

Ski hills: Deals and rodelling, too, near Quebec City

Mont Ste-Anne romantic and inexpensive

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



Rodelling is a type of adventurous sledding on Le Massif de Charlevoix.

Photograph by: Rochelle Lash

Mont Ste-Anne and its affiliate Stoneham have an astounding deal for skiers and riders who are ready to sign up early.

Claude Péloquin, president of the Association des Stations de Ski du Québec (ASSQ), advises that if you are watching your budget, it's advantageous to plan your ski trip in advance. And these two appealing Quebec City areas are on board with a hard-to-beat offer. If you pre-pay their Book Early Package before Dec. 1, a three-night visit with lodging and day-and-night skiing at both mountains starts at \$91 p.p., per night, double occupancy.

Still, I think of Mont Ste-Anne as the province's most romantic resort, not just an inexpensive date. When you are on the mountain, the views of the St. Lawrence River are seductive. And a chocolat chaud at the mountaintop Café du Sommet has a certain Quebec je ne sais quoi. What also knocks me out when I'm up top is the otherworldly vision of paragliders sailing by. I'm told that almost anyone can try paragliding, and beginners can ride tandem with an instructor, if that assuages the fear factor at all. I'm more at home on the ground with some of Mont Ste-Anne's other winter experiences — ice-skating, dogsledding and cross-country skiing at the second-largest Nordic centre in North America, after one in California.

Of course, Mont Ste-Anne's definitive off-slope activity is a sojourn in enchanting Quebec City. That would ramp up the romance factor considerably. The Ultimate Ski Package at the landmark, five-star Fairmont Le Château Frontenac starts at \$192 p.p., double occ., including passes for Mont Ste-Anne or Stoneham, the use of an indoor pool and a buffet breakfast so fulsome that it will sustain you

through lunch.

If you walk out Le Château's front door, there is a toboggan run on historic Dufferin Terrace and a 400-year-old living museum in the streets of Old Quebec.

A little farther northeast, the creative, dynamic area of Le Massif de Charlevoix always is in the news. It is now a three-ringed vacation enterprise orchestrated by Daniel Gauthier, the former Cirque du Soleil executive turned tourism tycoon. The Train of Le Massif, a gourmet rail journey running from Montmorency Falls near Quebec City, and the ingenious new Hôtel La Ferme in Baie-St-Paul, are two unique options to expand a snow vacation with gastronomy, spa life and entertainment, all much-needed commodities in Baie-St-Paul. La Ferme's 500-seat concert space will showcase a holiday-themed Winter Choir on Dec. 2, with Quebec pop chanteuse Ingrid Saint-Pierre.

On the mountain, Le Massif has introduced "rodelling," a sort of sledding, in addition to skiing and riding Eastern Canada's highest vertical drop — 770 metres, which edges out Tremblant at 645 metres. Now that Le Massif's bid for the Olympics has taken a back seat, there are rumours about a possible Club Med opening. Nothing is certain yet, other than the news that a winter Club will open in North America, soonish.

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