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## The Eastern Townships of Quebec, Canada

By Bruce Sach

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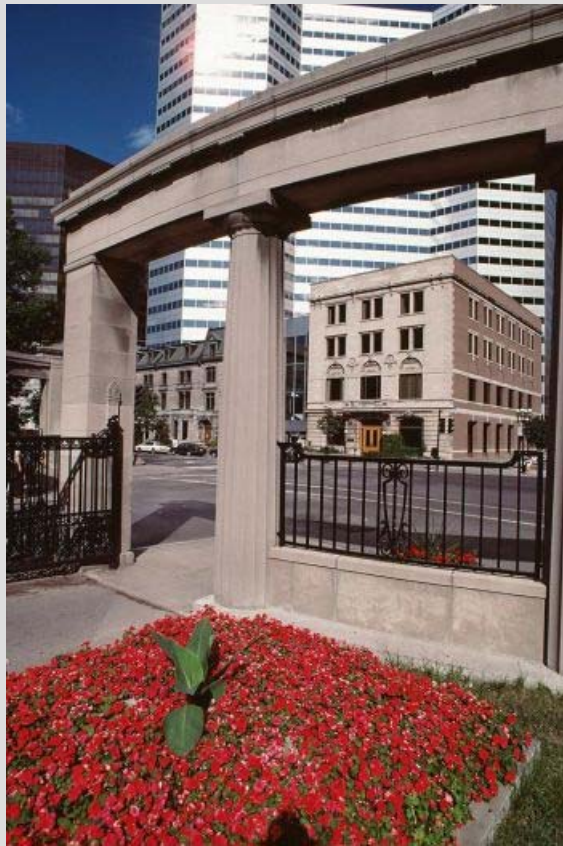
SNOWCOVERED SCENE: A village in the Canton de l'Est, or Eastern Townships, in the mountains in Quebec, Canada (Photos.com)

I think I'll have the fish soup  
Marseillaise—no, seared duck thigh  
sounds nice. No, make that hake, I love  
white fish—no, what do you think of the  
pan-seared la Carnadière farm duck leg?

No, on fifth thought, I'll go with the blood  
pudding or the Brome Lake duck pâté.  
This being Quebec, the waiter is having  
as much fun as I am, as I make up my  
mind for the appetizer.

After all, in this part of the world, people  
enjoy talking about, preparing and, yes,  
eating food.

### Food and Fun Fête in the Eastern Townships



**PARK BEAUTY:** Flowerbeds in an urban park near the entrance of McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Montreal makes a great jumping off point from which to go explore the Eastern Townships. (Photos.Com)

involving all those lovely choices I mentioned previously.

## Mountain Magic in Sutton

Mont Sutton goes a long way to keep its customers happy. Many locals have been going there faithfully for decades, as the Boucher family has slowly continued to upgrade and carefully groom its private domain as a unique downhill ski center.

### Places to See and Things to Do in the Eastern townships:

The Granby Zoo is located about an hour's drive from Montreal. The zoo contains over 1,000 animals, 75 of which are endangered species.

Joie de Lavande is a tranquil little lavender "farm" on the edge of Knowlton that has a little store that sells lavender products.

The Sherbrooke Museum of Fine Arts is "dedicated to the exploration, conservation, and advancement of fine arts in the Eastern Townships."

The Labyrinthe Memphrémagog rests on the shore of a lake and is one of few public open-air labyrinths in the world. It is open only five months a year, from mid-May to mid-October.

### Travel Recommendations:

Auberge and Spa West Brome: [www.awb.ca](http://www.awb.ca)  
Manoir Hovey: [www.manoirhovey.com](http://www.manoirhovey.com)

Mont Sutton ski area: [www.montsutton.com](http://www.montsutton.com)

What I loved about Quebec's Eastern Townships was the fabulous variety of new foods. I learned the French names of dishes I wasn't familiar with in English. This was just part of the après-ski activities that included visiting great spas and, before I forget, neat, cozy ski hills, each with their own personality.

Never heard of the Eastern Townships? They are a secret (more or less closely guarded) for lovers of good things from Quebec.

I also appreciated the accommodation, which allowed for a variety of choices, making allowances for everyone's differing tastes.

The Auberge and Spa West Brome has all the niceties of a modern inn. From your room, you can go downstairs to visit the tiny indoor pool, have a sauna, or enjoy a spa treatment. (Vinotherapy is one of their specialties.)

If you like a more familiar feel to your meals, there is a small kitchenette in your room in which to fix your own. Nearby Sutton, (it's on the road between the inn and the Mont Sutton ski area) provides a great deli, the La Rumeur Affamée at 15 Principale Street.

Or, if you take advantage of the hotel special, you can enjoy a gourmet meal

Glade skiing is a specialty here, and the grooming needed to keep trails that zip in and out of the forest involves a lot of study and knowledge about snow and the hill's quirks. More than one fellow skier mentioned that Sutton was the only hill he skied.

Like many Quebec ski hills the food is better than your standard fare, with chefs that have lengthy backgrounds in culinary schools and restaurants.

## The Manoir Hovey

Manoir Hovey is the kind of place you want to visit and then savor the memory for a long, long time. First, whether your room is in the main lodge or in a near separate chalet, the ambiance in this place is priceless. As part of the Château and Relais chain, it exudes European appeal and service.



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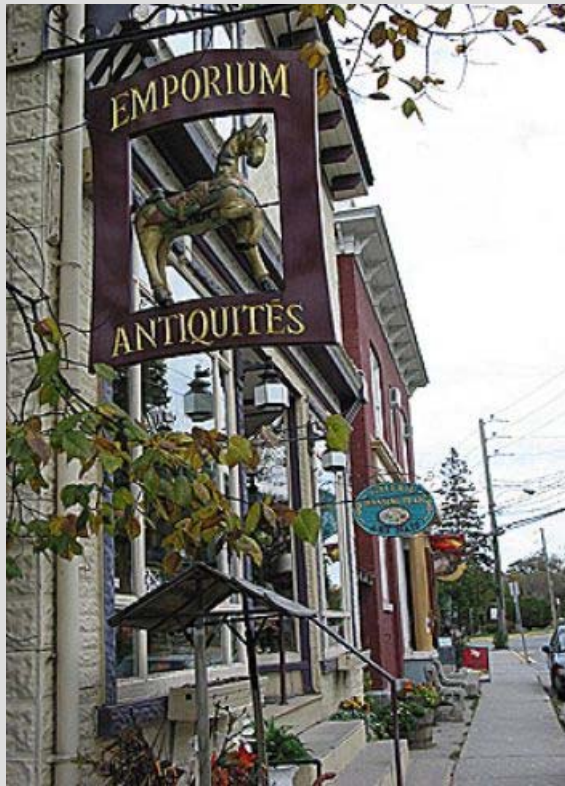
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You could sit in the library, located just off the main dining area, indefinitely. Here, you can soak in the atmosphere of this century-old house, built by a wealthy U.S. southerner desiring to vacation in the North, but not in "Yankee" territory.



NORTH HATLEY: The Manoir Hovey is not too far from beautiful and historic downtown North Hatley (Courtesy of [www.townshippersheritage.com/Matthew Farfan](http://www.townshippersheritage.com/Matthew_Farfan))



LAKESIDE: Echo Bay, Lake Memphremagog (Courtesy of [www.townshippersheritage.com/Matthew Farfan](http://www.townshippersheritage.com/Matthew_Farfan))



The house is a replica of George Washington's Mount Vernon residence and is an oasis of quiet and civility.

This means that meals are served with the utmost of care. Breakfasts were simple and wholesome. I had easily the best French toast ever for one breakfast and the Manoir Hovey granola is so well appreciated that guests buy it as souvenirs for themselves or as gifts for loved ones.

The dining room offers a huge variety of local products and the sommelier will offer interesting pairing for those dishes that may be unfamiliar, including a few local wines and ice wines and ice cider.

Chef Roland Ménard, who hails from the neighboring city of Sherbrooke, offers a fascinating menu.

The Manoir Hovey offers stunning views over Lake Massawippi, near the charming little town of North Hatley. Don't let the English names fool you.

Most of the inhabitants of these towns became French speakers long ago. That said, however, all the personnel at the Manoir speak English.

## Ski and Spa Options

Mount Orford is a compact ski center where all three lifts are almost sandwiched together. The highest of local peaks, it offers magnificent views of the Eastern Townships and of other ski areas, like Owl's Head and Bromont.

Nearby are two interesting spa options. Just a few minutes away is the Estrimont Spa. Like many Quebecer spas, it offers a relaxing spa area where you can relax indoors or out.

Another interesting spa option is the Balnéa Spa, a true Nordic Spa experience. Here dry and wet, but very hot, saunas prepare you to plunge into frigid pools or, even better, natural lakes or rivers.

The Balnéa wins the award, in my book, for beautiful design and location. You can have a meal there or go to nearby Bromont.

The café, located in the Chocolate

from Lake Memphremagog (Courtesy of  
www.townshippersheritage.com/Matthew Farfan)

Museum at Bromont, is a place where you  
can rub shoulders with the Quebecer  
locals. The Bromont ski center is the

closest thing to "big time" skiing that you're likely to find in these parts.

Finally, as you leave the area after having skied yourself out, stop off in Granby, the last major town in the Eastern Townships.

The St. Christophe Spa offers many couples packages including meals from the hotel's restaurants, served right in the spa's waiting room. As with all the spas we visited in the Eastern Townships, we were struck by the personnel's knowledge and expertise.

*Bruce Sach is a free-lance writer who hails from Canada.*

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