

# Ferme 5 Étoiles: unusual animals and winter fun

BY ROCHELLE LASH, THE GAZETTE DECEMBER 3, 2012 10:27 AM



Ferme 5 Étoiles is a resort with exotic animals in the near-wilderness of the Saguenay–Lac-St-Jean region.

**Photograph by:** Rochelle Lash

The whales have gone south, but at Ferme 5 Étoiles outside of Tadoussac, the cougars, wolves and moose still are in residence. And the snow is arriving in a big way.

Ferme 5 Étoiles is a sprawling property in the near-wilderness of the Saguenay–Lac-St-Jean region. It's a multi-purpose vacation spot that is at once a family getaway, a destination for winter sports and a refuge for wild animals. It's also a petting zoo with a big difference — these are not the tame farm animals you would see in a shopping centre or the domestic animals that you would adopt as a pet.

Here, you can cuddle a wolf named Kodiak or commune with a moose named Azure. Or sleep in a cabin with a splendid view of the frozen Saguenay Fjord.

Plus, Ferme 5 Étoiles is a wonderland of winter activities like snowmobiling, dogsledding, ice-fishing, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing on trails that receive up to seven metres of snow each winter.

This is rugged country where the forests are vast and winter is extraordinarily white and starkly beautiful. The Saguenay Fjord, the giant river that runs 100 kilometres from Tadoussac to La Baie, freezes from December to March, capturing the rise and fall of the tides in frozen, natural ice formations along the shore.

The owners of Ferme 5 Étoiles, Stéphanie Deschênes and her husband, Yanick Morin, met when they were 16 years old in a neighbouring village, married and have been running their vacation getaway for 10 years, although her parents had operated a simpler B&B on the property.

They invited me to tour the newest installations and join them for dinner. When I arrived from Tadoussac, they greeted me as if I were a long-lost sister.

We hopped into Yanick's pickup truck — I turned down the ATV ride — and bounced for seven kilometres through the forest to the shore of the Saguenay. Here stand the Ferme's most intriguing lodgings, five remote wooden chalets built on the rocks overlooking the water. If you don't have a four-wheel drive, Yanick and his team will help to transport you, your groceries and your luggage by snowmobile. After that, you're on your own, in a splendid wilderness, with a wood stove, electric heating, running water and indoor plumbing.

For the less adventurous, Ferme 5 Étoiles also has B&B-style rooms, motel-style rooms with kitchenettes and condo-style apartments. The newest and most comfortable are the studios built at the edge of a large paddock of deer.

So, when you get up in the morning and stretch on the front porch, you might have a gentle, curious visitor come to say hello.

"We wanted our guests to relax in a special environment where they could appreciate nature, with the privilege of contact with animals. That's our goal here at the Ferme," Stéphanie said.

I was right at home. A goat named Daisy danced around when I toured the barn. Hens were laying, rabbits hopped, cows chewed and the sheep simply hung out. Life unfolded as expected, but then we moved on to the unique aspect of Ferme 5 Étoiles, a visit to the more exotic animals, each in their own large outdoor pens.

We played with Azure the moose, who had been found abandoned at the side of the road when he was 10 days old after his mother had been killed by a truck. He's thriving now and he's almost old enough to be thinking about having a girlfriend. He might get lucky.

Recently, two neighbour boys found Zoe, a one-week-old baby moose, alone in the woods. The ferme's naturalist, Majorie Poirier, nursed her for weeks, and she'll make it. For now, she has her own private paddock, but everyone is hoping for a love affair in the future.

Ringo, the great horned owl, had been rescued with an injured wing. The cougars, Zara and Kobalt, were repatriated from a zoo that had closed. We watched, fascinated and a little apprehensive, from outside double fences while the big cats tore at their supper of gigantic slabs of beef (about three kilos a day, each). The Arctic wolves, Maya and Kodiak, are tame enough to be hugged, but only the guides are permitted to feed them.

Now that the cougars and wolves had eaten — and thankfully not me — we went onto dinner, a typically rural Québécois meal, as hearty as any farmer, outdoorsman or lumberjack would want. We

tucked into thick pea soup and an enormous helping of tourtière Saguenay–Lac-St-Jean, heaped with diced meat and potatoes. I didn't make it even halfway through, but I got my second wind just in time for luscious blueberry pie, another specialty of the region. The menu also features homestyle renditions of bison, venison and chicken or salmon glazed with maple.

The farm is constantly evolving, adding new animals and expanding the lodging options to suit all comers. The latest amenity is a spa pavilion creatively set in the deer park, with hot tubs, a sauna, a cold shower and massages.

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## IF YOU GO

Sacré-Cœur is an approximately six-and-a-half-hour drive from Montreal. Take Highway 40 east and Route 138 to Baie-Sainte-Catherine, cross the ferry (it's free) to Tadoussac and continue northwest on Routes 138 and 172.

**Centre de vacances Ferme 5 Étoiles:** 877-236-4551, 418-236-4833, [ferme5etoiles.com](http://ferme5etoiles.com), 465 Route 172 O., Sacré-Cœur.

**Price:** Overnight stays include a session of animal feeding, fireplace wood and use of trails. Chalets cost approximately \$179 for two; apartments and studios, \$199 for two; B&B in main lodge, \$79 for two incl. breakfast; motel-style w/ kitchenette, \$99 for two. Yurts, teepees and campsites available. In summer, there is a tennis court and swimming pool. Spa facilities and massages are extra. Meals: Breakfast, \$10; dinner, \$20-25; discounts for children 12 and under. Infants 2 and under do not pay.

**More information:** Tourisme Côte-Nord/Manicouagan: 888-463-5319, [tourismemanicouagan.com](http://tourismemanicouagan.com); Tourisme Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean: 877-253-8387, [saguenaylacsaintjean.ca](http://saguenaylacsaintjean.ca).

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