Quebec
WINTER OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

by jay kana | photos courtesy of jay kana

Earlier this year, I jumped at the opportunity to spend a week in captivating Quebec during winter, with the focus being on adventuring and enjoying what their outdoors has to offer. Armed with a solid winter coat, a dozen pairs of thermal underwear and the rest of the winter outerwear gear, I trekked east to la belle province.

OUTAOUAIS

North of Ottawa is the gorgeous village of Old Chelsea, where you'll find Nordik – Spa Nature, the largest spa in North America. Specializing in relaxation and wellness, they're focused on thermotherapy and relaxation techniques from Scandinavian countries. There's a plethora of options to help you rejuvenate in this gorgeous setting.

Gatineau Park boasts 61 km of snow-shoeing trails varying in difficulty and is an excellent way to enjoy winter outdoors. I did the easy version and if I can make it through, anyone can! Travel at your own pace, soak in the scenery and be sure to capture several pictures.

For lodging, choose the charming Wakefield Mill Inn and Spa with its oh-so-stunning backdrop on the shores of the Gatineau River. Comfortable rooms, an inviting dining room with menus based on a traditional French and Québécois style, and picturesque grounds make this an easy choice.

Eastern Outaouais brought me to the simply stunning Fairmont Le Château Montebello for a curling lesson. Did I hurry hard? Of course I did! Did I fall? Not once!

From the old-school elevators to the massive stone pillars and picture perfect interior/exterior, this was/is one of my favourite Fairmont properties.

Dine at their on-site restaurant, Bistro La Seigneurie, which blends trendy food with friendly surroundings.

Parc Omega, a natural and historic reserve, is a massive version of Ontario's African Lion Safari. A 15 km car route that takes approximately 90 minutes allows you to observe and feed the wildlife in their natural habitat. You'll see deer, bison, buffalo, wolves, bears, caribou, birds and many others along your journey at this remarkable park.

Lodging is also available if you're interested, plus there's the very cool and unique "Wolf Cabin" where you're inches away (separated by glass, of course) from the wolves. It's an up close look at these majestic creatures in the wild.

EASTERN TOWNSHIPS

I started by Kick Sledding at Vie de Plein Air. Once you find your balance point, it's actually a fun way to get around. This year round sports equipment rental centre also offers skates, bikes, kayaks and paddle boards/boats and other items to enjoy their beautiful outdoor surroundings.

Fatbiking was next (biking on snow with massive, grippy tires) in Parc de la Gorge de Coaticook. There's 12 km of trails available as you get a full body workout here. It took me a few minutes to adjust and find my balance point but once I did, I can see why this activity is increasing in popularity. There are showers on site, along with a quaint café to help you refuel and refresh.

Ice Fishing is no longer on my bucket list, thanks to my time at Parc Découverte Nature. They've got two fishing ponds, gear is provided and you don't require a fishing license. I was shown how to safely hand-drill a hole in the ice, lure and catch fish. Yes, I caught one and quickly put it back.

If you're the catch and consume type, their team will prepare your fish for you to bring home. Alternatively, you can clean, cook and eat your fish via an onsite BBQ.

Winter is made better by enjoying a sleigh ride at Centre d'équitation Jacques Robidas. Having horseback riding experience, I rode while my travelling companions were in the sleigh.

I figured I'd been on plenty of sleigh rides in my life but horse riding in winter in Quebec was another great bucket list item to cross off. There's also cottage rentals, snowshoeing and hiking packages available.

Cross country skiing at Parc national du Mont-Orford was picture perfect. Big snowflakes gently descended upon the park during my time at this winter wonderland. Glide along 15 marked, packed and groomed trails totaling 50 km varying in difficulty. This nearly 60 square kilometer park is a year round facility is great for hiking, camping and time on the water.

Wrapping things up on the activity side was something indoors, courtesy of The Leon Courville Vineyard, complete with breathtaking views of the Eastern Townships. Enjoy their red and white wines, aged wines in oak barrels, late harvest and ice wines as well as sparkling wines.

Lodging at the Estrimont Suites & Spa is a little piece of heaven, between views of the mountains, impeccable suites and onsite amenities. It's certainly a great way to unwind after exploring the outdoors! Their on-location restaurant specializes in steak and seafood, paired with wonderful wines.

On the dining side, be sure to visit Taverne 1855, where they use high quality local products to create delectable menu offerings, paired with a selective wine list, all wrapped in a warm, enticing atmosphere. The Star Café Lac-Brome is a quaint spot for fresh, organic coffee, absolutely delicious pub fare and live music.

To plan your Quebec outdoor adventure: quebecoriginal.com