



Le Grand R is a domain of deluxe chalets and condos in the great outdoors near St-Donat. LE GRAND R /LAUZEPHOTO.COM

CHECKING IN

FROLIC IN THE SPECTACULAR OUTDOORS

Le Grand R offers deluxe woodsy window into St-Donat's snowfields and forests



ROCHELLE LASH

The community around St-Donat is popular with cottagers, but it's not often in the limelight. The resort hotel Le Grand R is changing that. Le Grand R is a deluxe woodsy resort on a splendid private estate about 10 kilometres outside of St-Donat in the Lanaudière tourism region. This domain embraces all of the lodging requisites of a deluxe property, but its wow factor is the great outdoors. Set among the most compelling, pristine landscapes north of Montreal, Le Grand R is at the heart of lakes, snowfields, forests and mountains. The condos are built adjacent to the Clubhouse — the main lodge — overlooking Lac Bouillon, and the chalets are nestled in the woods, so Le Grand R is very much a part of nature.

THE SCENE Le Grand R is a great hit with families because the large estate is safe and car-free, plus there is a choice of activities, including an indoor pool. All of the accommodations have full kitchens and washer-dryers. Everyone in the gang can do their own thing outdoors. The Club R formula — any season — means that all of the facilities are included in the rates. In winter, that would be the indoor pool, the fitness room, ski storage and an extensive trail network for snowshoeing or cross-country skiing. In summer, Le Grand R has its own private beach with lounge chairs and small craft on Lac Bouillon, which does not permit motorized boats, so peace and quiet reign. The resort is a major destination for weddings because the setting is so photo-worthy, with a gazebo on the lakefront and the mountains in the distance.

THE LODGING What is appealing about Le Grand R's lodging is the beauty

of the rugged, rustic exteriors combined with modern, well-appointed interiors. The most traditional accommodations are the deluxe, four-star condo-style units of one, two or three bedrooms. These are spacious units with designer kitchens, wood panelling and gas fireplaces — truly good-looking. Large windows give everyone a gorgeous view of valleys or mountains, and some look out on Ski La Résève, which is four kilometres away, and owned by the same people who own Le Grand R. The eight Chalets du Trappeur are equally comfortable, with the added charm that they're tucked into the woods. These are rustic-modern three-star accommodations, each with two bedrooms, a living room with sofa bed, a wood-burning stove, a full kitchen, one bathroom with a shower, and yes, a washer-dryer, Wi-Fi and a flat-screen TV, even in the forest. Most guests are in groups of family or friends and they bring groceries to eat in, but Le Grand R has a restaurant that operates evenings Fridays through Sundays in winter, and additional Wednesdays and Thursdays in high season. It's straightforward, affordable fare, with main courses of chicken, fish, pasta or beef, as well as the house spe-

cialty, pad Thai. **THE SPORTS** All guests at Le Grand R have access to the resort's 42 kilometres of trails for snowshoeing, winter hiking and cross-country skiing. If you're keen for more, the hotel's network links with the Sentier National, a long distance trail used in summer and winter. It crosses Lanaudière, the Laurentians, Outaouais and other Quebec regions, and also connects to trails in Ontario, New Brunswick and beyond. Ski La Résève, an exciting downhill mountain that is more than 60 years old, multi-tasks with snow tubing, telemarking, backcountry, fat-biking and snow-scooter jaunts (it's like a luge, but standing). Good news for newbies: Equipment rentals are available for all of those options. La Résève has skiing and snowboarding trails for everyone, including lots of kids' stuff, but it stands out for its black-diamond challenges. Elite junior skiers or snowboarders, ages eight to 12, can take weekend courses in acrobatic skiing or slopestyle, tackling Olympic-inspired moguls and obstacles. La Résève's Versant Nature has no lifts, but it does have

IF YOU GO

St-Donat is a 90-minute drive from Montreal via Autoroute 15, Exit 89, 819-424-2833, st-donat.com. **Tourism Lanaudière:** 450-834-2535, 800-363-2788, lanaudiere.ca. **Le Grand R:** 855-424-1333, 819-424-1333, legrandr.ca; 251 Chemin Fusey, St-Donat. Bistro Le Grand R, open Fri.-Sat.-Sun. in winter (and also Wed.-Thurs. in high season). **Prices:** Prices fluctuate and are approximate. They include indoor pool, fitness room, trails, local calls, Wi-Fi, board games/toys. Packages available with meals and downhill skiing/tubing at La Résève. Christmas packages include holiday dinners and themed activities. Condo-suites: One bedroom: \$199-\$259 per night, for two people; two bedrooms, \$289-\$399, for up to four; or three bedroom, \$399-\$519, for up to six. Chalets du Trappeur: \$199-\$299, for up to six, with beds and sofa-beds. **Ski La Résève:** 877-424-1373, 819-424-1373, skilareserve.com



Le Grand R's lodgings are modern and well-appointed.

three glorious backcountry trails. The Festival du Talon Libre, celebrating such heel-up sports as telemarking and Nordic skiing, will take place Feb. 17-18. Lanaudière also is major snowmobiling country. Le Grand R has a secure garage and you can hop directly onto Trail No. 33, heading south for 21 kilometres to Notre-Dame-de-Merci or north for 128 kilometres to St-Michel-des-Saints. If you need to rent a ride, Location Sports St-Donat (819-424-2244), also adjacent to No. 33, has gear, maps and MXZ Bombardier machines.

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