

# Checking In: ‘Glamping’ in the Laurentians

Clear tents aren’t quite as comfortable as hotel rooms, but nature lovers will enjoy nights in the wilderness

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE AUGUST 23, 2013



The inflatable, transparent Sphair is a new “glamping” option at Le Village Windigo in the Upper Laurentians.

Le Village Windigo is a deluxe lakeside resort with well-equipped condos and chalets, but the co-owner suggests that you give up indoor comforts and sleep outside, at least for one night.

Windigo embraces 20 condos and 18 chalets, all with satellite televisions, full kitchens, washer-dryers, barbecues and wood-burning fireplaces. The accommodations are built around a central pavilion with a restaurant, so you can cook in or dine out. It’s a perfect example of the resort trend of rustic comfort, defined as very livable lodging in a rugged, outdoorsy setting. So far, that’s familiar vacation life.

The new sleep option at Windigo is the Sphair, a fancy tent that is transparent so that you fully experience views of the glorious surroundings — a shimmering lake, forests changing colours, glowing sunrises and sunsets, and stars sparkling in the nighttime sky. Sphairs are inflatable and portable, so whoever rents a chalet can have it set up on the lawn of the condo or chalet.

“It’s the feeling of sleeping outdoors, but with no downside,” said Marc Mestdagh, managing partner of Windigo, which is owned by his family. “You will enjoy the sounds and sights of nature, but without the bugs or rain.

“The Sphair has most of the comforts of a good hotel room.”

Well, let’s say that it has some of the comforts of a hotel room, but it is missing a shower, tub and sink. The two-person, one-room Sphair is equipped with a queen-sized platform bed with a foam mattress and a rudimentary loo — a portable indoor toilet similar to one that you would find on a boat. For a little entertainment, there’s a sound system, and coloured LED mood lights create a lounge atmosphere. The double Sphair adds a separate salon-style space with a sofa bed, suitable for one child.

Sacrificing indoor conveniences just might be worth it for a special night in nature. Windigo harnesses all that is great about the region of Mont Laurier in the Upper Laurentians.

Children adore the freedom of the wide-open spaces, on land or in the water. Nature lovers are thrilled by the majestic, near-wilderness of boreal forests, lakes and mountains that are part of the vast La Vérendrye wildlife reserve. (It’s named for the great Quebec fur trader of the early 1700s who was known for his pioneering explorations of the Canadian and U.S. Mid-west and West, although he did not make it to the Rockies. His sons did, however.)

Sports such as fishing, rafting and hiking abound. Windigo is on the shore of the 15-kilometre Baskatong reservoir, which has seemingly endless sand beaches. The resort is at the foot of Devil’s Mountain (Mont Diable), at 783 metres the second-highest peak in the Laurentians after Mont Tremblant, and carved with trails.

“My father, Henri, is from Belgium, and he got involved in Windigo because it represented the Canadian dream,” Mestdagh said. “He adores the magnificent terrain around the resort and the wild beauty of the region.”

The ideal way to experience both Windigo and its new “glamping” option is to buy a resort package that includes a few nights in a chalet or a condo plus one night in the Sphair. That way you can combine an outdoor adventure and then be pampered with restaurant meals, a dip in the hot tub and a massage — not to mention a hot shower.

Mestdagh suggests you check into your Sphair about one hour before sunset and check out the next morning about 10 a.m., since it is often too hot during a summer day. It’s air-filled, but not air-conditioned. But the best is yet to come, with the trees turning colours in autumn and cooler temperatures for spending time in a plastic bubble.

## **IF YOU GO**

Ferme-Neuve/Windigo is 300 km, or a 3.5- to four-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 15 and Route 117 north to Mont Laurier and Route 309 north.

**Le Village Windigo:** 866-946-3446, lewindigo.com, 548 chemin Windigo, Ferme-Neuve. Sphair is available in the winter, at 15 C or warmer.

**Price:** Sample packages: One night in a double Sphair (tent-style, two people, one child) with dinner and breakfast at Windigo, \$329. Two-night visit, lodging without meals (one night in a Sphair plus one in a condo), \$443.

Windigo serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, but the prices below are without meals and include beach, small craft, bicycles, tennis, hiking, hot tub and tree-to-tree course for children: a one-bedroom condo for two people costs \$223 per night (forest view) or \$255 (lake view.) Two children 12 and under stay for free; extra adults pay \$50 per person. Chalets (some with lake view), with two bedrooms plus loft and two bathrooms, start at \$358 per night, for up to six people. A three-bedroom chalet, with three bathrooms, for six people and two children, costs \$408 (forest view) or \$447 (lake); a five-bedroom chalet, lakefront, for 10 adults, two children, costs \$595. Prices will drop Sept. 10.

**Extras:** In summer, spa treatments, ATVs and motor boats. In winter, spa treatments, snowmobiling, dogsledding, ice-fishing.

**Hôtellerie Champêtre:** Le Village Windigo is a member of Hôtellerie Champêtre, a group of more than 30 establishments throughout Quebec. For gift cards and specials: 514-861-4024, [hotelleriechampetre.com](http://hotelleriechampetre.com).

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