

Quebec yurts steppe up to sports – three ways



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

Yurts help travellers get close to nature – but not too close.

Now a major trend in adventure travel, yurts originally were the movable homes of nomadic tribes in the steppes of Central Asia, but many Quebec destinations have adopted them, creating a fusion of rustic comfort and outdoor life. There are differences, however.

If we were in the boonies of Kazakhstan or Mongolia, our yurt would be fashioned of well-worn canvas or felt stretched over a wood frame. At the end of a season, we would mount horses to herd the goats and sheep, fold up our yurts and transport them on yaks across the inhospitable tundra to the next pasture, all for sheer survival.

In Quebec, we go camping to enjoy our lush countryside of forests, lakes and mountains, and play in the snow.

Modern North American yurts usually are made of high-tech materials over metal frames and built on wood platforms to be semi-permanent and weather-proof. The interiors are relatively cushy, like primitive hotel rooms. And when the vacation is over, guests can load up their SUVs with ski gear, cork the chardonnay and navigate back to their urban dwellings via GPS.

Here are three yurt destinations, all within 90 minutes of Montreal, and each with a dramatically different focus.

HIGH IN THE LAURENTIANS: You can channel your inner mountain goat at Attitude Montagne in St-Adolphe d'Howard, a sports complex with a specific mission. It is focused on climbing – rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering and backcountry skiing.

Attitude Montagne offers courses given by accredited experts, creates its own wall of ice and also has a high-altitude simulator for training in case you are considering trekking in Peru or the Himalayas.

If you are part of an Attitude activity, it supplies everything for the alpinist, including ice axes, boots with crampons, harnesses, helmets and ropes.

Dominic Asselin, a professional



Vallée Bras-du-Nord in Portneuf has a cluster of yurts at the heart of a wilderness sports centre with snowshoeing and fat-biking. *PHILIPPE JOBIN*

high-mountain guide, owns Attitude Montagne and is constantly expanding.

The base camp is a converted motel on St-Adolphe's main street, and the campgrounds and the first new yurt is in the Laurentian foothills, a five-minute drive away. The super-sized yurt sleeps up to 20, mostly school groups, Scouts or climbing clubs, but there are smaller ones on the way.

Attitude Montagne's new restaurant Le Chèvre supplies breakfast if ordered in advance and, otherwise, is open for supper on most evenings for such hearty dishes as chorizo with mango chutney, onion soup with black beer, mac'n'cheese, chicken pot pie, beef bourguignon, plus micro-brews, scotches, ciders, privately imported wines and cocktails.

LUXE IN LANAUDIÈRE: Chalets Lanaudière is a family-friendly domain, outside of Rawdon, with easygoing outdoor activities that everyone can enjoy.

This scenic vacation site has 23 chalets, four cabins and four comfortable yurts tucked into the forest, with a lake and a gurgling stream.

"We're meant for Monsieur and Madame Everyone and their children," said marketing manager Julien Verville.

Chalets Lanaudière has another goal. It is a non-profit enterprise that supports sending underprivileged children to summer camp.

Each yurt has a double bed, so they're ideal for couples – romantic in a roughing-it way – and there is a sofa-bed for kids.

"We probably have the most



Chalets Lanaudière in Rawdon is a family-friendly domain with deluxe yurts featuring a sofa-bed for children. *CHALETS LANAUDIÈRE*

deluxe yurts in Quebec," Verville said. "They have attractive furnishings, electric heaters, windows, beds with mattresses and sheets and kitchens with propane stoves."

A welcome centre houses bathrooms and showers, and to get into the pioneer spirit, guests transport their food and clothing by sled for about 100 metres from the parking lot to the yurt.

Les Cabanes d'ici, a cluster of four glamping chalets, is the property's newest lodging. Built and decorated to reflect the forest, they house four to six people and make life in the woods easy with wood stoves, electricity, bedding and fully equipped kitchens.

Chalets Lanaudière has kid-friendly snow tubing, skating, broomball and trails for snow-

shoeing and cross-country skiing, plus off-site winter packages with the attractive Nordic spa, La Source à Rawdon, and Kinadapt for dogsledding.

SPORTY IN QUEBEC: Vallée Bras-du-Nord is an adventure paradise for serious outdoor types with rustic lodging and strenuous sports.

The development is a co-operative of leisure enterprises north of St-Raymond-de-Portneuf, west of Quebec City, run by outdoorsman Frédéric Asselin (no relation to Dominic).

The Vallée has a cluster of eight yurts in the woods and one high atop a cliff, but if they're not your style, the partnership also represents cabins, chalets and full-fledged country inns.

The yurts represent roughing it. Guests haul their gear on sleds

IF YOU GO

Vallée Bras-du-Nord, St-Raymond-de-Portneuf, Quebec City region: 800-321-4992, 418-337-3635; yurts, about \$110; \$8 for hiking trails, \$15 for mountain biking, \$75 for fat-bike rentals and trails.

Chalets Lanaudière, Rawdon, Lanaudière: 877-834-8363, 450-834-6383, chaletslanaudiere.ca; minimum two nights, Fri-Sat.; yurts about \$145 per night, including activities. Cottages available. Extra: snowshoe rentals, catering.

Attitude Montagne: 819-714-0101, attitudemontagne.com; 1510 chemin d'Avalanche, St-Adolphe, Laurentians. Yurt lodging: up to \$300 for up to 20 people; or less with an activities package; inn rooms/studios, \$70-\$115 for two. Le Chèvre delivers breakfast to rooms with reservations and is open for supper most nights.

from the parking lot – less than one kilometre for most – and they can rent sleeping bags and kitchen utensils. The yurts don't have lighting, but they each have a futon, bunk beds, a wood stove (with logs supplied) and a pot for boiling water.

Vallée Bras-du-Nord has 80 kilometres of hiking and snowshoe trails, plus lots of rollicking terrain for fat-biking and backcountry skiing. In summer, it's all about kayaking, Via Ferrata, mountain biking, hiking, canoeing and canyoning.

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