

Checking in: Best of the Beaupré Coast, both old and new

Renowned winter region chock-full of summer activities

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE JUNE 14, 2013



One of the Chalets-Village Mont-Sainte-Anne, a cluster of 14 unique country houses near Mont-Sainte-Anne.

Photograph by: Chalets-Village Mont-Sainte-Anne

When I think of Mont-Sainte-Anne, I imagine snowdrifts swirling around a windswept summit and half-frozen skiers dashing inside the summit chalet for a seat by the fireplace. I love it all — the cold, the snow, the sports — and I have hardly given a thought to the Beaupré region during summer. Until now.

I'm unforgivably late in getting with the program, that's for sure. The Beaupré Coast is rich with golf and hiking, spa life and gastronomy as well as family-friendly adventures such as mountain biking and "canyoning," both as exhilarating and thrilling as the sports of winter.

The Beaupré Coast runs for about 55 kilometres along the north shore of the St. Lawrence River from Montmorency Falls outside of Quebec City through Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré, Château-Richer, St-Férréol-les-Neiges and St-Joachim. Often with views of the St-Lawrence River, Beaupré is postcard-pretty. It's also one of Quebec's most historic regions. None other than explorer Samuel de Champlain built a livestock ranch here in the 1620s and the pioneering Monseigneur de Laval developed a sprawling seigneurie in the 1660s that became known as "the garden of Quebec City" for its rich

farmland.

The venerable Avenue Royale, also called Route de la Nouvelle-France or Route 360, is dotted with quaint farmhouses, some of which date from 1700s. The classic attractions of the area include Auberge Baker, known for its fine traditional Quebec cuisine for more than 75 years; and the Shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, revered for its stained glass, sculpture and copper doors, carved during the 1960s by artist Albert Gilles whose family continues the métier at Cuivres d'art Albert Gilles, a museum and workshop.

Among the newer Beaupré features is the Ni Vu Ni Cornu Gallery, a colourful showcase of multimedia and avant-garde art and sculpture created by 40 professional artists. It's grown-up culture, but it's also a lighthearted and fun visual arts collection that might appeal to children.

The Spa des Neiges is another nearly-new destination. It's a Nordic spa with all the requisite hot and cold baths, with one exceptional feature: it has a dramatic location on the shore of the St-Lawrence River. Besides the beautiful scenery, the rushing waters have a mesmerizing factor which adds to the spa's relaxation effects.

When it's time for a lunch break, my favourite quick stop is Les Trois Becs Café-Épicerie, a gourmet shop that specializes in Quebec products. Lunch could be a smoothie, a soup and a sandwich, and I try to remember to bring a small cooler and ice packs so I can bring home pâtés and a pie. The terrace will be improved this year as the Beaupré traffic roundabout has been reconfigured and there is new greenery.

But, back to the action. One of Quebec's best-loved snow sports mountains, Mont Sainte-Anne is intensely active in summer. The tamest pastime for visitors is the gondola ride to the summit. The mountain also turns its ski trails over to hearty hikers who want to climb up, down and over challenging terrain with waterfalls and spectacular scenery.

There is new disc golf — looks like the Olympic discus throw, but plays like golf over 12 "holes." Mont-Saint-Anne's most impressive summer credentials are for its mountain biking circuit which is a major stop for international competitions, including the World Cup on Aug 10 and 11. There are about 160 kilometres of trails for beginner to advanced riders and an area for toddlers with mini-bikes for rent.

Mountain biking can be rough stuff, but the first Gran Fondo Mont-Saint-Anne, an exciting road-cycling participation day, is designed for many levels of athletes. Set for June 22 and 23, the Gran Fondo has three routes: 55, 115 and 160 kilometres, all along the hills and past the scenic sights of the Chemin du Roy and the St-Lawrence. There will be food kiosks, colourful banners fluttering in the wind and thousands of spectators waving on the cyclists.

Moving northeast to the far border of the Beaupré Coast where it almost meets Charlevoix is the Canyon Sainte-Anne in St-Joachim. This is a series of climbing adventures high — a dizzying 70 metres high — above the Ste-Anne waterfalls and gigantic rock formations. The Canyon has relatively easy paths for children (although the site itself is daunting), zip-lining, a Via Ferrata for agile athletes

and thrilling treks across suspension bridges for those who revel in heights.

For lodging, Beaupré's most convenient choices are the resort hotel Château Mont-Sainte-Anne and the individual Chalets-Village Mont-Sainte-Anne which all are reconverted historic houses for between eight and 80 people. They are both good getaways for families, the Château with a bistro, indoor and outdoor pools, and the Chalets with lots of homespun space, simple furnishings, large kitchens and garden areas.

rochelle@rachellesh.com

Twitter: rochellelash

IF YOU GO

The Beaupré coast is a three-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 40 east to Route 138.

Tourism info: Beaupré: 877-611-6145, www.cotedebeaupre.com; Quebec City region, 877-783-1608, www.quebecregion.com, www.routenouvelle-france.com.

Chalets-Village Mont Ste-Anne: 800- 461-2030, www.chalets-village.com, St-Férréol-les-Neiges; 15 houses available from five to 32 bedrooms; including firewood, wireless Internet, bedding, towels and full kitchen, the five-bedroom House in the Cedars starts at \$595 for two nights for up to 12 people.

Gran Fondo Mont Ste-Anne: June 22 to 23, \$80-\$175; 581-999-7841, www.granfondomsa.com; depart from Château Mont-Sainte-Anne, 500 Boul du Beau-pré, Beaupré.

Spa des Neiges: 855-963-4437, www.spadesneiges.com; 9480 Boul Ste-Anne (Route 138), Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré; Nordic baths \$35-\$39; ask about discounts as low as \$19 Tuesday to Thursday; massages start at \$80 for a one-hour Swedish massage.

Mont-Sainte-Anne: 888- 827-4579, www.mont-sainte-anne.com; Beaupré, mountain biking and rentals, gondola to the summit; golf, disc golf, hiking, paragliding, canyoning.