

A deal a day available in the Eastern Townships

Snow-sports scene is booming thanks to 'so much new snow and so much sun'

The polar vortex and related provocateurs created havoc for the Eastern Townships' tourism industry at the outset of winter, but as of two weeks ago, the region has been on a roll with the right kind of storm: lots of snow, and no rain, sleet or ice. Hotels, restaurants and sports centres are hopping.

"We have faced huge weather variations over the past 20 years," said Alain Larouche, president of Tourism Eastern Townships. "And after a chaotic start to the season, the snow-sports scene now is booming."

"If there is no snow in town, people in Montreal and Ottawa do not realize how good the conditions are."

The current conditions are a far cry from power outages and the hassle of melting snow for water and cooking over fireplaces. True, it was a creative Christmas that brought people together to help each other, but it's good to have things back to normal, snowy mid-winter conditions.

"It's absolutely gorgeous today — so much new snow and so much sun," innkeeper Patricia Gérard said when I stopped by her auberge in Sutton recently. "The word is out about the great snowfall, so both the inn and the dining room are nearly full tonight, and it's only Monday."

Gérard and her husband, John Kostuik, own Auberge des Appalaches, a charming, 11-room lodge high atop a hill overlooking the town of Sutton. Thanks to his modern bistro cuisine and her attention to décor, Appalaches has become the darling of locals and tourists. It's a rustic, European-style ski lodge with a cosy fireplace salon and only one television in the lounge, all the better for making friends.

Gérard's most recent gambit is the creation of two new suites, the Queen Superior and Queen Patio, which are the best rooms in the house. These two rooms were re-configured from five smaller ones, so there is more space, lots of light and bigger bathrooms. Gérard has added a soupçon of country chic with lean lines, barnwood trim



ROCHELLE LASH
CHECKING IN

and colourful quilts. The Eastern Townships have some of the most attractive deals in the ski and snowboard industries — a total of 97 packages, Larouche reports.

Mont Sutton's terrific Ski-and-Stay, a.k.a. Ski-Dodo-Ski, is valid at a variety of inns, B&Bs, condos and hotels throughout town. It's valid Monday to Thursday and includes one overnight, plus breakfast and lifts for 1½ days. It starts at \$89 per person, double occupancy, or \$159 for two nights and 2½ days of skiing, at six lodgings, including Auberge des Appalaches and the very different Le Montagnard, a three-star complex with several price-conscious formulas: studios for two to four people, condos for six to eight, chalets for 16 to 20 and hotel rooms.

The stakes are raised a little at five slightly fancier places where Sutton's Ski-and-Stay costs \$109 per person, double occupancy for one night, or \$195 per person for two nights. This category includes Le Domaine Tomali-Maniatyn, a deluxe hilltop B&B in a contemporary mansion, and Les Caprices de Victoria, a romantic B&B with antiques and ornate vintage décor.

On the mountain, Mont Sutton is offering \$25 tickets and \$32 lessons if you can rework your schedule to ski during the week, valid until Feb. 20. Tuesdays are for the 50+ Club (skiers 50 or older); on Wednesdays, it's the Suits & Ties gang for men; and on Thursdays, the Divas on Skis get goodies with their packages for women.

In contrast to Sutton's intimate inns, the Magog-Orford region is home to several large resorts, such as Estrimont Suites & Spa, Hôtel Chéribourg and Manoir des Sables, all of which have dining, on-site activities and family options.

They're within a kilometre or two of Mont Orford and the wonderful cross-country



AUBERGE DES APPALACHES

Auberge des Appalaches in Sutton is popular for its 11 cosy guest rooms, the fireplace salon and modern bistro cuisine.



MANOIR DES SABLES

Manoir des Sables, at the foot of Mont Orford, has packages with dining, spa life and outdoor activities.

trails of Parc national du Mont Orford.

The Morning Ski Package at Manoir des Sables, a comprehensive, four-star country resort, features all-day lift tickets at Mont Orford, with one overnight and breakfast, and access to free activities: an indoor pool, hot tubs, a skating rink, snow tubing and the loan of snowshoes and cross-country ski gear for exploring the grounds.

Prices fluctuate at large hotels like Manoir des Sables, but the Morning Ski Package runs about \$146 per person, double occupancy on weekends, or \$132 per person, double occupancy on weekdays. Children stay for free,

but pay junior rates for breakfast and skiing.

For extra fees, guests can take time off the slopes at Manoir des Sables's very complete Spa Nordique Village, which has 16 treatment rooms, a Turkish-style steam bath, saltwater whirlpools and a Finnish sauna. The Just for Me package is an indulgent, three-hour trio of a massage, a facial and a pedicure, for either men or women, at \$175.

Down near the Vermont border, a 90-minute drive from the Champlain Bridge, Owl's Head is a peaceful, somewhat remote mountain community with slopeside lodging and a restaurant and

massage services at the base lodge. At the end of January, the site featured 25 to 35 centimetres of new snow.

Owl's Head is a great buy, with a \$17 pass on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for all skiers and approximately \$23 for juniors on weekends. Members of CAA get up to 25 per cent off regularly priced tickets Thursdays through Mondays. And if you purchase in advance at store-en.owls-head.com, you can save up to 40 per cent on any day.

The Don't Tell Fred package at Auberge Owl's Head (referring to Mansonville native Fred Korman, who has owned the area for 48 years) starts at \$75 per person, double oc-

IF YOU GO

Tourism Eastern Townships: 800-355-5755, east-erntownships.org

Magog-Orford Tourism: 800-267-2744, tourisme-memphremagog.com

Sutton Tourism: 800-565-8455, infosutton.com; Mont Sutton: 866-538-2545, montsutton.com.

cupancy, including one night, breakfast and lift tickets. That's a steal. Don't tell.

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VERMONT

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