

Solar eclipse 2024 : A resounding success for the Eastern Townships tourism industry!

Sherbrooke, April 23 2024 – A little over two weeks after the spectacular total solar eclipse during which the Eastern Townships was front and centre, Tourisme Cantons-de-l'Est (TCE) has calculated the contributions to the region's economy that resulted from this unique celestial event. The information was gathered from a survey of over 70 local tourism business and observation sites and by measuring the impact of marketing campaigns, along with data from Propulso, a high-tech, Magog-based company specializing in geolocation.

TCE's primary goal was to lure visitors to the region to view the eclipse and encourage them to stay longer. It did so by promoting the event to local stakeholders and showcasing the wide range of activities and attractions that tourists can enjoy at this time of the year. The results of the post-eclipse research shows that TCE more than succeeded!

"We were fortunate in that we had so many well-organized viewing areas, wonderful weather and strong support from the local tourism industry," explains Isabelle Charlebois, General Manager of Tourisme Cantons-de-l'Est. "We also had great feedback from visitors, many of whom did indeed opt to stay for a while to explore the Eastern Townships."

Highlights

- All the observation sites and tourism enterprises that were surveyed were delighted with the large turnout generated by the total solar eclipse – not least because it happened during the shoulder season.
- **On April 8 alone**, based on the preliminary geolocation data, more than **55,000 visitors from outside the region came to the Eastern Townships** on that Monday. (Once data are finalized, that figure is predicted to be even higher.)
 - More than 20% stayed overnight in the region.
 - More than 80% came for the day and stayed for an average of 5 hours, boosting the number of people who visited local restaurants and boutiques.
 - 75 % originated within the province of Quebec (other than the Eastern Townships).
 - 25% originated outside the province of Quebec, notably Ontario and the United States.
 - There was also a significant number of visitors from Western Canada, France, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland.
- **Americans, in particular, boosted overnight stays in the region's accommodations.** Over 80% of the survey's respondents from the lodging sector reported an increase in bookings from the United States, **as did local restaurants.**

- **Over 50 areas were chosen across the region** (landmark sites and tourist venues) to ensure spectators would enjoy the best possible viewing experience of the solar eclipse. They proved to be very popular! **An estimated 60,000 eclipse-watchers from within Canada and abroad, turned up at the more than 50 official sites.**
 - This figure does not include those who watched the eclipse elsewhere in the region or at their own homes.
- **Occupancy rates in the region’s accommodations hit an all-time high, with the majority of hotels and B&B fully booked over the eclipse weekend.**
 - It’s worth noting that the occupancy rate on Monday (after the eclipse) was 88% - an unusually high percentage for the start of a week.
 - Average occupancy rates for the month of April typically range between only 31-40%.
 - Demand and supply came into play as well. According to survey participants, the average accommodation (excluding campsites) cost \$363. In 2023, the same rooms were going for \$154.
- **Tourism spending^[1] specifically associated with eclipse-related stays (Saturday, April 6 to Monday, April 8) is conservatively estimated to be close to \$4 million.**
- The majority of tourism businesses reported that the eclipse and the resulting surge in visitors, had a direct impact on their bottom line.

The region benefitted from exceptionally (and unexpectedly) good weather. **It was, in fact, one of the few places along the trajectory of the eclipse to enjoy clear skies and mild temperatures.** The Townships beat the odds! Based on data over the past 25 years for April 8, southern Quebec had a 60-80% chance of experiencing overcast skies on that particular day....

A delighted public!

The results of the survey showed that everybody was thrilled with having experienced the complete solar eclipse – an incentive perhaps, to return. “The eclipse introduced visitors not familiar with the Townships, to get a brief taste of our charming region,” says Lysandre Michaud-Verreault, Public Relations and Communications Director of TCE. “We hope they’ll come back to the Eastern Townships and stay for a longer time in the not-so-distant future.”

Targeted marketing campaigns

The tourism association has stepped up its promotional and communication efforts to attract more visitors who would be interested in staying in the region for more than one day.

In January, Tourisme Cantons-de-l'Est (Tourism Eastern Townships) added a landing page to its website featuring a wealth of information about eclipse-related activities and ideas for a multitude of getaways, themed around the astronomical event. **Over a three-month period, the page generated some 65,000 web sessions.** The TCE’s social media campaign **reached over 1.4 million people**, resulting in over 80,000 ad clicks. The main target markets were New England, Ontario and the Greater Montreal Area.

An extraordinary amount of media coverage

Over the past year, more than 1,500 publications and broadcast media – print and online, magazines, radio and television - covered the solar eclipse in the Eastern Townships. These were the outcome of the the TCE’s many public relations initiatives which resulted in mentions of the event in such prestigious media as *Forbes*, *Vogue*, *Space.com*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Travel + Leisure* and CTV. Local and regional media also gave the eclipse extensive coverage. This extraordinary amount of media attention resulted in 1.4 billion impressions (potential views), greatly raising the region’s profile – at home and abroad.

Partnerships that ensure our continued success

By the end of 2022, Tourisme Cantons-de-l’Est, in collaboration with Mont Mégantic National Park, had established a committee made up of ministry and municipal stakeholders, coordinating efforts to attract potential tourists (local and from outside the region) to the Eastern Townships.

Tourisme Cantons-de-l’Est is delighted to work alongside the following regional partners :

- Bishop’s University
- Cégep de Sherbrooke college
- Champlain Regional College
- CIUSSS de l’Estrie – Estrie Public Health Department
- CIUSSS de l’Estrie - Deputy Director of Emergency Measures, Civil Security and Organizational Issues
- Club d’astronomes amateurs de Sherbrooke – Sherbrooke Amateur Astronomy Club
- Ministère de la Sécurité publique - Ministry of Public Security
- Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l’Habitation (MAMH) – Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Ministère du Transport (MTQ) – Ministry of Transport
- MRCs des Cantons-de-l’Est – Eastern Townships Regional County Municipalities
 - Brome-Missisquoi
 - Coaticook
 - Granit
 - Haute-Yamaska
 - Haut-Saint-François
 - Memphrémagog
 - Des Sources
 - Val-Saint-François
- Destination Sherbrooke
- Mont Mégantic National Park (PNMM)/ASTROLab
- Pôle régional en enseignement supérieur de l’Estrie (PRESE) – Estrie Higher Education Hub
- Sûreté du Québec (SQ) – Provincial police service
- Table des MRC de l’Estrie (TME) – MRC political/administrative organization
- Université de Sherbrooke

About Tourism Eastern Townships

Tourisme Cantons-de-l'Est (Tourism Eastern Townships) is one of 21 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 600 members representing more than 1,000 tourism offerings 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 a tourism spend of more than \$900 million annually. Tourism in the region also generates more than 20,000 jobs.

-30-

Source :

Shanny Hallé

Media Relations Coordinator | Tourism Eastern Townships

Cell : (819) 821-1220

E-mail: shalle@atrce.com