiday destination based on price, so we make sure our packages are competitive," Dufresne said. "And once they have opted for Tremblant, we match their needs."

Many do opt for Tremblant, approximately two million visitors a year including some of the editors and readers of Ski Magazine, which has named Tremblant the No. 1 winter resort in the East for 16 straight years. Tremblant's village embraces approximately 1,900 hotel rooms and condos in a slopeside village that accommodates approximately 6,300 visitors. The rates fluctuate madly, depending on the date, how many people are bedding down in one unit and its level of luxury. And apart from price, you can choose where to stay according to your needs.

For example, kids rule Le Sommet des Neiges, where you can bring your own groceries or request a stocked refrigerator and options like nanny service, baby equipment or a birthday party. And bon vivants can indulge at the five-star Le Westin Resort & Spa, which has an outdoor swimming pool and a swish Japanese restaurant, Yamada.

It's becoming clearer. But I have one more proviso on my list. I figure my room or condo is only as good as its most recent renovation, especially since so many travellers trundle through with ski equipment, bicycles, baby carriages and luggage carts. Given that, my pick of Les Suites Tremblant for 2012-13 is Le Saint-Bernard, the series of colourful European-style townhouses atop the village's boutiques and bistros. Split into two buildings, Le Deslauriers and Le Johannsen, these condos are a bonanza because they are moderately priced and have been overhauled this year with new curtains, carpets, bedding and mattresses. Guests at Le Saint-Bernard also have a bonus — access to Intrawest's indoor water park, Aquaclub La Source.

I have been to Tremblant countless times, strolling through the village, skiing, shopping and eating. I thought I had seen it all. But Lapointe took me on an eye-opening tour of luxury condominiums and mountain chalets that operate under the banner Tremblant Platinum, so-called because of their exclusive cachet, polished sheen and steep prices.

Lapointe and I drove up, up and up to condominium complexes with lofty names like Altitude and Equinox and exclusive housing estates called La Réserve and Le Saint-Andrews. Even the deer look prosperous here. These are privately owned and some are rented out.

Stainless-steel kitchens, polished wood floors and superior bedding are de rigueur at Tremblant Platinum. I visited a stunning three-bedroom, ski-in-ski-out condo at Altitude that has all that plus heated floors in the kitchen and bathrooms, a vast living room with a wood-burning fireplace and four patio doors opening onto a cliff-side terrace with splendid views.

We also stopped by a multimillion-dollar mansion called Oasis that looks like a movie-worthy mountain lodge in Aspen or the Alps. Tucked behind towering cedars, this five-bedroom dream house is equipped with fine artwork, a gym, giant-screen HDTVs, a pool table and a (summertime) swimming pool. Tremblant Platinum will help you to hire a private chef and sommelier, then you can kick back after dinner in the outdoor hot tub that overlooks the mountains.

Lapointe offers other concierge services, such as in-house yoga, massages, groceries, private ski lessons or helicopter rides. She also can provide babysitters and such baby gear as monitors, cribs, strollers, high chairs and snow sleds.

By the way, if Homer Simpson is your idol or if you're a fan of movies like *The Hangover* or *Animal House*, you need not apply to Tremblant Platinum. The owners of these posh palaces don't want the expensive furniture trashed or the designer kitchens messed up with leftover pizza boxes. Remember, this is one-per-cent living.

"We favour families," Lapointe says. "Many guests come for special occasions and we do everything

possible to ensure a memorable stay.”

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IF YOU GO

Mont Tremblant is a 90-minute drive from Montreal via Highways 15 and 117 north to Montée Ryan.

Mont Tremblant Resort/Les Suites Tremblant: 88-Tremblant / 888-736-2526, www.tremblant.ca.

Early Bird Ski & Stay Packages (based on a three-night stay, with two days of lift tickets and valid all season, but bought by Dec 4): At Place Saint-Bernard (Le Deslauriers and Le Johannsen buildings), a four-star, one-bedroom condo, including access to Aquaclub La Source, rates start at approximately \$107-123 p.p., per night, double occ., incl. lift tickets; or \$274-305 per night (approx. \$70-76 p.p.) for two adults and two children (6-12), incl. lifts.

Visits include snow tubing, bonfires, skating, First Tracks and concerts, when available. Extras: babysitting, Kids' Club, Mother Nature Day Camp, and Activity Centre (dog sledding, ice-climbing, helicopter rides, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, sleigh rides).

Tremblant Platinum: 800-909-3171, 819-421-4411, www.tremblantplatinum.com; 6385, Montée Ryan, Mont-Tremblant. Price, including village activities: A two-bedroom luxury condo starts at approximately \$2,115 for seven nights. The Altitude three-bedroom condo starts at \$2,800 for seven nights. A five-bedroom private house (like Oasis) starts at \$7,000 a week for 10-12 adults and children. Properties are slopeside or serviced by a shuttle that runs every 30 minutes to the South Side lifts. Prices will increase Dec. 19.

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