

Savings On The Slopes

Now's the time to get Quebec's early-bird deals

Rochelle Lash

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If your eye is on the bottom line, casual skiing is out. Commitment is in. What's trending at Quebec's snow-sports areas is big savings on advanced-purchase tickets and deep discounts if you are flexible.

"Season passes offer the biggest savings," says Claude Pélouquin, president of the Association des Stations de Ski du Québec, which groups 74 areas from Abitibi to the Gaspé, and from the U.S. border north to Saguenay. "If you are ready to commit to buying early-season tickets, you will save a lot, so it is win-win for both the skier and the snow resort.

"And if a skier or snowboarder can adapt to off-peak days, they can take advantage of night skiing or early-week discounts. Saturday is the most crowded and expensive day, but there are bargains the rest of the time."

The hottest ticket in Quebec is the Ski Passe-Partout: \$39.99 with 30 per cent to 40 per cent off day passes to any area for a maximum of five visits to each. It's such a coveted Christmas gift that the ASSQ is sold out by early December. The Accèski Famille works similar monetary magic at \$25 for adults and \$15 for children. Plus, many areas put families first with attractive rates, so the entire gang can spend the day together.

Mont Habitant in the Lower Laurentians adores kids, and its Family Program features a trio lift ticket for one adult and two children at an affordable \$63. Meanwhile, you can party at Ski Bromont, the Eastern Townships' most sizzling after-dark scene.

A four-hour night pass costs \$31 and on those special Nu-its Blanches, the slopes are lit until 2 a.m. and La Débarque bar swings until 3 a.m.

Mont Saint-Sauveur traditionally is the first area in Quebec to open and the last to close in spring, so investing in lift passes here has high returns.

Mont Saint-Sauveur International offers a night season pass at \$199 at its six small-but-feisty areas in the Lower Laurentians and Gatineau. A weekday season pass is \$345.

The seniors' deals are so tempting that you probably can't wait to turn 60, when you can snag 50 per cent off at a different area every weekday.

You can ski well into your old age pension with steals such as Tuesdays at Ski Mont Gabriel for \$15.70 and Mondays at Mont Olympia at \$18.57.

Farther north, Mont Tremblant, Quebec's largest downhill resort area, now is recognized far and wide.

Along with the iconic villages of Zermatt, Chamonix, Aspen and Whistler, National Geographic Magazine has named Tremblant one of the world's 25 best snow-sports towns, labelling it great "for croissant-loving skiers and riders looking for European ambience."

True, but we all experience different Tremblants.

Take the Middle Eastern princes, South American jet-setters and Hollywood movie stars who arrive for the high life by private jet at Mont Tremblant International Airport.

They surely are revelling in their first Canadiana log cabin, beaver tails and maple sugar taffy. Then there is the picture-postcard sight of the Laurentian forests and mountains blanketed by snow, not to mention 1,000 snow guns manufacturing more of the white stuff.

Or imagine the New Yorkers and Torontonians who fly in on Porter's charters. I bet they need that croissant fix - and Tremblant's best is said to be at the posh Hotel Quintessence. But, those living closer arrive by car or bus, then cocoon in slope-side condos and frolic along the buzzy pedestrian village, which has cute shops and family eateries.

The lifts will roll on Nov. 22 and opening-day festivities at the summit restaurant Le Grand Manitou include shmoozing with the likes of Olympic snowboarder Jasey-Jay Anderson. To round out the party, world champion downhiller Erik Guay and FIS snowboarding champ Ariane Lavigne will make virtual appearances on Facebook video clips.

Tremblant can be daunting economy-wise, but there are a lot of free features - yes, free! - if you have the inside dope.

Even if you are not betting the farm on blackjack or roulette, the Casino Express Gondola is a gorgeous ride high over a forest wilderness with unparalleled panoramas of Lake Tremblant. Intrawest also runs free guided tours for skiers or boarders, departing from the summit at 9: 30 a.m. and 1: 30 p.m., daily. It's a great introduction to a big area and you'll have company to give you confidence.

To boot, guests of all slope-side hotels have First Tracks privileges for magical morning slides before the lifts open to the public. Also free around the Tremblant village are ice skating, after-dark tubing, activities for children and après-ski concerts in the bandshell.

The new Latitude Card offers lift tickets starting at \$49.99 per person, per day, and also includes discounts for the rest of the season.

That's for people on a two-to-seven-night visit. For frequent skiers, the opportunity to snap up Mont Tremblant's new \$399 Sublime Season Pass has come and gone - bookmark that for September 2013 - but a runner-up is the T-66 card at \$379 which has 66 days of slope time and other markdowns. For overnights, depending on how many people bunk into a hotel room or condo, lifts and lodging start at \$79 per person.

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CLOSE WINDOW

