



The dwellings of Laõ Cabines de Racine are perched high on a hill for dramatic views of Eastern Townships mountains and valleys. "It's like living outside, but you are indoors," says owner Marie Courtemanche. *EASTERN TOWNSHIPS TOURISM*

IF YOU GO

**Laõ Cabines:** 819-345-4434, laocabines.ca; 548 chemin du Grand Brompton, Racine; three models, \$95-\$160-\$190, including firewood in winter, drinking water, bedding, soap, trails, lake. **La Station du Chêne Rouge:** 819-437-0737, lastationduchenerouge.com; 1640 chemin Rodgers, Canton-de-Hatley; \$85-\$165 per night, including firewood in winter, trails, bedding (in some units), drinking water. Baggage service starts at \$20, round trip. Bring your own food, toiletries, towels, bedding (for some units). Pet-friendly. Camping, less expensive, is available in summer. **Eastern Townships:** 800-355-5755, easterntownships.org.

HOTEL INTEL

# Get away from it all with a glamping trip



ROCHELLE LASH

Staycations, privacy and fresh air are keywords in today's challenged travel scene. Glamping is the way to go if you love the outdoors and if you are willing to give up the niceties of a hotel room like TVs, mini-bars and indoor loos and showers. Comfortable cabins are popping up all around Montreal, offering woody lodgings and light adventure.

The choice includes all shapes and sizes of huts, cabins, yurts and tree houses with such rustic conveniences as gas stoves for heating and cooking facilities.

Luxury in glamping is measured differently than luxury in an urban hotel or a country resort. If you want to count your blessings, serenity is a big factor. Figure that you will be in the woods, quite far from your neighbours, and you'll probably only hear the brush of the wind through the trees. That surely rates five stars for peacefulness.



La Station du Chêne Rouge has creative cabins and snow-sports trails for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and winter hiking, in the woods outside North Hatley. *LA STATION DU CHÊNE ROUGE*

Here are two exciting glamping developments in the Eastern Townships, an approximately 90-minute drive from Montreal.

**Laõ Cabines:** Laõ Cabines de Racine is a domain of six creative lodgings in the Val-St-François region about 40 kilometres north of Magog. Laõ Cabines is perched high on a rocky cliff and built atop wooden poles for even more dramatic views of valleys and mountains.

"We are truly lost among the trees and also on a hilltop," said Marie Courtemanche, who owns the striking new glamping

grounds with her partner, Vincent Tognon.

"Our guests are very much on their own, isolated and in total tranquility," Courtemanche said. "We call it nature in comfort."

Laõ has three models of cabins, all single-space studios with queen beds as well as kitchenettes (but no refrigerator). Some have sofa beds. Cleverly designed by Ubudesign of Granby, the cabins are pine, each with one wall of glass to capture that fabulous vista.

"It's like living outside, but you are indoors," Courtemanche said.

The cabins fan out from a Welcome Pavilion, which has Wi-Fi, showers, loos, a hot tub, games and books. There is cellphone service throughout the property. Laõ also has four kilometres of trails for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, and in summer there's paddle boarding and kayaking on a lake.

Courtemanche can prepare a lunch box with goodies from local suppliers: cheese from Fromagerie la Nouvelle-France, charcuterie from Cochon Tout Rond and a baguette and chocolate from Les Douceurs de Lory. She also recommends visits to such food producers as Boucherie Lamarche and Le Marché Localvore and in summer, the farmer's stand, Brin d'Ail.

Dining-out options include Bistro le Radis Noir, Brasserie du Lac Brompton and Bistro le Brandy Creek.

**Chêne Rouge:** La Station du Chêne Rouge is named for the massive oak trees that envelop its large mountaintop glamping domain, outside of the village of North Hatley.

Chêne Rouge is home to 10 eco-inspired lodgings, as well as five summertime camping huts. The year-round getaways include shapes like dome-style pods,

triangular A-frames and square cabins.

You are all set for light cooking, lounging and sleeping with queen or double beds, wood stoves, small equipped kitchens and a table and chairs for two or four.

The toilets and showers are at the Welcome Centre, but there are several waterless toilets on the grounds.

Outdoors, guests can relax on their individual patios around a firepit. There is cellphone service, but no Wi-Fi.

"We want to be in harmony with nature," said Philippe Florentin, who operates Chêne Rouge with his wife, Hilda. "This is a place where people, flora and fauna can coexist."

The cabins are situated between 50 and 950 metres from the central pavilion and you can borrow a sled or wheelbarrow to transport your luggage, or pay a fee for baggage service by ATV.

Chêne Rouge has trails for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and winter hiking, so guests can spend their days in the woods or make a break for civilization with a gourmet lunch at Manoir Hovey, the Relais & Châteaux in North Hatley; downhill skiing at Mont Orford, 25 kilometres away; or a visit to Sherbrooke, home of Ström Spa and the Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke.

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# Crack a good book and cuddle a cute cat

Nova Scotia bookstore finds winning feline formula ups the cosy factor

DAVID BARBER

You've probably already heard of Cats the musical and Cats the movie. But Cats the bookstore? One bibliophile in Nova Scotia has that covered, too.

And why not? Both Cats the successful musical and its less successful movie version are based on a book to begin with — a 1939 collection of T.S. Eliot poems called Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats. And where better for cats to indulge their curiosity than among the bookshelves?

So, fittingly, visitors will find there's more to Otis & Clementine's Books & Coffee in Upper Tantallon, N.S., than just organic beans and entertaining literature.

There are also a whole lot of kittens in the store — and all are available for adoption.

Some feline residents may greet visitors at the door. Others may wander through the store looking for someone to pet them. More may find a spot on bookshelves or a window sill to curl up in.

"It's a perfect fit having the cats here. It just makes the space feel cosier," owner Ellen Helmke told website Insider.com. "Sometimes people come in just to see the cats and sometimes people don't even know that cats are here. It's very cute."

Helmke opened her second-hand bookstore in 2011 and began fostering kittens in May

2019. So far, she said, she's found homes for 30 cats. And the cats are helping her while she helps them back.

"It's definitely been a benefit to me in terms of my quality of life and the success of my business," she said. "The books are in good shape, but the kittens are what gets people talking."

Some customers may be surprised to see cats when they come to shop for books, but others already know because they follow the store on social media.

South Paw Conservation Nova Scotia (SPCA), a local rescue group, provides the kittens and cats, ensuring they are up to date on vaccines, are spayed or neutered and are also dewormed. A \$235 fee covers the costs, after applicants have filled out an on-line adoption form and been approved.

But if you find a kitty you like, Helmke advises you don't delay.

"I usually only have the kittens for a couple of weeks on average, and then they get adopted," Helmke said. "The interest in each one is amazing. As soon as we get new cats in people are like, 'I want to get my application and send it in!'"

And Helmke has found fostering has been a win-win for both her business and the cats.

"It draws customers to the store," she said, "the kittens become socialized, and they easily find homes."



You can take home a cat along with some books at this shop. *PHOTOS: OTIS & CLEMENTINE'S BOOKS & COFFEE*



A young reader shares a tale with a curious companion.



The kittens at Otis & Clementine's are quick to find homes.