

Better than Acadia? Cycling the Trails of Quebec's Eastern Townships

By Peggy Newland - Columnist | Jul 25, 2026



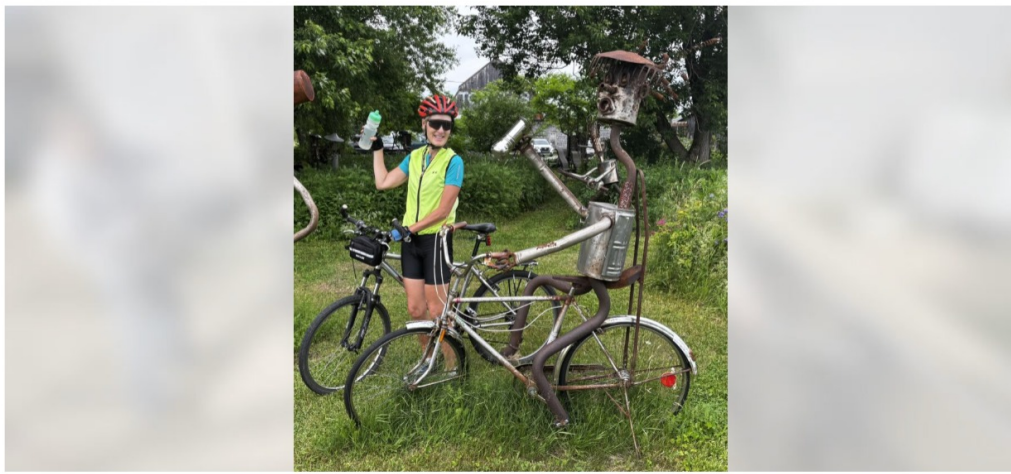
One of my favorite places in the world is Acadia National Park. The carriage trails and cycling paths around mountains, past lakes, to seaside coves are all stunning, but as with all beautiful locations, there are summer/fall crowds and traffic. I've found another beauty zone for bicycling in a hidden, uncrowded nook of Quebec's Eastern Townships that could be Acadia's competition for my favorite places.

Just three and a half hours away from the seacoast of New Hampshire and with over 1,200 miles of paved and gravel bicycling routes, Brian and I plant ourselves smack dab in a perfect weekend getaway at Spa Eastman. Close to cycling trails and situated in meadows of wildflowers, Spa Eastman has been named Canada's "Best Wellness Retreat" and it shows: tranquil rooms overlooking forest glens, quiet gardens, a swimming pond, tree-lined pool, multiple saunas, whirlpools, cold plunges, steam rooms, classes on "cultivating wellness and restoring energy," and anti-inflammatory Tonique cuisine. It could be easy to just park it at the spa, but cycling is calling us.

After a three-course breakfast of cashew yogurt, homemade muffins, fresh-made applesauce, and mung bean crepes with oyster mushrooms, spinach, peppers, and asparagus, we zip down to access part of La Montagnarde (Route Verte). We cycle along the shores of Lac d'Argent, which takes us past a crystalline lake, rolling pastures, and unique farmstands offering everything from fresh strawberries, cheeses, and ice cream. We discover a farm full of sculptured statues made of hubcaps, mufflers, and tailpipes and spend time enjoying the creative art. Continuing, we are surrounded by maple forests, streams, fields, all with distant views of Mont Lilly-Butters. We take an offshoot from the gravel and cycle quiet routes of Chemin du Cedre near Lac Stukely. A swim on this quiet lake is a must, and we find a spot for our packed picnic lunch and a dip with views.

Coming back to Spa Eastman, we hoof it up a huge hill, so a jump in the pond, a leap into a cold plunge, and a nap in a hammock under quaking aspen is our remaining afternoon before dinner.

The dining room and outdoor terrace offer views over Mont Orford and across the spa's expansive meadows, swimming pond, and pools. With an on-property menu designed by nutritionist and chef Jean-Marc Enderlin, we are in healthy hands. Featuring four course table d'hôte, we start with shrimp ceviche and continue with delectable tomato soups followed by multi-layered "fresh from the Eastman garden" salads, which are artfully delicious. Brian enjoys duck breast tournedos with berries, ginger, cream of parsnip, yellow beetroot, apple, and walnut while I choose a chickpea and amaranth crepe stuffed with spinach, oyster mushrooms, tofu cauliflower and cashew cream. We share an organic bottle of wine before adding in the desserts: a superb mint and matcha cake and a chocolate ganache with nuts.



The next morning, after another three-course breakfast and plentiful coffee, a couple from Montreal tells us about the new gravel paths near Mont Orford. "Just connect La Montagnarde to La Cavaliere and make sure to bring suits for swimming in Lac Fraser."

We look through their maps and decide to cycle the longer route from Spa Eastman to Lac Fraser. Wooded, with gravel and paved paths, we wind past more streams, marshes, through northern hardwood forests and boreal marshlands. Fir and spruce scent the cycling as we roll up and down gentle hills and eventually come to Lac Fraser. Dotted with islands, draped in yellow spruce and sugar maple, the clear "refreshing" lake is nature at its finest. We jump right into the water and float in the sunshine until it's time for another packed picnic lunch on the beach.

After a couple of hours by the lake, we circle back to the spa for our circuit: pool, hot tub, sauna, cold plunge. That evening, we walk "just up the road" for an experiential dinner at Huit5Quatre. The light is magical as we enter a curated garden with expansive lawns and into a wooden dining room filled with open windows for cool breezes on the hillside. A secret menu is deliberately not revealed until the menu is placed in front of you. We share an evening with Chef Francois Lessard and his delightful wife and business partner, Laura Vega. Chef Lessard creates masterpieces of gastronomic joy. Each plate features his style of colorful precision, with a focus on exceptional ingredients found within Quebec and beyond. Each course is a kaleidoscope of color, arrangement, and unique balance. Almost too gorgeous to eat, but we enjoy every bite. Foraged herbs, just picked vegetables, curated meats, and fresh-caught seafood followed by a seasonally inspired dessert—perfection. Wanting to keep each dining experience unique, Chef Lessard makes each night a sensory "secret" surprise.

On our last morning, we stay central to the spa. Morning yoga by the pond, a walk along the meadows and through the gardens, a soak in the hot tubs as birds serenade us, a breakfast on the terrace—we don't want to leave.

After checking out, we explore, by car, some of the towns nearby. First, the lake resort town of Magog. We have lunch on the rooftop of Les Enfants Terribles, a French brasserie with seasonally inspired cuisine. We share mushroom arancini, duck poutine, and beet and warm goat cheese salad. Then we walk it off before popping back into the car to ramble around the cutest village—North Hatley, on Lac Massawippi. We find beautiful homes by the lake, unique shopping, and a bicycle path beckoning us for "just one more" ride in Quebec. We cycle 29 kilometres from North Hatley to Lennoxville and enjoy the river, waterfalls, and wildflowers draped along the hillsides on crushed gravel "car-free" trails. Then it's a jump into the Lac Massawippi at the local dock for a clean-off before the ride home.



The Eastern Townships is Acadia Quebec-style: a nirvana of crushed gravel, lakesides, rolling hills, spa towns, and cuisine that will knock your cycling socks off. Instead of summer crowds on Acadia carriage trails and lobster rolls at shacks, come for Canadian charm in a serene countryside that whispers, "return again" for quiet and cuisine. I've made my next reservation for fall.

Spa Eastman. 895 Chemin des Diligences. Eastman, Quebec. www.spa-eastman.com (450) 297-3009. Come for a themed stay (relaxation, health immersion, yoga) or just find your own wellness adventure. All inclusive, with curated Tonique Cuisine.

Les Enfants Terribles. 803 Rue Principale. Magog, Quebec. www.jesuisunenfantterrible.com Rooftop dining with sunset views over Lake Magog. Walkable town with shops and parks.

Huit5Quatre. 854 Chemin des Diligences. Eastman, Quebec. www.huit5quatre.ca. A "don't miss" cuisine adventure close to Spa Eastman and a world away for sensory joy.

