

A Weekend Getaway At Quebec's Tremblant: The Devil Made Me Do It

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Written For: Score Golf for Women

Good thing the Quebec course-fringed with emerald greens and pearly-white sand traps-is so endearingly pretty. Good thing a trembling ski mountain looms spectacularly in the distance. Good thing there are five tees for golfers to choose from, and that the devilish Le Diable is just down the piste from a beachclub, a spa, an indoor hot pool, a golf academy, shopping, nightlife, and an oh-so-enticing medley of restaurants francais. No matter which demon spooks a female golfer on course, Tremblant is the ideal spot for a weekend golf getaway for women.

Best known for its skiing, Tremblant is a colourful new-but-made-to-look-old Quebec habitant village flanking the lower hillsides of a 650-metre mountain, Mont Tremblant. It's on the banks of true blue Lac Tremblant, and on the edge of a forested provincial park. It's located about 1.5 hours north of Montreal in the heart of Les Laurentides (the Laurentians).

For decades Tremblant rivaled America's Sun Valley as the place for the jet set to go skiing. But when Vancouver's Intrawest-owner of Whistler/Blackcomb- took over in the 1990s, the resort became the ultimate playground for a more sporting four-season set, hell bent on golfing, hiking, rollerblading and biking. Today it brims with well-appointed, often sumptuous accommodation, rollicking attractions and top-notch golf courses that weave through dense Laurentian forest.

Le Diable and Le Géant are the courses nearest to the village action. La Belle and La Bête are just down the road, closer to Grey Rocks, Tremblant's skiing cousin. The region's Royal Laurentian and a new course designed by Fred Couples called The Master-debuting this season-round out Tremblant's impressive golf offerings.

The Par 71 Le Diable stretches through deer habitats guarded by stately red pines. Visually, the course is intimidating-a combination of enormous waste bunkers, water and rolling bentgrass fairways-but here the devil's bark is much worse than his bite. Le Diable is more open and much more friendly than next door's Le Géant.

The Par 72 "Giant" is true to its Mont Tremblant roots: plenty of elevation changes, elevated tees and elevated greens add drama to awe-inspiring fairways. Le Géant looks more like a ski hill than a golf course. Golfers are forced time and again to carry their shots all the way to the greens, with bunkers or deep rough as penalties for coming up short-long shots and accuracy win the game at Le Géant.

Grey Rocks' La Bête (The Beast) offers more target golf, but it has less sand and fewer forced carries-generally it's more forgiving. Its kinder-still sister, La Belle (The Beauty) is older, more traditional, more laid-back and more gentrified, rounding out nicely Tremblant's four main golf offerings.

Le Diable, Le Géant and La Bête particularly are un-walkable; carts are mandatory for tackling their extreme terrain changes. All four courses are noteworthy as examples of modern golf architecture in ravishing, natural settings.

The nearby Tremblant Golf Academy is a one-year-old, 16.5-acre dedication to teaching and learning. Up to 60 people per day can whack balls towards heavily manicured target greens, out of sand play areas and back and forth across a mix putting and chipping greens. There are specialized sessions focused on women: Elle Golf programs range from half-day private and group lessons, to one- to five-day sessions that include a daily round of 18 holes and breakfast and lunch.

Golf aside, it's Tremblant's general ambiance that's so attractive. The pedestrian-only village is alive with colour. Brightly-painted roofs of blue, green and red, and flower boxes spilling with

geraniums add joie de vivre. Book stores, sports stores and trendy clothing, art and gift shops line up along Tremblant's meandering cobbled streets. Outdoor cafés serve crêpes and café lattes. There's a fondue restaurant called La Savoie and a wine and cheese oasis called La Grappe à Vin that deserve special mention. At night, Le P'tit Caribou absolutely rocks... women from all walks of life can cut loose and dance on tables.

Relaxation comes in many forms. Tremblant's Beach and Tennis Club offers sailing, water-skiing, canoeing, kayaking, pedal boating, 15 tennis courts and a big long beach to lie on along the shores of Lac Tremblant. The Aquaclub La Source is an indoor/outdoor set of hot pools with gym facilities combined. Hiking, cycling and rollerblading trails meander up and up and up along the manicured slopes of Mont Tremblant. Outdoor concerts and buskers are common both at the top of the gondola and down below in the main square of the village.

Scandinave, the local spa, is a refuge of heated hot tubs and massage therapists. Rivière La Diable (Devil River), babbling peacefully past the spa, the golf courses and through Tremblant's tumbling terrain, is a constant source of relaxation.

Canadian poet Stephen Leacock once said "The devil is passing out of fashion." But in Tremblant's case, we disagree, Mr. Leacock. For women, le diable... el diablo... whatever you care to call him... is passing very much into fashion.

For more information on Quebec's Tremblant, visit www.tremblant.ca or call 1-88-TREMBLANT. Lori Knowles is a freelance golf and ski writer and columnist living in Toronto.

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