

Travel:

THE CANADIAN COUNTRYSIDE OF QUEBEC'S EASTERN TOWNSHIPS

by Don & Bonnie Woodland

The Bleu Lavande Lavender Farm grows over 200,000 lavender plants!

Some of the prettiest countryside you've ever seen is the wine producing and mixed-farming area in Quebec known as the Eastern Townships. Just a 6-7 hour drive from Cape Cod, the area is located just north of the Vermont border. 35 miles east of Montreal, the Eastern Townships continue east to Sherbrooke. The rolling countryside, ski areas, and attractive lakefronts, make it an alluring area four seasons out of the year.

Countryside like this beckons you to try the local produce: cheese, honey, rabbit, venison, duck, trout, apples and maple products, to name a few. Area restaurants are very professional, friendly, and language is never a problem.

Outdoor activities reign in this area. The Eastern Townships have more than 124 miles of designated

bicycling trails (Véloroute des Cantons) along quiet backroads and converted railway lines. You can stop off at villages and tourist attractions along the way and learn about the area's roots; the area was actually founded by Colonial Loyalists who came from New England. Plus, there are also those who traveled from Ireland, Scotland, and from other regions of Quebec.

Many of Quebec's wineries are located in the Eastern Townships. The Route des Vins links 14 wineries (and cider makers). A favorite is the **Vignoble de L'Orpailleur Winery**--located in **Dunham**--the birthplace of Quebec's wine production.

In 1982, French winegrowers defied the challenging climate by applying vine-producing methods adapted from Northern Europe and the USSR--by ridging-up the roots

in the fall to protect them from the cold, and plowing them back in the spring when the ground thaws out.

Of special interest at L'Orpailleur is their Ice Wine--made from grapes harvested from October to January in sub-freezing temperatures. The over-ripe, desiccated fruit is sweeter and more concentrated, so it makes a lovely dessert wine. This is a product that has

drawn much acclaim.

Unusual also is L'Orpailleur's Gray wine, which is a semi-sweet wine--a mixture of 1 part red wine and 2 parts white wine. (www.orpailleur.ca/)

Stanbridge East is one of the most picturesque little villages in Quebec. This former mill town is home to the Brochets (Pike) River and the Missisquoi Museum, housed



The Blue Lavande's inventor-turned-farmer Pierre Pellerin



Auberge Lakeside Inn in Knowlton is a classic!

in the 1820 Cornell Mill. To the east is Hodge's General Store and Bill's Barn. The village is famous for its vintage architecture. Nature lovers will be tempted to explore the bike paths, take a canoe ride down the river, or simply walk along the roads and attractions in the area. Festivals and expositions are held back-to-back all year round. The variety of events include: horse shows, country music festivals, perennial markets, the flower expo, the Apple Pie festival, and much more. (<http://tinyurl.com/5hzc19>)

The border community of **Sutton** didn't become a town until 1962. The town has a wonderful shopping area—one made all the more colorful with planting boxes filled with flowers in front of most of the commercial area's businesses. The town also has one of the best four-season walking-trail systems in Quebec, and is one of Quebec's

more prominent ski centers. While in Sutton, check out **La Rumeur Affamee**, a wonderful shop that looks like an old general store inside. It's located across from the Post Office. The store has a large choice of local products such as: venison, maple, products, sausage, artisan breads, croissants and pastries, local and European cheeses, meats, oils and vinegars, jams, coffees, teas and Bilboquet ice cream. (www.larumeuraffamee.com/)



The old Cornell Mill and waterfall on the Brochets (Pike) River in East Stanbridge

restaurants. They also produce foie gras, pates, smoked duck magret, merguez sausages, rillettes, duck and guinea-fowl confit, and gizzard contit. Reservations are required for their "rustic table" dining. (www.lagirondine.ca/)

Domain Pinnacle is a family-owned and operated orchard and cidery near Frelighsburg. Owners Charles and Susan Crawford produce an award-winning, premium Ice Apple Wine on the 430-acre property, that is distributed to 36 countries around the world. Located on the 45th parallel—the same latitude as the world's renowned wine-growing regions—the south-facing apple orchards benefit from nearly ideal growing conditions, which combined with the intensely cold winter, create a unique combination that makes the creation of Ice Apple Wine possible.

It takes over 80 apples (six

Frelighsburg is a small town at the foot of Pinnacle Mountain. Apple orchards figure prominently in the local economy. And there are many craftspeople and artists. **La Girondine**—located in Frelighsburg—is of interest both to foodies and to those who enjoy elements of agri-tourism. It is a place you can see ducks, lambs, rabbits, pigs and guinea-fowl raised, which are later sold to area



The Balnea Spa is located on a magnificent mountainside and lakefront site at Bromont-sur-le-lac.

different types) to make one bottle of the Ice Apple Wine. The ultra-concentrated juice is extracted from apples by freezing them at temperatures as low as -35 degrees F, then slowly fermenting them at low temperature for up to eight months. The Ice Apple Wine is 12% alcohol and improves with age. It can be celled for up to 15 years. (www.domainepinnacle.com)

Magog is a great town to visit. The downtown shopping area is one of the best in the

area, and the seemingly endless Lake Memphremagog waterfront is gorgeous. A boat cruise on the lake will help you appreciate its enormous size.

With mountains that stretch over 30 miles to the Vermont border, it's easy to understand why Magog is called the "treasure chest of the Townships."

Throughout the year, Magog is alive with sports, cultural events and a wide variety of activities. You can enjoy water sports, swimming, golf,

horseback riding, tennis, cycling and in-line skating.

Just outside of town is the very popular **Savon Des Cantons**, which runs daily soap-making demonstrations. Wannabe soap manufacturers can learn how to produce bath salts, hand soap, or kitchen soap (in a box), and can choose the ingredients (and scents) themselves. (www.savon-descantons.com)

Enjoy lunch or dinner right across the street at **Aux Jardin**

Schampetres. This delightful Magog restaurant is a converted 1860 country home, and offers a menu strong on locally-produced fare, including: duck, turkey, organic herbs and edible flowers and homemade jams. 6-course dinners are \$55 incl. tax, and 3 course dinners are \$35. (www.auxjardinschampetres.com)

Also outside of Magog is the magnificent **Abbey at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac**. This immense Benedictine monastery, located on the west shore of Lake Memphremagog, is home to around 50 monks. They live a meditative life at the Abbey, but also produce award-winning cheeses and sparkling cider wine. The cheese-factory has been in operation since 1943, making Ermite, a blue cheese; Mont Saint-Benoît, a kind of mild Gruyère; Le Moine, a stronger tasting Gruyère, and Ricotta (made with whey). At the farm, the monks breed beef-cattle and cultivate grain. Other monks work in maintenance, kitchen, refectory, infirmary, laundry, etc.

The monastery existed in more humble quarters since 1912, but was raised to the status of an Abbey in 1952. In 1990, work was begun on the construction of the Abbey church. The monks were able to dedicate their church in 1994--the 82nd anniversary of the foundation.



The Auberge & Spa West Brome (the yellow buildings) is completely surrounded by farmland.



The view from the top of the magnificent Abbey at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac on the west shore of Lake Memphremagog

Witnessing one of their services is a unique experience, as they sing in Gregorian Chant. Hearing such a haunting sound echoing throughout

the sanctuary is unforgettable. (www.st-benoit-du-lac.com)

South of Magog is one of the most picturesque commercial ventures in Quebec, the **Bleu Lavande Lavender Farm**. The only Canadian lavender producer with international certification, Bleu Lavande is acres and acres of lavender -- over 200,000 lavender plants! That makes the farm the second largest producer of lavender in North America.

You'll enjoy the beautiful boutique on the grounds, which has dozens of products made from the crop's 100% pure Lavender essential oil. (www.bleulavande.ca)

The beautiful village of **Knowlton** is the largest at Lac-Brome (Lake Brome). It has a darling shopping area, as well as a number of reasonably-priced restaurants, most of which offer al fresco dining and historic homes and places to stay. Don't miss a

look-see at the **Auberge Lakeside Inn** in Knowlton. This 1870 historic inn is well-maintained and very rustic. The restaurant there has a great reputation. (www.auberge-lakeviewinn.com)

A really restful place to stay while in the Lake Brome area is the **Auberge & Spa West Brome**.

This country inn offers spacious suites and spectacular views--as it's surrounded by farmland. It is also home to a wonderful restaurant, complete with outdoor terrace (in season). Head Chef Stéphane offers sumptuous regional dishes made from the freshest local ingredients. There's also an extensive selection



Natural soaps produced at Savon Des Cantons



The Abbey at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac

of wines. (www.awb.ca)

An interesting agri-tourism attraction in **Stukely-Sud** (South Stukely) village is the lamb and donkey farm: “Le Seigneur des agneaux” (translated: “The Lord of the Lamb”). Donkeys raised on the farm are for the purpose of protecting the resident sheep herd from coyotes. They also serve as

line of soaps made from milk from: donkeys, goats, ewes and cows.

While there, you can also learn a great deal about the personality of donkeys, which you’ll find quite a surprise. These animals aren’t at all deserving of the “stubborn” reputation they have been tagged with. You’ll also learn about sheparding sheep and why shepards



Mixed farming is a common sight in the Eastern Townships

hiking pack animals. And their milk is used for the manufacture of soap production (great for moisturizing). In fact, the farm has launched a new

use a “shepards crook.” You can also sample the lamb raised.

A walk through their main barn is interesting as it is built



A unique sight: a round barn in West Brome



A large farm operation in West Brome

entirely without nails. (www.leseigneurdesagneaux.com)

Bromont was founded in 1964. It’s known for its outdoor facilities, including: the Ski Bromont center, the largest lit skiing facility in North American, (which converts to a water park and mountain bike trail site during the summer), excellent golf courses, a bike path that joins the extensive Route Verte, an Olympic velodrome, horseback riding and hiking trails. Shefford Street has a nice variety of shopping opportunities.

In Bromont, don’t miss the **Musee du Chocolat** (Museum of Chocolate). This is a real education on the history and technology of chocolate. You’ll also see marvelous sculpture made from blocks of chocolate. Samples of specific chocolate are available. And there’s a wide variety of chocolate that can be purchased. ([\[duchocolatdebromont.ca\]\(http://www.duchocolatdebromont.ca\)\)](http://www.musee-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

A trip through Bromont isn’t complete without taking a couple of hours to pamper yourself at the **Balnea Spa**. This world-class



Of the 150 donkeys in the province, 16 are at Seigneur des Agneaux



Customers enjoy sampling the Ice Apple Wine at Domain Pinnacle, near Frelighsburg.

spa is located on a magnificent mountainside, lakefront site, which is in a private nature reserve of Bromont-sur-le-lac. You can have any Spa service imaginable performed: massages, body treatments, facial care, health cures, packages of one or more days and yoga courses. Call ahead to reserve.

Enjoy a Finnish sauna, Turkish baths, outdoor whirlpool baths with salted water, heated terraces, waterfalls, pond in forest, or alternate between hot and cold tub (or cold shower); there are several of each kind on the premises—both in the main spa facility, or down at the lake. Alternating the two

(hot, then cold), patrons believe, is far more relaxing than just using the “hot.” Facilities also include a solarium offering a beautiful view of the mountains, and a restaurant delicatessen. (www.balnea.ca)

Tips:

- Don't forget to bring your passport. And allow time at the border for spot inspections,

primary language, there's no language barrier. Everyone in Quebec studies English as a second language from the 2nd grade through High school. So just about everyone is fluently bilingual. (Why was that we wait until 7th grade in America to teach second languages?)

- Electric power is identical to U.S., so all your appliances will work fine.



A beautiful lunch is made even better when served al fresco under the grape vines at L'Orpellieur Vineyard, in Dunham.

especially on your northbound trip.

- The Canadian dollar is on a par with the American dollar, as far as exchange rates are concerned. And American money is accepted no problem. But of course, you'll get change in Canadian money.

- If you have a choice of cars to take to the area, choose the one with better suspension, as the secondary roads in the area, while not pot-holed, are still not as smooth as you find just over the border in Vermont.

- Watch your speed. Those 100 speed signs are in kilometers-per-hour, not miles-per-hour.

To get to the Eastern Townships, just head to Boston and continue north on I-93; then take I-91 to the US border. Once you are across the border, you're in the Eastern Townships.

If you'd like to know more about vacationing in Quebec, Canada, go to www.bonjourquebec.com.

And thanks for traveling!



Owner Michelle Besre explains her pastry technique at La Rumeur Affamee, in Sutton

- Although French is the