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The Five-Point Weekend Escape Plan

Embrace Winter in Cantons-de-l'Est

Clomp through virgin snow, take sleigh rides past picturesque villages, and sip ice wine in Quebec's quiet, lake-laced southern region.

By AnneLise Sorensen | Published Jan 21, 2011

CANTONS-DE-L'EST ONLINE >>



1. Where to Stay



Enjoy cozy surroundings and throwback charm at **Manoir Hovey**.
(Photo: Courtesy of Manoir Hovey)

Lace up a complimentary pair of skates for a morning twirl on the private rink at **Manoir Hovey** (from \$165), a nineteenth-century colonnaded inn modeled after Mount Vernon. Inside, 38 plush alpine rooms feature four-poster beds and woolen blankets piled on wicker chairs, while the oak-paneled library is ideal for playing chess and sipping mulled wine (\$8) in the evening. Take advantage of a free third night (Sunday to Friday, through February 27) and make it a long weekend.

Find a sleeker alternative to B&B quaintness at **Le Pleasant** (from \$150), opened in summer 2010. Located near Mont Sutton, the hotel offers excellent ski deals, the best of which combines a one-night stay with a day and a half of access to the slopes for \$95 (Monday through Thursday).

Look for the painted wooden sign that marks the inviting **Auberge Knowlton** (from \$125) in a petite village founded in 1802. Owner Signy Stephenson serves as the informal tourist liaison, offering walking guides of Knowlton's distinctive Victorian architecture and dispensing historical commentary over platters of roast duck (\$24.95) sourced from nearby Lac-Brome at the in-house restaurant, Relais.



2. Where to Eat



Dine on Auguste's high-quality bistro cuisine made with fresh regional products.
(Photo: Courtesy of Auguste)

BYOB at the farmhouse restaurant **Aux Jardin Champêtre** (open on weekends only during the winter) near Magog. Opt for the daily prix-fixe menu (\$55), which offers a selection of dishes featuring turkey and chicken from the on-site farm, as well as local rabbit, trout, and vegetables. The setting matches the menu: old-fashioned milk pails and plank walls painted robin's-egg blue.

Make your way to Sherbrooke, the region's largest town, for Québécois cuisine served with a twist at **Auguste**. Yes, there's poutine (\$3) on the menu, but it's made *inverse* (inside-out): cheese swaddled in mashed potato and then deep fried. Be sure to try meaty delights like black pudding served with a tangle of red cabbage (\$16) and bloody filet mignon with aged-cheddar croquettes (\$40).

Expand your culinary horizons at **Café Massawippi**, in North Hatley, where deer tartar is one of the dishes served as part of a multi-course table d'hôte (\$50 to \$60) that changes daily. The humble interior—specials scrawled on a blackboard, gauzy white curtains—belies the daring country cuisine prepared here, which includes surprising yet exquisite pairings like duck foie gras with tahini Rice Krispie squares.



3. What to Do



Head to the largest observatory in eastern Canada, located on Mont Mégantic.

(Photo: Rémi Boucher)

Grab a torch and snowshoe under the moon to the **Mont Mégantic Observatory**, which houses the country's most powerful telescope, where you can spot *la Grande Ourse* (the Big Dipper) and *Cassiopee* in the night sky. The observatory offers six-hour guided treks (\$41.75, including dinner) starting at 5 p.m. every Saturday through March 26.

Enjoy the silence at **Sutton en Haut Park**, where you can cross-country ski (\$11.50) on twenty miles of trails and gentle slopes flanked by snow-flecked pine trees. **Mont Sutton** (\$60 lift ticket), the adjacent downhill ski resort, celebrated its 50th anniversary in December 2010 and offers deals throughout the season. The Divas on Skis promotion includes \$25 lift tickets for women and discounts during happy hour (*cinq à sept* in the local parlance) at Bar Le Tucker (through February 24).

Join the locals who are choosing Nordic spas over cocktail lounges for après-ski this season. **Spa Le Montagnais**, which opened in summer 2010 on Mont Mégantic, features outdoor hot and cold baths (\$25/day), deep-tissue massages (from \$69/hour), and screensaver-worthy views of snowy valleys and swaying pine trees.

Take in the snowy terrain from a dog-pulled sled on **Nordik Adventures'** two-hour ride (\$75). Climb in as the pack of huskies is harnessed, and then coast around Mount Orford with the wind in your ears.



4. Insider's Tip



Buy cheese and find solace at Abbaye Saint Benoît-du-Lac, a Benedictine monastery that houses 48 monks on the shore of Lake Memphrémagog.

(Photo: Courtesy of Abbaye Saint Benoît-du-Lac)

Restaurants and shops throughout Quebec sell the blue-veined L'Ermite cheese, made by the monks at the stately, white-granite **Abbaye Saint Benoît-du-Lac**, which rises over the lovely Lake Memphrémagog. Avoid the retail markup and buy a pungent wedge (\$2.85) direct from the source, where you can also purchase bottles of the excellent Cidre de l'Abbaye sec (dry apple cider; \$11). Time your visit for the daily Gregorian chanting (usually 11 a.m.), peer out over the vast lake, and, if you're enchanted by the monastic life, stay in one of the abbey's single-sex budget hostels (\$50 for room and board; 819-843-4080 for men, 819-843-2340 for women).



5. Oddball Day



Observe a frozen vineyard and buy bottles of crisp white wine at [Domaine Les Brome](#).

(Photo: Courtesy of Domaine Les Brome)

Start your day with espresso (\$2.50) and a grilled cheese sandwich made with local cheddar (\$6) at [Star Café](#) (109 Lakeside, 450-243-5222) in Knowlton, and pick up a little jar of maple-sugar spread (\$5.75) on the way out. Stop into [Galerie Carpe Diem](#) to see owner Nicole Taillon's sculptures of woodland nymphs and pirouetting fairies, or check out regional art and silver jewelry at [Galerie Knowlton](#). Next, explore Quebec's wine country along the 75-mile [Route des Vins](#), which starts just west of Knowlton. Head to [Le Vignoble de l'Orpailleur](#), near the historical town of Dunham, where you'll learn about the northern European methods that help grapes survive the cold weather. Navigate back north to [Domaine Les Brome](#) (call before visiting in winter; 450-242-2665) to pick up a few bottles of crisp, slightly tangy white wine (\$24). As the day's light fades, head south (just under an hour's drive) to Sutton, enjoying the pastoral landscape along the way. For a taste of the region's culinary renaissance, stop in for dinner at the cheeky French bistro [Beaux Lieux](#) in Sutton, where chef Christian Beaulieu injects international flavors into seasonal ingredients with dishes like salmon with Japanese tamari, horseradish, and honey (\$10).



6. Links

[Tourisme Cantons-de-l'Est](#) has extensive coverage of the region and recommended B&Bs, restaurants, and outdoor activities.

[Bonjour Quebec](#) is the province's official tourist website, and while it has the requisite sections of fawning prose, it's also filled with travel tips, up-to-date accommodation information, and an excellent overview of Quebec.

Quebec's only English-language daily is the [Montreal Gazette](#), with a strong "Food and Wine" section on culinary trends and restaurant openings, both in Montreal and across the region, plus a helpful list of festivals.