



Sucrerie de la Montagne features rustic log cabins in an idyllic mountaintop domain. *YANNICK GRANDMONT/SUCRERIE DE LA MONTAGNE*

IF YOU GO

**Sucrerie de la Montagne:** 450-451-0831, sucrerie-de-lamontagne.com; 300 chemin St-Georges, Rigaud.  
**Lodging:** One night with breakfast, dinner: \$135 p.p. for adults 13 and over; \$75 for ages six-12. With dinner: \$110 p.p./\$65 p.p. Without meals: \$85 p.p./\$55 p.p. Including in-room coffee, firewood, trails. Children five and under stay for free.  
**La Bête Sauvage:** multi-course dinner, \$55; reservations, Thurs.-Sat. Closed March-April.  
**Sugar shack:** Meal and tour: \$29-\$38 for adults; \$13-\$19 for ages seven to 12; \$13 for three to six. Sleigh rides are available at certain times of the year.

HOTEL INTEL

# SUGAR SHACK CHALETs PROMISE SWEET DREAMS

*Sucrerie de la Montagne is as picturesque a country tableau as you can imagine*



ROCHELLE LASH

I went full sugar-shack immersion on my first visit to the renowned Sucrerie de la Montagne in Rigaud and I found that cabane à sucre cuisine has evolved since my last tourtière in the countryside.

Ham, baked beans and maple syrup still are mainstays of this hospitality juggernaut, but the Sucrerie has added a soupçon of sophistication to the microcosm of maple.

I arrived on a celebratory day, so the Sucrerie's owner, Pierre Faucher, had uncorked a bottle of Wapiti, the new maple-infused, fortified wine made exclusively for him by Vignoble Côte de Vaudreuil.

And showing off the new dinner offering, chef Félix Le Cavalier dished out bison sausages and venison chops from La Bête Sauvage, the Sucrerie's gourmet

dining room. When I departed, I purchased gifts at the General Store: the requisite jugs of maple syrup, of course, but also a flacon of maple-scented perfume, custom-blended by Parfumerie Galimard of France.

**The scene:** Founded 41 years ago, the Sucrerie has grown from a single-room sugar shack to one of Quebec's largest maple operations with several dining halls and lodging.

With a staggering archive of media coverage from America

to Asia, it certainly is the most recognized. And it likely is the only sugar shack that is both a Quebec National Historic Site and a signature experience of the Canadian Tourism Commission. With all this publicity, it attracts as many as 80,000 people a year.

The Sucrerie is as picturesque a country tableau as you can imagine, and it's especially magical in winter. A dozen ancestral log buildings cluster around a blazing firepit, high on a mountaintop and surrounded by a forest of majestic maples. Indoors, the scene is warm and festive, with heaps of hearty food and antique country decor.

"Our authenticity is the main

attraction," said Faucher, who runs the place with his son Stefan. "We built all this by hand."

The Fauchers are tall, burly mountain men with bushy beards and ample bellies wrapped in the ceinture fléchée, the colourful woven belt of Quebec's coureurs des bois of the 1600s. Faucher père is a jovial host and an irrepresible marketing whiz who has travelled the world to show off Canadian maple magic.

**New gastronomy:** La Bête Sauvage is a 100-year-old dining space filed with heavy pine furniture and festooned with collectibles like snowshoes, copper carvings and oil lamps. This intimate room serves a new multi-course, prix fixe extravaganza from pea soup to sugar pie, but with new gourmet dishes in between.

"We have tamed Quebec's wild game," said Pierre Faucher. "It's our leap into fine dining, but still with the charm of our rustic setting. It's festive, not formal."

Appetizers include rabbit terrine and smoked duck, and main courses include venison, cipaille or bison sausages.

**Sugar shack:** The traditional

cabane à sucre dinner includes all-you-can-eat pea soup, baked beans, tourtière, maple-smoked ham, meatballs, soufflé-style omelettes, sausages and salt pork. It's almost impossible to save room for dessert — irresistible sugar pie or mini-crêpes with the Sucrerie's divine syrup — but it's a must.

"Our natural process using a wood fire is what gives our syrup a distinctive flavour," said Faucher.

The Sucrerie is one of about three per cent of Quebec's approximately 8,000 maple producers that use a centuries-old system of taps, buckets and wood-fired evaporators, instead of modern vacuum pumps and plastic tubing.

The Sucrerie does a huge business with group parties, when it rocks with entertainment, including dancing to live fiddle music.

**Chalets:** The Sucrerie has four rustic log cabins, perfect for people who want to get away from it all. They're vintage timber and mortar buildings Faucher salvaged and moved here. The chalets, each two storeys with single and double beds, are suitable for between two and six guests.

There are no televisions and the Wi-Fi and cell service are spotty, but the fireplace glows all night, and togetherness and tranquility are the main attractions. Couples love the claw-foot tub, aperitifs by the fireplace and dinner at La Bête Sauvage. Children get fresh air frolicking around the property and snowshoers can tackle trails through the woods.



La Bête Sauvage, a gourmet dining room, serves a menu of Quebec game. *MICHAEL GREEN PHOTOGRAPHY*

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