



The dramatic summit chalet at Bromont, montagne d'expériences. "People want to be outdoors," says CEO Charles Désourdy. "But we'll control access. We can almost predict the busy days when we will have to restrict day tickets — normally the slopes would be packed after major snowfalls and on sunny days." *BROMONT, MONTAGNE D'EXPÉRIENCES*

BUMPY CONDITIONS

ROCHELLE LASH

At least two things are certain about the downhill slide-sports season of 2020-21: it will happen, and it will have a few bumps.

Quebec's 1.4 million skiers and riders can enjoy lifts, trails, wash-rooms and new digital tracing, but very little in the way of avant- or après-ski. And, tucked between our helmets and our masks, we'll probably have foggy goggles.

It will be pure ski-ride mode, with few frills.

Children will be out of luck if snow school is cancelled, especially at popular beginners' areas such as Mont Rigaud and Ski Saint-Bruno.

Grown-ups will miss the camaraderie. The successful charity sport-athon Tremblant 24h, set for Dec. 4 to 6, has moved online. Elevation Tremblant Gay Ski Week is off the calendar, and Mont Sutton has suspended the rollicking music jams at Bar Le Tucker. And Bromont, with its extensive night terrain, has streamlined its moonlit Nuits Blanches — snow sports will happen, but without the parties.

Many mountain operators have been studying 2020's summer of skiing in Southern Hemisphere countries such as Chile, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand.

"Tremblant is working to make this season's experience user-friendly and to promote accessibility to our mountain," said Patrice Malo, president and COO of Station Mont Tremblant, which originally scheduled an ambitious start date of Nov. 20, but changed that to Nov. 27 due to unseasonably warm temperatures. (Many other sites don't have firm opening dates, partly because the recent warm weather has complicated snow-making operations.)

"Health and safety are at the forefront of our priorities," said Malo. "We'll be monitoring our employees, strictly following guidelines and staying flexible as the situation changes."

Visitors may be in good company, possibly skiing and riding alongside Olympic champions Jasey-Jay Anderson and Erik Guay,

There will be fewer frills for Quebec skiers and riders this season, and the pandemic protocol will largely involve the honour system to 'respect the rules'



Day skiers at some areas, including Tremblant, will have to reserve dates in advance. *TREMBLANT*



Physical distancing will apply at Tremblant's colourful slopeside village. *TREMBLANT*

who are Tremblant ambassadors, and Mikaël Kingsbury and the Du-four-Lapointe sisters, whose home area is Les Sommets in St-Sauveur.

TICKETS TO RIDE

Most mountains will give priority to season-pass holders, in

order to restrict the number of visitors for purposes of physical distancing. Day skiers can buy a limited number of tickets online, and at some areas — such as Tremblant, Bromont and Les Sommets — they'll have to reserve dates in advance, occasionally facing a



A freestyler at Sommet Saint-Sauveur, which opened for the season Oct. 30. *ALAIN DENIS/LES SOMMETS*

"sold out" announcement. Most single-day deals, such as the under-\$30 weekday bargains at Mont Sutton, will be eliminated, along with Tremblant's Latitude, Costco and Ski Max tickets.

If you plan to ski or ride more than a half-dozen times, season

passes are great deals, with lots of perks. Owl's Head offers the NINOXE4, which is \$139 per person for the season if you buy four at once. Depending on when you buy, Mont Blanc's juniors can ski for \$259 to \$359. At Mont Habitant, a five-day, five-night adult pass costs \$135 to \$155.

Because this year is fraught with uncertainty, many areas are offering a "guaranteed season," which means a full refund by a certain date for an unused pass. If Tremblant's clients do not use their 2020-21 Tonik passes, they can receive full credit, rolled over to 2021-22. If they bought insurance, the pass is refundable in the case of illness or other reasons.

SHADES OF SUMMER

The 2019-20 season was truncated in March. Downhillers were bereft of the annual spring bacchanalia, while mountain operators posted a cumulative \$60-million loss. Then, summer was a surprise. While commerce, sports and hospitality reopened sluggishly in cities, there was an exodus of urbanites to the countryside, where sports provided a release. The same intense interest is expected for winter.

"Based on our mountain biking and water-park success, we will be very popular," said Charles Désourdy, CEO of Bromont, montagne d'expériences. "People want to be outdoors, and some who aren't travelling south will return to skiing."

"But we'll control access. We can almost predict the busy days when we will have to restrict day tickets — normally the slopes would be packed after major snowfalls and on sunny days."

PANDEMIC PLAYBOOK

"We are counting on everyone to respect the rules," said Yves Juneau, CEO of the Association des stations de ski du Québec (ASSQ), which has 75 members. "We can have a great season despite the pandemic, but it's an honour system, especially for people coming from a red zone."

SEE **SKI** ON **D2**



Mont Sutton is prized for its glade skiing. *SKI MONT SUTTON*

COLOUR-CODED PROTOCOLS ON THE PEAKS

SKI FROM **D1**

The government’s colour-coding will rule, but regardless of the alert level, two-metre distancing will apply and double-layer face coverings will be mandatory. That means whisper-thin neckwarmers won’t make the cut. That’s part of the honour system.

“We do not want to be unwelcoming,” said Juneau, “but we advise people to arrive at the mountain dressed and ready to go, then ski or ride and depart promptly, all with limited contact. That might mean eating a sandwich in your car.”

One hitch is that people will not be able to leave their gear in the lodge, so they’ll have to suit up and boot up in their cars.

Technology will also be a factor. To track possible contagion, the ASSQ is developing an electronic tool — which may be ready by December — to enable mountain operators and health authorities to trace skiers, based on their online purchases of tickets and scanning at the lifts.

Juneau explained the pandemic protocol: If an area is in a green, yellow or orange zone, most facilities will operate and there will be food service, but with limitations. If an area is in a red zone, chalets will be used only for brief warm-ups and washroom breaks, and there won’t be snow school or locker access, although ski shops will be open and daily rentals will be available.

The ASSQ has developed a colour-coded chart that clarifies the intricate regulations, especially on lifts (visit mysnow.ski). Skiers and snowboarders from the same household will be asked to ride together. If the ski zone is green, yellow or orange, chairlifts will run at normal capacity and gondolas will be at 50 per cent. If the area is in a red zone, gondolas will carry two at a time. Singles from red zones have to distance by two metres; this means two single skiers can ride on the six-person chairs at Mont Orford, Sommet Sauveur, Bromont and Le Relais near Quebec City, but singles would ride alone on a quadruple.

OFF-TRAIL

This might be the ideal time to try an hors-piste adventure. Powder hounds can frolic in an average seven metres of snow with cat-skiing and riding at Massif du Sud, east of Lévis, and heli- and cat-skiing at Chic-Chac in Murdochville, in the Gaspé.

Tremblant and Mont-Sainte-Anne operate alpine touring — cardio-busting uphill treks. Le Massif de Charlevoix offers scenic cross-country at Sentier des Caps, as well as guided backcountry touring over the mountains and through the woods.

THE NUMBERS

In other years, Quebec slide sports represented an \$800-million industry and generated almost 33,000 jobs, but this won’t be a profitable season.

One Laurentian manager said it would be “survival mode,” with additional technology, fewer skiers and reduced revenues from food and beverage sales, equipment sales and rentals and possibly ski school.



Mont Orford has a vertical drop of 589 metres, the longest in the Eastern Townships. *EASTERN TOWNSHIPS TOURISM*

For example, the mini-empire of Les Sommets’ five areas in the Lower Laurentians and Gatineau tallies approximately 700,000 skier visits during an average season. Anticipating less traffic, Olympia and Morin Heights will offer night skiing only on weekends, and Gabriel not at all, and the three areas will close on Mondays and Tuesdays. But exceptionally for this year, those pass holders can access the big sister, Sommet Saint-Sauveur/Avila, although you’ll need a Gabriel-Plus pass.

“Being so close to Montreal, we usually have a strong market of day skiers who we’ll integrate as best we can,” said Louis-Philippe Hébert, CEO of Les Sommets. “We’re among the leaders in both accessible pricing and night skiing, and we’ll still be the first in Quebec to open and the last to close.” (Sommet Saint-Sauveur opened Oct. 30 and has operated intermittently since.)

“Our goal this year is to keep people’s spirits up by keeping them skiing and riding,” said Hébert.

COMMENT

Johnny’s on the spot

Getting dumped from Fantastic Beast franchise is the latest blow for Depp’s Hollywood career. **Sonia Rao** explains.



Johnny Depp

Johnny Depp announced recently that he would no longer appear in the Fantastic Beasts film franchise — news that arrived on the tail of his loss in a libel case against a British tabloid that called him a “wife beater,” and nearly two months after production began on a third instalment in the Harry Potter spinoff series.

“I have been asked to resign by Warner Bros. from my role as Grindelwald in Fantastic Beasts and I have respected and agreed to that request,” Depp wrote in a letter uploaded to Instagram.

Depp’s exit came as a surprise to crew members, according to The Hollywood Reporter, which stated that his “pay-or-play” contract requires the studio to pay his eight-figure salary regardless

of whether he appears in the film. The dismissal nonetheless marks a major career repercussion for an actor still embroiled in a \$50-million defamation lawsuit against his ex-wife, actress Amber Heard, who wrote an op-ed for The Washington Post in 2018 including a thinly veiled reference to her domestic abuse allegations against him.

A Warner Bros. spokesperson on Tuesday declined The Post’s request for additional comment on Depp’s contract, referring back to a statement that confirmed his departure from the franchise and thanked him for his contributions.

Legal proceedings played out publicly after Heard filed for divorce from Depp in May 2016,

with tabloids circulating photographs and videos detailing the allegations Depp has repeatedly denied.

Their divorce was finalized that August. In April 2019, after Depp’s lawyers claimed the op-ed Heard wrote in the wake of the #MeToo movement was based on the “categorically false” premise that Depp had abused her, she described more than a dozen specific allegations ranging from 2012 to 2016 and recalled fearing for her life.

Andrew Nicol, the judge in the libel case against the publisher of British tabloid the Sun, wrote in his final judgment last week that he believed Heard “was the victim of sustained and multiple assaults.”

The Hollywood Reporter said that Warner Bros. “wanted to allow due process to take its

course before making a decision on the embattled star’s future in the franchise.”

Gellert Grindelwald, the dark wizard Depp played in 2016’s initial Fantastic Beasts film and its 2018 sequel, will be recast for the remaining three instalments.

Depp isn’t the only person involved in the Fantastic Beasts franchise whose behaviour has been scrutinized.

Creator J.K. Rowling garnered controversy back in June when she doubled down on transphobic beliefs first made public last year. Harry Potter actors Daniel Radcliffe and Emma Watson responded by publicly expressing support for the trans community, as did Fantastic Beasts star Eddie Redmayne.

The studio and Rowling, who wrote both Fantastic Beasts screenplays, previously stood by their decision to cast Depp as Grindelwald.

Rowling wrote on her website in December 2017 that “conscience isn’t governable by committee. Within the fictional world and outside it, we all have to do what we believe to be the right thing.”

Warner Bros. stated that the proceedings between Depp and Heard had been “jointly

addressed by both parties, in a statement in which they said ‘there was never any intent of physical or emotional harm.’

“Based on the circumstances and the information available to us, we, along with the filmmakers, continue to support the decision to proceed with Johnny Depp in the role of Grindelwald in this and future films.”

In an article published Monday evening, Variety attributed the studio’s change of heart three years later to the merger between AT&T and Time Warner, the parent company of Warner Bros., which occurred after the second Fantastic Beasts film had already wrapped.

Since then, there “has been an overall lack of tolerance for the kind of controversy that every major studio has had to weather at one time or another when courting mercurial — but historically popular — talent like Depp,” the trade magazine reported.

Depp maintained his innocence last week in an Instagram post. “My resolve remains strong and I intend to prove that the allegations against me are false,” he wrote. “My life and career will not be defined by this moment in time.”

The Washington Post