

Auberge au Soleil Levant

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE SEPTEMBER 8, 2010



Located on the shore of Lac Mégantic, Piopolis has created a walking tour of its historic sites, including its imposing Église St. Zénon.

Photograph by: Steve Pellerin, Special to The Gazette

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Editor's note: Some of the details might have changed since the original publication date. Please check with the establishment before heading out!

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For information on La Route des Sommets, Mégantic regional tourism and the photography contest, call 800-363-5515 or go to www.tourisme-megantic.com. For Eastern Townships information, call 866-963-2020 or go to www.eastertownships.org.

Parc National du Mont Mégantic and AstroLab: 800-665-6527, www.sepaq.com or www.astrolab.qc.ca.

The Auberge au Soleil Levant is located at 499 rue Principale, Piopolis, 819-583-5697, www.aubergeausoleillevant.com. Rooms prices range from \$75 to \$80 for two. Breakfast costs \$4-\$7; lunch \$5-\$10; and a three-course dinner \$14-\$22.

NOTRE DAME DES BOIS - La Route des Sommets of the Mégantic region is a country road that promises to take visitors to new heights - literally.

Mégantic, at the eastern reaches of the Eastern Townships near the Maine border, is a region of massive mountains and clear lakes, home to wildlife and quaint villages, all linked by quiet country roads. It is ideal for outdoor sports, especially hiking and cycling in autumn and Nordic skiing, snowshoeing or ice fishing in winter. It also is home to some of the highest elevations in the province: Mont Mégantic, at 1,105 metres, and Mont Gosford, at 1,193 metres, are the highest peaks in southeastern Quebec.

La Route des Sommets starts at the towns of La Patrie and Notre Dame des Bois (with an elevation of 555 metres above sea level, it is one of the highest-altitude towns in Quebec) on the edge of Mont Mégantic provincial park, about a three-hour drive from Montreal. The scenic 157-kilometre tourist trail takes in 15 towns and winds through forests that are still holding splashes of fall's vibrant colours.

The route climbs the granite mountains of the Appalachian chain and meanders through picturesque valleys with their patchwork of dairy, cattle and sheep farms.

At its far end, the route skirts Grand Lac St. François and winds up near the communities of Stornoway and Stratford. The local tourism board has created a colourful map of the tourist route listing its high points.

"La Route des Sommets is a great way to discover Mégantic's countryside," said Nil Longpré, tourism commissioner for the area. "It's designed as a driving route, but it's ideal for visiting attractions and charming villages, to cycle, to hike mountains or simply walk in the woods. People can see virtually all of La Route in two or three nights, or more if they take time to visit."

Having no doubts about the beauty of his region, Longpré has invited photographers to enter a contest for the most striking image along La Route des Sommets. The tourism department is awarding \$1,000 in the contest, which ends Oct. 31. Details are available at www.tourisme-megantic.com.

La Route des Sommets really is defined by the mountains. Mont Mégantic and its neighbour, Mont St. Joseph, both have car roads to the top so visitors can easily experience their summits. An astronomy centre is located at the top of Mont Mégantic, and the summit of Mont St. Joseph has a Catholic pilgrimage site around a century-old wooden chapel, which was recently restored.

"Parc Mégantic is quite well-known," but more and more people also are discovering Frontenac provincial park north of Stornoway, Longpré said. "New campsites have been built on the edge of Grand Lac St. François, and it's a great area for kayaking, canoeing and hiking.

"Visitors also should make a point of stopping at the town of Lac Mégantic," Longpré said. "It has a beautiful boardwalk along the lake and lots of small shops and restaurants. It's a lively place, and it's the capital of the region."

Cyclists can choose from at least two established routes. The Axe Eau Sommet is a half-hilly, half-flat

trail suitable for intermediates or advanced riders. It leaves Piopolis and heads west to Val Racine, 22 kilometres away. Another route, Le Grand Tour of Lac Mégantic, travels for 33 kilometres on mostly flat roads, and then another 13 kilometres that are hilly. If you can't make it home, Taxi-Vélo (877-766-8356 [begin_of_the_skype_highlighting 877-766-8356 end_of_the_skype_highlighting](tel:877-766-8356)) can pick you up.

La Route des Sommets also features a number of interpretation centres, or tiny museums, such as La Forêt habitée du Mont Gosford (www.montgosford.com), an exhibit on forestry and such wildlife as moose, white-tailed deer and birds. And the village of Piopolis (www.piopolis.ca) has created a walking tour of its historic sites, including the church, Église St. Zénon, that dominates the main street.

"Piopolis is a must-see," said Longpré. "It's a charming village situated on the banks of Lac Mégantic. And its history is so unusual. It was colonized in the late 1870s by papal soldiers who were rewarded with land for their loyalty to the church."

Now that the summer cottagers have left, Piopolis is back to its permanent population of about 400. One way to enjoy Lac Mégantic, even in autumn, is a walk along the boardwalk through a marsh filled with ducks, herons and loons.

Karine Moisan, a Mégantic native, and her partner Sylvain Orichefsky, took the plunge this summer and bought a modest inn, Auberge au Soleil Levant, near the shore of Lac Mégantic in Piopolis. The couple has worked hard to upgrade the inn, revamping the decor, sprucing up the bathrooms, and adding televisions, coffee machines, mini-refrigerators and wireless Internet.

The inn is a budget-priced place to sleep over, and it will provide futons for children. With its restaurant/pub, it also is a gathering place for all day dining. Moisan prepares classic breakfasts, lunches of pannini, pasta and pizza, or evening meals featuring garlic shrimp, filet mignon, chicken, brochettes or linguine.

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