

# Size counts for a lot in Maine

## Trio of great getaways a five-hour drive from Montreal

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE NOVEMBER 16, 2012



Sugarloaf Resort in Maine: The largest downhill area in the east has exceptional above-the-treeline snow fields.

**Photograph by:** Sugarloaf Resort

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East is almost west in Maine. Size counts for a lot there, where mountains have big swaths of skiable terrain and sweeping verticals that sometimes seem like the Rockies in scope.

Sugarloaf Resort, Saddleback and Sunday River in Maine make a great trio for a snow-sports getaway. True, they are about a five-hour drive from downtown Montreal, but you can experience major downhill with unique characteristics.

Sugarloaf reminds me of Mt. Fuji, with its trademark cone-shaped snowfields at the summit. Now the largest downhill resort in the east in terms of terrain (1,056 skiable acres, compared with Tremblant's 654), Sugarloaf was boosted to the No. 1 spot size-wise with new glades and the extension of its Burnt Mountain face. Off-slope, Sugarloaf Village is a cozy walkabout area with new features this year: a gaming arcade, a general store and the Downhill Supply Co., all part of the Sugarloaf 2020 plan.

The young and restless can catch air at the Anti-Gravity Center's skateboard park, trampoline and climbing wall. The Sugarloaf Sports and Fitness Center is tamer, with an indoor pool, hot tubs and massages.

Sunday River embraces eight peaks — yes, eight! — and, although it is the third-busiest area in the

Northeast in terms of skier visits (after Killington and Okemo in Vermont), downhillers still have lots of elbow room. They also have lots of snow, albeit much of it man-made. When other areas are crying for coverage, Sunday River has exceptional terrain because of its extensive snow-making and grooming systems, which are among the most sophisticated in the industry. The mountain has opened for skiing and riding in October for the past five years.

This year, Sunday River is going for hits for everyone with its new kids' adventure trail, glade skiing and freestyle clinics, and the killer steep White Heat double-diamond run.

You would think people would be exhausted after all that action, but Sunday River's zip-lines are the craze for après-ski, followed by rum punches at the Foggy Goggle. In a dash of urban chic, the restaurant Cho Sun from Bethel has opened a branch at Sunday River where skiers and riders can fuel up on Japanese sushi and Korean noodle bowls.

Saddleback, 45 minutes from Sugarloaf, is the junior in this trio, but it is a serious mountain with exciting skiing and snowboarding, an impressive vertical drop, superb glades and great family programs. Saddleback also has above-tree terrain, but strictly for very fit and adventurous athletes who are willing to hike up and lug their gear to un-groomed "side country."

A major part of Maine's mystique is peacefulness. You're in splendid wilderness surroundings with skiers and riders spread out over vast areas.

And thanks to glorious new glades at these major areas, you can own the woods.