

YOU



Le Massif de Charlevoix has aligned with the Mountain Collective, which groups together 25 international destinations. *JEAN-SÉBASTIEN CHARTIER-PLANTE*



Bromont will have more after-dark trails this season. *BROMONT, MONTAGNE D'EXPÉRIENCES*

SKI DEALS ARE SNOWBALLING

Quebecers can go global or stay local with multi-mountain passes and deep discounts this season



Mont-Ste-Anne has summit-to-base trails for all levels, as well as superlative cross-country. *ANDRÉ-OLIVIER LYRA*

ROCHELLE LASH

With the price of life skyrocketing, one would think the cost of skiing and snowboarding would spiral upward too, especially with the surge in countryside tourism.

But winter slide sports are fighting inflation with a storm of discounted deals and multi-resort passes, local and global.

If we stay home and tackle some of Quebec's roughly 75 downhill areas, we can enjoy the slopes that spawned champions like snowboarder Sébastien Toutant, who started out at Val St-Côme, and, from Les Sommets, skiers Alexandre Bilodeau, Mikael Kingsbury and the Dufour-Lapointe sisters.

Local, independently owned mountains have big hearts and inspire loyalty and family visits,

with an invaluable chance to ski or ride an hour or two from home. Imagine how many thousands of youngsters have graduated from snowplow turns to freestyle and moguls at Mont Rigaud, Mont Habitant, Val St-Côme, Mont St-Bruno and Les Sommets.

All good, but with a multi-mountain pass you can slide around the world and après-ski with fondue and schnapps in the Alps or sip pisco sours in the Andes.

If you are wary of season passes or advance ticket sales, consider them a bargain. Prices for last-minute tickets at major areas are sky high and sales may be limited. Whistler Blackcomb can cost up to \$229 for one day (for same-day access during peak holidays like Christmas or school break) and Tremblant can reach \$145. In

the U.S., Vail and Deer Valley easily topped US\$200 last season, and sometimes skyrocketed to more than US\$250 on holidays.

That's scarier than a double black diamond run on an icy day.

The fine print: You'll have to sift through various formulas. Multi-passes are valid for anywhere between one day and a full season, with your lift ticket included or discounted, and with or without blackout dates. Prices here are for adults, but you can expect deals for seniors, juniors and students.

Slide sports areas make it worthwhile to buy in advance. Fees are often at their lowest in April, almost eight months before the season starts, and then increase every few months. So, yes, some of the best prices have expired for this year.

The downhill action has been off to an early start this season. Sommet St-Sauveur, which boasts the longest season in Eastern Canada, opened last week and often has skiing and riding until May. It's celebrating with an après-ski party Saturday from 5 to 10 p.m. Tremblant opened Thursday, and hosts a music and dance party Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. The lifts rolled last weekend at Stowe Mountain Resort in Vermont.

Most other areas around Montreal are expected to open by mid-December, but early season operating days are often uncertain.

Go global: Most of the world's largest downhill resorts have joined coalitions. It's a win for the sports companies that broaden their

reach and clients who can tour around at great prices.

For example, a local-only Tremblant Tonik season pass costs \$699 to \$759 for 2022-23 (depending when you buy), but if you upgrade to the Ikon Pass from Alterra Mountain Company, which owns Tremblant's on-mountain operations, you'll have access to 50-plus areas around the world.

Ikon Pass holders can sample New England destinations such as Killington, Sugarbush, Sunday River, Sugarloaf and Loon Mountain.

They can also visit European superstars Zermatt-Matterhorn, Chamonix Mont-Blanc and Kitzbühel, plus Valle Nevado in Chile and Deer Valley and Sun Valley in the Western U.S.

SEE SKI SEASON ON C2



Mont Sutton offers glade skiing, mogul runs and a growing alpine touring network. *MONT SUTTON*

GREAT DEALS TO BE HAD ON SLOPES THIS SEASON

SKI SEASON FROM C1

One of the Ikon Pass's ultimate powder experiences is Lotte Arai Resort in Japan, which is blanketed in up to 20 metres of precious dry snow annually, with sushi and sake on the après-ski menu. Canada's Rocky Mountains come close, but Quebec's mountains get four to eight metres.

Even Le Massif de Charlevoix — a fiercely independent trailblazer — has aligned with the Mountain Collective. This association groups together 25 bucket list destinations, including Panorama and Revelstoke in B.C.; Banff Sunshine and Lake Louise; plus the aristocrats of the Western U.S., Sun Valley, Idaho and Aspen Snowmass; Chamonix Mont-Blanc, the alpine queen of France; as well as areas in Australia, New Zealand, Chile and Japan.

"Linking with Mountain Collective is consistent with our strategy of becoming a world-class ski resort and appealing to clients from outside Quebec," said Nicolas Racine, general manager of Groupe Le Massif. A Club Med opened there last season, adding further international flair.

Mont-Ste-Anne and Stoneham, near Quebec City, and Stowe and Okemo mountain resorts, in Vermont, are go-to mountains even for some Montrealers. They're all connected to Vail Resorts' powerful Epic Pass. If you buy in, you'll have unlimited access to 41 areas and limited days at others.

The dizzying choices provided by the Epic Pass include British Columbia beauties Whistler Blackcomb, which has a new 10-person gondola at Creekside, and Fernie Alpine Resort, known for its copious snowfall, authentic town and ski-in/ski-out Lizard Creek Lodge, which has been upgraded.

Epic also allows access to Attitash Mountain Resort and Wildcat Mountain in New Hampshire; U.S. giants Vail in Colorado and Park City in Utah; Verbier and Les 3 Vallées in the Alps; as well as areas in Australia.

Some areas are linked to more than one multi-resort pass. If you're pumped for a marathon at the incomparable SkiBig3 in Alberta — Banff Sunshine, Lake Louise Ski Resort and Mount Norquay — you can access all three with the Ikon Pass and the SkiBig3 Pass, as well as the Mountain Collective Pass, which is good for Banff Sunshine and Lake Louise and discounted at Mount Norquay. Banff Sunshine and Lake Louise were the first two areas in Canada to open this season, in early November.

Ski local: Smaller, indie mountains are irresistible, too, and there are many ways to save, including season passes, weekday visits and multiple-day tickets.


"Mont-Habitant has been home to up to four generations of clients and employees," said James Stein, whose grandfather opened the tiny ski area in the Lower Laurentians in 1959.

"It's likely one of the last hills in

Canada still operated by its original developers," said Stein. "We are part of many people's childhood memories."

The Canadian Ski Council's Grade 4 & 5 SnowPass buys ski days for youngsters in those grades, including two visits each at Mont Rigaud, Ski Garceau in St-Donat and Mont Avalanche in St-Adolphe-d'Howard, as well as other sites. It's \$29.95 for the season.

The Association des stations de ski du Québec offers deals at most areas (Le Massif de Charlevoix is a notable exception). For beginners, the Never Ever Days package (available starting in December) costs an inviting \$29.95 for two days. For those who want to sample many areas, the Ski Passe-Partout costs \$49.99 and gives 25 to 30 per cent off, with five visits at each mountain. It's a great way to return to favourites like Mont Blanc in the Laurentians and sample new territory like Massif du Sud, a snowy secret east of Lévis.

 *Linking with Mountain Collective is consistent with our strategy of becoming a world-class ski resort and appealing to clients from outside Quebec.*

Also up north, Les Sommets has long offered multiple-mountain tickets for engaging day and night skiing at Sommet St-Sauveur and its Versant Avila, as well as Morin Heights, Gabriel and, near Gatinneau, Edelweiss.

In the Eastern Townships, the L'Est Go card provides good rates at four independent areas: Owl's Head, Mont Sutton, Mont Orford (which has new RFID technology) and Bromont, montagne d'expériences. The latter is Quebec's third-largest area in skiable terrain, after Tremblant and Mont-Ste-Anne.

Bromont's Apex Card brings a day ticket down from roughly \$95 to \$63, if you buy several. Bromont will have an exciting new season, with 31 new snow cannons, more after-dark trails and a dramatic new panoramic lookout.

At Mont Sutton, the Monday pass is heaven. No crowds and no blackout dates at \$198 for the season. And the new Sutton Card, available for two, three, four or five non-consecutive days, saves up to 35 per cent on regular tickets until Dec. 15.

Bon ski.



A local Tremblant Tonik season pass costs \$699 to \$759. *TREMBLANT*



Owl's Head overlooks Lake Memphremagog in the Eastern Townships. *OWL'S HEAD*



Picturesque Mont Orford has three mountains for downhill and alpine touring. *MONT ORFORD*