

**Press release**
 **For immediate release**

**Tourism Eastern Townships launches its winter season with innovation on the agenda**

**North Hatley, November 14, 2024** – Tourisme Cantons-de-Est (TCE)/Tourism Eastern Townships is officially kicking off its 2024-2025 winter season and on the agenda are a slew of new features and innovations, augmenting the region’s wide range of attractions and activities. Our snowy mountains, outdoor sports, cultural events and leisure activities draw thousands to the Townships every year and this season they will be more appealing than ever!

A major move was a visit from [Tournée IA+ Tourisme](https://mtlab.ca/etn/tournee-iatourisme/), on the day of the official winter launch. The company (a start-up incubator) outlined how artificial intelligence (AI) could benefit the tourism industry and help to develop it into the future. With AI software, for example, users can better identify what tourists are looking for and thus improve the “visitor experience” - both before they arrive in a region and during their stay. The fact-finding day ended with the very first Cocktail des Fêtes (Holiday Cocktail) held in the enchanting setting of the Tap Room at Manoir Hovey – a great opportunity for members of Tourisme Cantons-de-l'Est to network with one another, while celebrating the launch of the winter season.

“With its breathtaking scenery and excellent infrastructure, the Eastern Townships is fast establishing itself as a prime winter destination,” says Isabelle Charlebois, General Manager of TCE. “This year, we’re thrilled to announce new, innovative attractions, while at the same time, continuing to showcase our natural and cultural heritage. Adding [Tournée IA+ Tourisme](https://mtlab.ca/etn/tournee-iatourisme/) to the mix has allowed us to understand how artificial intelligence can enhance the visitor experience, deepen our understanding of what visitors need and support tourism enterprises as they transition into the world of AI.”

**A promising winter with dozens of activities**

After a successful summer season in the Townships, the outlook for winter looks promising as well, but with certain provisos. A TCE survey found that more than half of the companies operating this winter say they are “cautiously optimistic” but the vagaries of weather, coupled with uncertainty about the economy, makes it hard to predict the coming months with any degree of certainty.

No matter the weather however, the region offers a wide choice of winter activities that appeal to every taste. Visitors can ski (alpine and cross country), hike, go fat biking, snowshoe, try hot and cold treatments at a Nordic spa, attend a cultural event, watch the stars and discover the gourmet fare for which the Townships is renowned. The list goes on…All that, while staying in cozy and often unusual accommodations. It’s hardly surprising that the region is the fifth most popular winter destination in the province of Quebec! This winter, Tourism Eastern Townships is inviting visitors to discover (or rediscover!) the region, with over 60 new and enhanced winter activities in all 9 Regional County Municipalities (MRCs). **Check them out** [**here**](https://www.easterntownships.org/press/press-releases/1515/winter-in-the-eastern-townships-activities-local-flavours-and-memorable-outings)**.**

**Major promotions launched by TCE and partners**

The team at TCE is going full out to promote winter tourism in the region and to attract even more visitors. Between now and March 2025, more than $375,000 will be invested to position the Townships as THE winter destination of choice. The « Proche de vous. Loin de l’ordinaire. » (« [Close to you. Far from *ordinaire*.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUc0s2t_svk) ») campaign showcases the authenticity and beauty of the Townships and it particularly targets visitors from outside the province of Quebec. Two other major campaigns, launched in partnership with the Association des stations de ski du Québec (ASSQ) and the Alliance de l’industrie touristique du Québec (AITQ), will also promote the region as a mecca for skiers. Ads, inspirational stories, “What to do…” overviews and newsletters will also highlight not-to-be-missed seasonal events and attractions. Along with the promotional campaigns, TCE will be stepping up its efforts to engage with the media, content creators and travel professionals, to create even more interest in the destination. To complement this, agile strategies will be deployed throughout the season, with a focus on snow conditions, which are much better in the Eastern Townships' mountains and ski resorts than in urban areas. By also highlighting the diversity of winter activities available regardless of the weather, this approach aims to remind people that the Eastern Townships is a choice destination where winter can be experienced to the full.

**The integration of AI in the tourism industry**

The [Artificial Intelligence and Tourism Working Group](https://iatourisme.com/) founded by Pierre Bellerose and MT Lab, is currently travelling through Quebec, as part of the [Tournée IA+Tourisme](https://mtlab.ca/etn/tournee-iatourisme/) fall event. With financial support from the Quebec Ministry of Tourism, the goal of the event is to raise awareness among tourism industry players of the exciting new opportunities offered by AI and how this innovative technology can help to solve challenges faced by the tourism sector. The Working Group was in North Hatley on November 13, during the launch of the winter season.

On the agenda was a number of presentations, a collaborative workshop (to identify goals) and a panel of regional experts who explained how AI had been integrated into their own organizations, demonstrating the tangible difference(s) it was making to the “visitor experience”. Participants were given the opportunity to exchange ideas with knowledgeable professionals and to learn what other regions had experienced through their use of AI. The goal was to familiarize attendees with what artificial intelligence was capable of, to gather people together to identify industry needs and to come up with innovative solutions for the tourism sector, under the guidance of experienced entrepreneurs.

“The tourism industry is undergoing a major transformation,¨ explains Lysandre Michaud-Verreault, Manager of the Representation and Communications Department at TCE and a member of the AI+Tourism Working Group. “By integrating artificial intelligence into our operations and focusing on the implications for the ‘visitor experience’, we can better understand our customers’ expectations and behaviours, and as a result, we can adapt and streamline our tourism offer. The Tournée IA+Tourisme enabled industry players to discover effective solutions to problems, by discussing them with tourism professionals and companies with similar challenges.”

The regional tourism association (ATR) has also adopted the use of AI and is currently integrating it within the organization by organizing training sessions and workshops for employees. A committee focusing on AI has also been formed to speed up the implementation of artificial intelligence - both internally and among members. Each month, progress will be monitored, focusing on how AI performs with regards to tourism (destination, visitor experience, efficiency etc.). By sharing this knowledge within the organization and externally (for example, during the AI Tour on November 13) the committee will help to make this innovative technology a strategic lever to further develop the tourism industry in the Eastern Townships.

Along with those strategies to integrate AI, Cantons-de-l'Est has also partnered with MT Lab, to design software specifically for the hospitality sector with a focus on the visitor experience. $130,000 has been allocated for the development and implementation of this project, which will be created from regional data and customized recommendations. Part of the Tourism Innovation Program managed by MT Lab and supported by the Ministry of Tourism, this project represents a major step forward for the hospitality sector in the Townships.

Member companies of TCE can also take advantage of the services provided by one of our “innovation consultants”. Certified by the Conseil de l’innovation du Québec, these consultants can offer advice to tourism entities that want to grow their business - helping them to turn their aspirational ideas into reality.

**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 support and promote tourism development, showcase the “visitor experience” and market 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. The industry generates more than 20,000 jobs, making the Eastern Townships the 5th largesttourism employer in the province of Quebec.

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**Source :**

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