



#SKI #CANADA

Go play outside

In cultural Québec's outdoor playground, Mont-Tremblant is among the elite Eastern North American ski resorts. *By Crai Bower*

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oreal forests may circle the globe, but they're suitable for framing in Québec, Canada – home to le voyageur, sugar on snow and *caribou*, the legendary warm-me-up concocted from red wine, whiskey and maple syrup. The Québécois embrace winter the way most of us revel in summer, by spending as much time as possible outdoors, regardless of persistent snowfall and, especially, frigid temperatures. Settled within the Laurentian Mountains at the edge of Mont-Tremblant National Park, Mont-Tremblant Resort has celebrated all things winter for 80 years, with no signs of going inside. From a winter via ferrata to village sleigh rides, your roster of outside activities appears infinite.

On slope, the second oldest ski resort in North America continues to receive reliable snow – 615cm in 2018-19! There are 755-skiable acres across 101-named runs that also place Tremblant among the elite Eastern North American ski resorts. The Alterra Mountain Company ownership group recently committed US\$17 million to on- and off-piste improvements. A new high-speed quad now whisks you away to the popular North Side area. And, because North Americans are nuts for glade/tree skiing, Tremblant added five new glade runs over a 20-hectare area in the advanced Edge area.

Alterra also expanded the primary base lodge, Le Grand Manitou, adding 400 more seats and redesigning the food service area. La Fourchette du Daible, the North Side lodge, is also larger and much improved. Already the perennial number one ski resort in Eastern North America according to *SKI* magazine readers (for 19 consecutive seasons) the



improvements at the two main day lodges signal Alterra's commitment to earning this accolade for the next two decades.

Glade skiing in The Edge among the paper birch, sugar maples and balsam fir trees provides a fabulous introduction to the joys of skiing 'in the trees,' yet Tremblant will always be a mountain for every ability. Beginners gain their ski legs in the highly rated ski school, then take to the 5.9-kilometre Nansen run to hone their skills over a gradual 645-metre descent. Blue skiers enjoy the majority of terrain, zipping down Duncan Bas or traversing So-La Garette directly off the Express Gondola, one of two gondolas at the resort. Experts are awash in options too, whether you prefer to tuck and go down McCulloch or shred Emotion back at The Edge. As always, secure a mountain host guide for the first day to learn about the secret stashes and a toque full of local lore.

All South Side trails lead directly into the village, a delightful virtue of Mt. Tremblant. Forget about your car then immerse yourself in the alpine ambiance of this fairytale town, a series of towers and gables brushed in primary colours, bisected by cobblestone streets and pathways. Located on the eastern edge of Lac Tremblant, the village is filled with every kind of accommodation

ABOVE: Glade skiing at the oldest ski resort in North America.
BELOW: Dogsledding is a favourite pastime through the Laurentian Mountains in the Mont-Tremblant National Park.



from premier boutique properties like Quintessence to traditional hotels such as Hotel Le Grand Lodge and the Fairmont Tremblant. There are also many extended-stay condo and home rental services.

Not surprisingly, this Francophone village is sprinkled with superb après ski locales like the legendary Le P'tit Caribou, with its great deck and consistently good live music. Le Shack has established itself as the go-to mulled wine decanter and Bar Café D'Epoque hosts the best dance parties. Diners flock to La Savoie for Swiss fondue, always a superb après menu favourite, C'est la Vie for Quebecois cuisine and Le Grill Saint George's for more casual bistro food: think steak frites fare. Québécois take their food very seriously, which translates to a wide swath of excellent Tremblant dining for the rest of us.

One can argue that, more than anywhere else in North America, a visit here should always encompass a host of winter adventures to take full advantage of the stunning environment and exceptional Québécois culture. After all, les voyageurs were the first European extreme adventurers in North America, setting out through these same Laurentian forests on dog-led sleds or human-powered sleds and skis as they embarked on gargantuan trapping forays to the far west and farther north.

Dogsledding remains a favourite pastime along the forest paths. Several outfitters give you the reins after an orientation session to drive your own sled. The dogs work in unison at incredible pace and your goal is to steer and brake as you go whooshing through the spruce forest or across the frozen lake. You can also try horse-sledding behind a pony, or relax and endeavour upon one of several traditional horse-drawn sleigh tours over the fields and through the woods.

The gently sloping Laurentian foothills in Domaine Saint-Bernard form ideal terrain for all levels of Nordic skier. Rental equipment, tours and lessons are all available for you to course over 65 kilometres of groomed trails and, for advanced skiers, 50 kilometres of skate track. Follow the Devil's River, slip into the forest and ski or snowshoe across open meadows within this protected 600-hectare

park. You can also go ribbon skating in Parc Régional Bois de Belle-Rivière, a 2.5-kilometre ice skating path through the beech and birch forest, day or night.

In short, you can colour in your winter fantasy with a variety of adventures in Tremblant, whether you want to drive a sports car on the lake ice; fat tire bike along the riverbank; lower your hook into an ice fishing hole; or select pretty much any other outdoor winter recreation you can conjure up. However you choose to play outside, make sure to set aside rejuvenation time inside Scandinave Spa, the first Nordic-style spa in Canada. Slide from hot pools and steam rooms into a cold Diable River plunge, settle in around a firepit, wrap yourself up in a hammock or slip into a well-earned winter's nap inside the zero-gravity pavilion. Like everywhere else in this mountain village just a 90-minute drive from Montréal, they just do winter right. 🇨🇦

TRAVEL FACTS

GETTING THERE
Mont-Tremblant is a 90-minute drive from Montreal-Trudeau International airport in Québec.

WHERE TO STAY
Mt. Tremblant Ski Resort
tremblant.ca
Hotel Le Grand Lodge
legrandlodge.com
Hôtel Quintessence
hotelquintessence.com
Fairmont Tremblant
fairmont.com/tremblant



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