

Country Roads: Au Diable Vert brings nature to your door

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE AUGUST 13, 2012



A wood stove keeps a tree house warm in winter at Au Diable Vert, a rustic getaway near Sutton in the Eastern Townships.

Photograph by: Au Diable Vert

You probably have vacationed in a room with a view. But have you slept in a tree house with a view? Or bedded down in a prospector's tent or an igloo with a view?

Au Diable Vert, a hilltop getaway with rustic lodging, is all about getting back to basics. And for owners Julie Zeitlinger and Jeremy Fontana and their children, the basics of a vacation include living close to nature, fending for yourself and enjoying a glorious view.

Nestled between Sutton and Vermont's Green Mountains, the huge property of Au Diable Vert overlooks the scenic Missisquoi River Valley in a relatively undeveloped corner of the Eastern Townships. Cabins are set in the woods, almost hidden from each other. Take a morning stretch outside your cabin and a vast panorama of forests, valleys and mountains opens up before you. The change is in the seasons.

"It's a great break from your usual pace," Zeitlinger said. "Parents spend all day with their kids, and people can bring their dogs. We have trails for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. In summer, it's hiking and kayaking, no vehicles or speed boats."

In fall, Zeitlinger, an Oxford-educated biologist, organizes mushroom and plant picking excursions.

Au Diable Vert doubles as a ranch, where Zeitlinger and Fontana raise beef cattle. The mountainside cabins are set above the pasture where shaggy Highland cattle graze.

Au Diable Vert's return to the simple life has been recognized as valuable. It recently won the 2010 National Award for Excellence in Sustainable Tourism from Parks Canada.

"We are based on the concept of eco-lodging and people-powered activities," Zeitlinger said. "Eco-lodging means that we are built with local materials like soy-based foam insulation and local recycled wood. We heat with dead-fall wood, and we avoid using anything imported from afar.

"And people are expected to use their own energies."

The use-your-own energy part of a visit to Au Diable Vert starts immediately. Most of the domain's far-flung cabins are accessible only on foot, so when you arrive, you are expected to carry your food and luggage on a sled up a hill to your cabin. It is a strenuous five- to 15-minute climb through the woods to most cabins, so Au Diable Vert has a snowmobile luggage service, which costs \$10 each way.

Most of Au Diable Vert's accommodations are very basic. That's part of the fun and relaxation factor. The loo is an outhouse. The cabin for showers is open only in summer, so many wintertime guests sign up for visits to Bolton Spa, where they can soak and clean up. All accommodations have bunk or platform beds and a wood stove, and most have cooking utensils. In some cases, you need to bring your own camp cooking gear and sleeping bags.

But roughing it isn't for everyone. Au Diable Vert has a solution for girlfriends with a princess style and couples who don't want bunk beds.

"Our new apartments are perfect," Fontana said. "We call them the mountain view suites and they're luxurious. After all, they have electricity, indoor plumbing and kitchens - and cotton sheets."

Even deep in the forests and high in the mountains, there are choices for dining and nightlife. Many visitors to Au Diable Vert bring their own groceries. Some buy the Highland beef raised on site. Others head for Sutton, brimming with great casual eateries like Bistro Beaux Lieux.

Diable's almost next-door neighbour, Auberge Glen Sutton, has a cool restaurant and showbar called Le Red Room with potent margaritas, plus Mexican food, steaks and burgers. Owned by blues and folk-rock singers Angel Forrest and Denis Coulombe, Le Red Room has an exciting lineup of shows, including a rockin' New Year's Eve party.

rochelleink@aol.com

If you go:

Glen Sutton is a 90-minute drive from Montreal. Take Highway 10 east to Exit 68 and Route 139 south.

Au Diable Vert: 169 Chemin Staines, Glen Sutton, 450-538-5639, www.audiablevert.com. Dog

friendly. Rates are per night, valid year-round and include use of trails. Mountain view apartments (two bedrooms): \$140 for two people, or \$210 for four. Cabins, with water and firewood, cost from \$55 to \$100 for two. For children 5-14, it's \$10 to \$15. Meals are available for groups of eight or more. Non-guests pay \$5 for trail access. Two-night minimum on weekends. Luggage transport to cabins, \$10 each way. The prices for the two-night, two-person Snowshoe Package, valid Sunday to Thursday and including snowshoes, firewood, drinking water and luggage transport, are: tree house, \$218 to \$258; rustic cabin, \$178; and mountain view apartments, \$298. Packages also are available with visits to Bolton Spa. In summer, when campsites are available, there are kayaking tours and foraging expeditions.

Le Red Room at Auberge Glen Sutton, 1388 Chemin de la Vallée Missisquoi in Glen Sutton, 450-538 2000, www.leredroom.com.

rochelleink@aol.com

© Copyright (c) The Montreal Gazette