

# LE MASSIF DE CHARLEVOIX IS EXPANDING

*Deluxe lodging and warm-weather activities will draw in year-round visitors*

Please follow guidelines for inter-regional travel. On-mountain restaurants will serve outside or takeout, and some facilities might be limited.



**ROCHELLE LASH**  
Hotel Intel

The dream evolves.

Daniel Gauthier, co-founder of Cirque du Soleil, developed Le Massif de Charlevoix over the past 19 years, transforming it from a quaint ski area into a major mountain with an international reach.

He made a pitch for the Olympics in the early 2000s but certain facilities did not meet the official requirements. Now Le Massif has partnered with a new Club Med that is expected to open in December.

As a snow sports area, Le Massif is known for its long trails on the highest vertical drop in Eastern Canada and its mesmerizing views of the frozen St. Lawrence River, all wrapped in the misty whites and greys of a Charlevoix winter landscape.

That gorgeous tableau is changing its colours to green forests and blue waters for spring and summer.

**Summer:** Le Massif has opened deluxe lodging and is launching a roster of warm-weather activities, broadening its appeal to year-round visitors.

The first full-fledged summer at the landmark resort area officially starts June 19 with panoramic rides on the gondola, a network of hiking trails and 20 kilometres of lift-serviced mountain biking for all levels. The two trail systems wind up, down and around this scenic mountain, from both the base and the summit.

**Lodging:** “Our lodging is built to combine deluxe country comfort, views of nature and easy access to the mountain,” said Lukas Vallée Valletta, the resort area’s new director. “Now our guests can appreciate the beauty

## IF YOU GO

Le Massif de Charlevoix is about a four-hour drive from Montreal (350 km). 877-536-2774, 418-632-5876; lemassif.com. Summit entrance: 185 Chemin du Massif, Petite-Rivière-St-François. The gondola has different prices for adults, juniors 17 and older and families. Children six and younger ride for free, at certain times. The gondola is expected to operate from June 19 to Oct. 11, but possibly not daily.

**Lodging:** Check for online promotions at lemassif.com. Two-night minimum. Lodging starts at \$219 per night for four in a one-bedroom unit. Prices fluctuate widely according to date, season, availability and size of the unit. Rates will be higher on weekends, and from July 12 to Oct. 13. Ask about specials for children.

**Charlevoix tourism:** 800-667-2276, tourisme-charlevoix.com. Local tourism: 418-632-1058, tourismepetiteriviere.com.

of Charlevoix during all four seasons and they will be steps from the gondola and adventure sports.”

Le Massif’s accommodations have distinct designs in various locations around the mountain: Les Chalets-Forêt, Les Refuges and Les Caches de la Grande Pointe. Each has its own character and price point, but they all are deluxe and fully equipped with fireplaces, flat-screen TVs and designer kitchens.

Les Chalets-Forêt, a cluster of lodges perched at the summit of Le Massif, represent high-mountain drama. The houses are three-storey dwellings for between eight and 12 people, with striking angular glass and wood architecture.

Les Chalets-Forêt have classy earth-toned decor and huge windows with panoramic views of the forest and, far below, the river. What’s different here is the top-floor experience, which has the dining room, living area and kitchen in one open space. Bedrooms are on the second level.



The gondola at Le Massif de Charlevoix overlooks the St. Lawrence River, and in summer will carry visitors to hiking and mountain biking trails. ALAIN BLANCHETTE/LE MASSIF DE CHARLEVOIX



Le Massif’s accommodations have distinct designs. Each has its own character, but they all are fully equipped with fireplaces, flat-screen TVs and kitchens. JEAN-SÉBASTIEN CHARTIER/LE MASSIF DE CHARLEVOIX

The newest sector is Les Chalets-Forêt Jumelés; these are similar to the original design, but have two houses attached, rather than totally independent structures.

Les Refuges is a sector that represents simplicity in nature. These are compact two- and three-bedroom dwellings for up to six people, built around an oval driveway, near the summit

of the ski lifts. They’re comfortable, casual and practical, with country-inspired decor, pine-panelled walls and queen and bunk beds. Many have patios, barbecues and hot tubs.

Moving upscale in fittings and furnishings, but located at the mountain’s base, Les Caches de la Grande Pointe is a complex of posh one- to three-bedroom condos, with combinations of queen,

king and bunk beds and futons, for up to eight people.

The thrill at Les Caches is experiencing a little-known area that’s about to boom. You’ll be at the foot of Le Massif, almost on the shore of the St. Lawrence River, and near the historic village of Petite-Rivière-St-François, as well as the new Club Med.

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# Big fun in small-town Spain

*Arcos de la Frontera, a little hill town just south of Sevilla, offers plenty of activities for visiting tourists, writes Rick Steves.*

As we’ve had to postpone our travels because of the pandemic, I believe a weekly dose of travel dreaming can be good medicine. Here’s a reminder of the fun that awaits us in Europe at the other end of this crisis.

I’m in the little hill town of Arcos de la Frontera, just south of Sevilla. Today, my goal is to connect with the culture of small-town Spain.

Arcos smothers its hilltop, tumbling down all sides like the train of a wedding dress. The labyrinthine old centre is a photographer’s feast. I can feel the breeze funnel through the narrow streets as drivers pull in car mirrors to squeeze through.

Residents brag that they see only the backs of the birds as they fly. To see what they mean, I climb to the viewpoint at the main square, high in the old town. Bellying up to the railing — the town’s suicide jumping-off point — I look down and ponder the fancy cliffside hotel’s erosion concerns, orderly orange groves, flower-filled greenhouses, fine views toward Morocco ... and the backs of the birds as they fly.

Exploring the town, I discover that a short walk from Arcos’ church of Santa María to the church of San Pedro (St. Peter) is littered with subtle but fun glimpses into the town’s past.

The church of Santa María faces the main square. After Arcos was retaken from the Moors in the 13th century, the church was built — atop a mosque. In the pavement is a 15th-century magic circle: 12 red and 12 white stones — the white ones represent various constellations. When a child came to the church to be baptized, the parents would stop here first for a good Christian exorcism. The exorcist would stand inside the protective circle and cleanse the baby of any evil spirits. This also was a holy place back in Muslim times. While Christian residents no longer use it, Islamic Sufis still come here on pilgrimage every November.

In 1699, an earthquake cracked the church’s foundation. Today, arches reach over the narrow lane — added to prop the church against neighbouring buildings. Thanks to these braces,

the church survived the bigger earthquake of 1755. All over town, similar arches support earthquake-damaged structures.

Today, the town rumbles only when the bulls run. Señor González Oca’s little barber shop is plastered with posters of bulls running Pamplona-style through the streets of Arcos during Holy Week. Locals still remember an American from the nearby Navy base at Rota, who was killed by a bull in 1994.

Walking on toward St. Peter’s, Arcos’ second church, I pass Roman columns stuck onto street corners — protection from reckless donkey carts. St. Peter’s was, until recently, home to a resident bellman who lived in the spire. He was a basket maker and a colourful character — famous for bringing his donkey up into the tower. The donkey grew too big to get back out. Finally, the bellman had no choice but to kill the donkey — and eat it.

The small square in front of the church — about the only flat piece of pavement around — serves as the old-town soccer field for neighbourhood kids.

At a nearby convent, the windows are striped with heavy bars and spikes. Popping into the dimly lit foyer, I push the buzzer and the creaky Lazy Susan spins, revealing a bag of freshly baked

cookies for sale. When I spin back the cookies with a “no, gracias,” she surprises me with a few words of English — countering, in a Monty Python-esque voice, “We have cupcakes as well.” I buy a bag of cupcakes to support the mission work of the convent. I glimpse — through the not-quite one-way mirror — the not-meant-to-be-seen sister in her flowing robe and habit momentarily appear and disappear.

Saving my appetite for dinner, I dole out my cupcakes to children as I wander on. My town walk culminates at another convent — which now houses the best restaurant in town, Restaurante El Convento. María Moreno Moreno, the proud owner, explains the

menu. (Spanish children take the name of both parents — who in María’s case must have been distant cousins.) As church bells clang, she pours me a glass of vino tinto con mucho cuerpo (full-bodied red wine) from the Rioja region.

As I sip the wine, María asks how my visit is going. I tell her that the entire town is a mucho cuerpo experience ... creating memories that will be a treasured souvenir.

This article was adapted from Rick’s new book, *For the Love of Europe*. Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. You can email Rick at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook. For Postmedia News



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