



Patrice Drouin with Kate the Clydesdale, and Lisa Linton with Soya, a Canadian breed. In addition to Auberge & Campagne, the couple run a stable for trail riding, breeding and rescue horses.

HOTEL INTEL

COSY INN SETS UP SHOP IN 1870s GENERAL STORE

Auberge brings couple's 'eco-vision' to life at gathering place near Mont-Ste-Anne



ROCHELLE LASH

Located about 45 minutes north-east of Quebec City, St-Ferréol-les-Neiges was settled around 1730 as a farming community. It's been relatively quiet since. A dynamic couple, Patrice Drouin and Lisa Linton, are picking up St-Fe's pace with the new country inn Auberge & Campagne and a handful of activities that have captivated both tourists and locals. Built in 1870 and carefully restored recently, the Auberge was originally the town's first school and later its general store. It's a heritage building set on a hill with views of the church, the towering massif of Mont-Ste-Anne and picturesque valleys, forests and mountains. As the name of the town implies, this is a white winter wonderland, where snowbanks pile up as high as rooftops and the boughs of fir trees hang low from the weight of a recent storm. **Local focus:** The folksy nine-room Auberge is only part of a tiny kingdom of back-to-the-land enterprises. Drouin and Linton also operate Chez Pat Ski Vélo Apéro, an intimate après-sports bar that specializes in Quebec bites and beverages; Cheval & Campagne, a stable for trail riding, breeding and rescue horses; and Ferme des Neiges, where children can help with the potato harvest,

learn horsemanship and visit pigs, goats and chickens, all raised organically. Drouin and Linton are inveterate multi-taskers. Drouin was the founder of GesteV, a company that orchestrates major events (and is now owned by Québecor). In summer, Linton is a trail-riding guide, and she recently published her third book, *A Bite of Life*, featuring stories about friends and food. Her first, *The Cabin*, would fit right in with Netflix's Nordic noir mystery series. "The farm and our use of regional products are part of our eco-vision," said Linton, who was born in Sweden. "We are also very focused on our community, and we are proud that our inn has already become a gathering place." The local theme runs throughout the Auberge. The works of regional artists are displayed, including photographers Manon Dumas, Matt Charland and Frédéric Bouchard, as well as painters Barbara Bergeron and Roxanne Vermette. The great outdoors and sports are at the heart of life here. One corner of the inn shows off the new-technology backcountry skis crafted by the company Ferreol, which has been featured on the CBC show *Dragons' Den*. **The Auberge:** "The Auberge is 'lagom,'" said Linton. "That's Swedish for 'not too fancy, not too rustic — just cosy, warm and comfortably in the middle.'" The centrepiece is the salon, where pine rocking chairs and vintage velvet loveseats are set around a fireplace. The nine rooms have double, queen or king



Auberge & Campagne features a cosy atmosphere with a fireplace lounge, nine rooms and an intimate bar. PHOTOS: AUBERGE & CAMPAGNE

beds for between two and four adults or children. Some have patchwork quilts and four-poster beds, and they all have pre-loved country furniture and portraits of Linton's favourite horses. Guests can also cocoon in a fully furnished apartment with a private entrance; a chalet, which has a view of the horses in their corral; and the Bunker, a refurbished military cabin in the forest with bunk beds for three. **Food and drink:** Linton's Swedish-style breakfast features Nespresso coffee, fruit, muesli, yogurt, hard-boiled eggs, cheese and ham, as well as homemade croissants with fig jam and Swedish cinnamon rolls. The honey comes from her beehives. Chez Pat, Drouin's café-bar, serves beer from Microbrasserie des Beaux Prés in Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré and gin from the Menaud distillery in Charlevoix.

There are also gourmandises such as brie from Portneuf, goose foie gras from La Ferme Québec-Oies in St-Tite-des-Caps and organic, gluten-free sausage from Viandes Bio de Charlevoix. **The region:** The Beaupré coast of the St. Lawrence River is known for superlative downhill and cross-country skiing and fat-biking at Mont-Ste-Anne, snowshoeing or walking along the Mestachibo Trail, dogsledding at Les Secrets Nordiques and wellness at Spa des Neiges. (The Auberge rents fat bikes.) In summer, Mont-Ste-Anne transitions to thrills like paragliding and mountain biking, as well as hiking and golf. Intrepid adventurers can tackle Canyon Ste-Anne's cliff rappelling, suspension bridges and zip-lining high over a rocky gorge of the Ste-Anne River. rochelle@rochellelash.com

IF YOU GO

St-Ferréol-les-Neiges is a three-hour, 20-minute drive from Montreal. It is two kilometres from Mont-Ste-Anne's cross-country centre, five kilometres from the downhill mountain and 50 kilometres from Le Massif de Charlevoix. **Auberge & Campagne:** 581-982-4933, aubergeetcampagne.com; 3470 Royale Ave., St-Ferréol-les-Neiges. Chez Pat Ski Vélo Apéro, Thurs.-Sun. One room is dog-friendly. Electric car charging available. **Price:** Rooms from \$189, including large continental breakfast, Nespresso coffee, and a lounge-kitchen with microwave, fridge, books, board games. Apartment or chalet from \$199. Camping-style Bunker from \$89 (bring a sleeping bag). **Mont-Ste-Anne:** 888-827-4579, mont-sainte-anne.com; Beaupré. Part of Resorts of the Canadian Rockies (RCR). Partner of Vail Resorts; some Epic passes are valid (epicpass.com). **Quebec City-area tourism:** 877-783-1608, quebec-cite.com

Vernazza is the humble queen of Italy's Riviera

It's easy to slip into full vacation mode in this tiny village, *Rick Steves* writes.

You can search the entire Mediterranean coastline for the best rustic village, surrounded by vineyards and steeped in tradition, and not find a more rewarding favourite than tiny Vernazza, my favourite of the five villages that make up Italy's Cinque Terre. The Cinque Terre is a stretch of Italy's Riviera tucked into the mountainous shoreline between Genoa and Pisa. Long cut off from the modern world, this remote expanse only became easily accessible with the coming of the train. Of the Cinque Terre's five towns, Vernazza, overseen by a ruined castle and with the closest thing to a natural harbour, is the jewel. The occasional train popping in and out of the mountain tunnels is the only reminder that the modern world is still out there somewhere. It's a tough

community long living off the sea — and, in the last generation, living off travellers who love the sea. The church bells dictate a relaxed tempo. Yellow webs of fishing nets, tables bedecked with umbrellas, kids with plastic shovels, and a flotilla of gritty little boats tethered to buoys provide splashes of colour. And accompanying the scene is the mesmerizing white noise of children at play, happy diners and the washboard rhythm of the waves. Vernazza's one street connects the harbour with the train station before melting into the vineyards. Like veins on a grape leaf, paths and stairways reach from the main street up into this watercolour huddle of houses that eventually dissolve into the vines high above. A rainbow of laundry flaps as if to keep the flies off the stout grandmothers

who clog ancient doorways. At the top end of town, Vernazza's scrawny access road hits a post, effectively a dead end for drivers. No cars enter this community of 600 people. Like the breakwater holds off the waves at the bottom of town, the post holds back the modern storm at the top. But the town's ruined castle no longer says, "Keep out." The breakwater is a broad, inviting sidewalk edged with boulders — reaching out into the sea like a finger beckoning the distant excursion boats. While Vernazza's fishing fleet is down to just a couple of boats, locals are still more likely to own a boat than a car. Boats are tethered to buoys, except in winter or when the red storm flag indicates bad seas. In that case they're pulled up onto the little Harbourfront square, usually reserved for restaurant tables. The humble town gathers around its pebbled cove, where well-worn locals enjoy some shade on benches and tourists sunbathe on the rocks. In sum-

mer, the beach becomes a soccer ground, where teams comprised of local bar- and restaurant-workers provide late-night entertainment. Vernazza has two halves. Sciuiu (Vernazzan dialect for "flowery") is the sunny side on the left as you face inland, and Luvegu ("dank") is the shady side on the right. But from end to end, everything's painted in one of the "Ligurian pastels," as regulated by a commissioner of good taste in the regional government. High above, the castle — now just a tower, some broken stone walls, and a grassy park — served as the town's lookout back in pirate days. Below the castle, an interior arcade connected houses — ideal for fleeing attacks. Village churches are always worth popping into. Vernazza's is on the harbourfront and is unusual for its east-facing entryway, rather than the more typical western orientation. Hanging on the wall inside are three historic portable crosses — replicas of crosses that (locals like to believe) Vernazzan ships once brought along on crusades to the Holy Land. During religious processions, these crosses are taken down and carried through town.

In front of the church, a mini piazza decorated with a River Rock mosaic is a popular hang-out. It's where the town's old ladies soak up the day's last bit of sun and kids enjoy a rare patch of level ball field. My evenings in Vernazza are spent sitting on a bench and people-watching, either with gelato or a glass of local white wine (I usually borrow the glass from a bar; they don't mind). During the passeggiata (evening stroll), locals meander lazily up and down the main street doing their vasche (laps). Sometimes I join in, becoming part of the slow-motion parade. Gelato in hand, I gaze up at the people looking out the windows of the faded pastel buildings like a gallery of portraits hanging on ancient walls. Becoming part of that sleepy Riviera scene, it's so easy to toss my busy itinerary into the sea and just be totally on vacation. *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.*