

News release
For immediate release

**Religious tourism in the Eastern Townships**

**Sherbrooke, Monday, July 25, 2022 –** With the July visit of Pope Francis to Canada, religion has been top of mind, especially in the media. Here in the Townships, we also have venues and activities associated with particular beliefs – part of what is known as ‘religious tourism’.

**SACRED VENUES**

**Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Abbey**

In 1912, an order of Benedictine monks from France established a monastery overlooking Lake Memphremagog. Enlarged down the years, the [Abbey](https://www.abbaye.ca/en/) interior is designed with multicoloured geometric bricks and granite - an eye-catching architectural style.

Guided tours are offered to the general public (1pm-3pm). They cover the history of the Abbey and the monks (with fascinating anecdotes) and a video explaining the monastic way of life. Participants are also given access to the Abbey terrace where they can enjoy the peaceful views that nourish the pious men who live and work here. The monks operate an orchard (U-pick is available during the apple harvest) and make cider and cheese, on sale at the boutique within the main building. Spiritual healing is also available.

**Saint-Michel Basilica-Cathedral**

Inaugurated in 1957, the [Saint-Michel Basilica-Cathedral](https://diocesedesherbrooke.org/fr/basilique-cathedrale-saint-michel) looms over the city of Sherbrooke. Dedicated to the Archangel Michael, the patron saint of policemen and soldiers (among others), it is built in Gothic style with soaring arches and pointed windows. Among many stunning works of art gracing the interior are magnificent stained glass windows in the nave and the choir. Tourists can also visit the museum dedicated to Blessed Marie-Léonie Paradis and the relic of this beloved nun (she died in 1912), as well as enter the crypt, which contains the remains of several bishops, priests and lay preachers.

**The Beauvoir Sanctuary**

[The Beauvoir Sanctuary](https://www.facebook.com/SanctuaireBeauvoir/) is a unique, peaceful shrine in the heart of the Townships – a place of silence, solitude and prayer. At the site, religious tourists can take contemplative walks alone (or accompanied by a priest) along a nature trail from which they can revel in the wonders of the rising or the setting sun… (Spiritual sessions for groups are also available.) The shrine is close to the city of Sherbrooke (accessible from major highways) but its ambience is far from the urban clamour. Panoramic views, rest areas and meals available for groups, families and lone worshippers.

**CONTEMPLATIVE HIKES AND PILGRIMAGES**

**The Abbey Circuit in the Memphremagog region**

[This self-guided walking route](https://www.circuitdelabbaye.com/english/), laid out in 2018, covers an 8-day, 155-km loop - beginning and ending at the Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Abbey. Along the way, hikers can explore the many interesting attractions in eight municipalities -- Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, Austin, Orford, Eastman, Stukely-Sud, Saint-Étienne-de-Bolton, Bolton-Est and Potton. Well worth a visit, en route, are the Savonnerie des Diligences (a soap maker just outside Eastman) and Eastman itself (one of the Coeur villageois), the Grange du parfumeur (Magog) and Spa Bolton.

**A mini ‘Way of Saint James’ in Megantic**

The highest peaks in southern Quebec lie within the starry universe of the first International Dark Sky Reserve, along the [mini Compostelle Mégantic](https://randonneemegantic.ca/) route. (Compostelle is known as the Way of Saint James in English.) On offer to walkers who take this scenic hike are luggage transportation, a shuttle service and a tailormade route plan. As is the case with its pilgrimage counterpart in Europe, walkers can choose hikes of differing lengths – the entire route (125 km); Chemin des Sentiers (90 km); Chemin des 4 Monts (80 km) and Chemin du Lac (45 km)

**The Pilgrims of the Valley route in Coaticook**

[La Voie des pilgrims de la Vallée](http://www.lavoiedespelerinsdelavallee.com/) is a new, long-distance walking route in the Coaticook area. The 214-km circuit links 12 municipalities so you can start your walk in any one of them! The entire route is designed to be covered in 12 days, walking an average of 17.8 km per day. Along the way are many attractions, including the Coaticook Gorge Park, Ferme Piscicole des Bobines (a fish farm in East Hereford) and les Savons Main de Nature Soaps (Barnston-Ouest).

**A ‘poetic trail’ in Saint-Venant-de-Paquette**

The 3-km [Sentier poétique](https://amisdupatrimoine.qc.ca/fr/activites_evenements/sentier_poetique.php) de Saint-Venant-de-Paquette is the brainchild of well-known local resident and singer/songwriter, Richard Séguin. The ‘poetic trail’ is lined with sculptures by Roger Nadeau and 14 sites commemorating poets from Quebec, among them Alfred DesRochers and his daughter Clémence (both Townships natives), Joséphine Bacon, Leonard Cohen, Émile Nelligan, Louise Forestier, Pauline Julien and Gérald Godin – it’s the ideal venue for relaxing and contemplating life, surrounded by beautiful artwork. The Musée-eglise, a church-cum-museum in the village, showcases the skills of the woodworkers of yesteryear, who embellished the interior of this heritage building.

**OTHER VENUES WITH A LINK TO RELIGION**

**Piopolis - a papal reward**

[Piopolis](https://www.piopolis.quebec/), one of a network of cozy villages – the [Coeur villageois](https://www.easterntownships.org/coeursvillageois) - lies on the western shore of Lake Megantic. Founded in 1871 by papal Zouaves (soldiers) who were rewarded for their loyalty to the papacy, this picturesque community has a handful of small businesses, as well as an inn, a B&B, a wharf, a marina and a campground – all the elements needed for a peaceful, low-key vacation.

The Halte des Zouaves and a heritage trail has six interpretive areas, explaining the unusual history of this postcard-pretty village. For some breathtaking views, it’s worth taking a detour to Rang de Grenier and the Route des Pionniers. There’s also a network of forested and waterfront hiking trails. The village church plays host to a series of classical concerts, from June to December.

**Noteworthy churches on the Townships Trail**

Along the Townships Trail ([Chemin des Cantons](https://www.chemindescantons.qc.ca/index_en.php)) tourists can visit a multitude of churches, whose architecture and history reflect the region’s American and British heritage. 17 different denominations are represented in this collection of noteworthy religious sites and along the way, through the 31 picturesque towns and villages on the Townships Trail, you’ll find elegant Victorian homes, round barns, life-sized historic figures, covered bridges, museums, interpretation centres and much, much more….

**The Slate Museum in Richmond**

The [Musée de l’Ardoise](https://museedelardoise.ca/) (Slate Museum) is housed in the former Saint Paul’s Church (it was built in 1889) and an exhibition explains the role that slate (as a building material) played in the development of the Eastern Townships at the end of the 19th century. Some of the local buildings (including the one-time church) have slate roofs and you can admire them as you follow a walking trail through Richmond, listening to a podcast describing the architecture of the old historic quarter.

**Steeples and Saints**

This fall, the Archdiocese of Sherbrooke will be offering [guided tours of four churches](https://diocesedesherbrooke.org/fr/balade-des-clochers) - Saint-Jean-Baptiste (Sherbrooke), Saint-Edmond, (Coaticook) Sacré-Cœur (Stanstead) and Saint-Cajetan (Mansonville). During this free activity, you will discover some stunning works of art and learn all about the history and architectural styles of these handsome churches (October 15 and 16).

We are actively working towards highlighting the Townships’ many natural and heritage assets and we will happily provide you with photographs of the region’s religious attractions.

**About Tourism Eastern Townships**

*Tourisme Cantons-de-l’Est (Tourism Eastern Townships) is one of 22 tourism associations (ATRs) in Quebec and the official representative of Quebec's Ministry of Tourism in the Eastern Townships. Since 1978, the TCE’s mission has been to promote tourism development, marketing the region within Quebec and internationally. TCE brings together more than 500 members throughout the 9 regional county municipalities (MRCs) and in all sectors of the tourism industry: accommodation, restaurants, attractions, activities and events.*

*The Eastern Townships is the fourth most popular tourist destination in Quebec. The region attracts some 10 million visitors every year, accounting for 6.5 million overnight stays and spending more than $900 million annually. The tourism sector is also the region’s fourth largest employer, accounting for 20,000 jobs.*

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