

Several-day hikes on the International Appalachian Trail (Gaspésie National Park)

PREPARATION & PREVENTION

The trail and its level of difficulty

The Parc de la Gaspésie section of the IAT totals just over 100 km, with a possibility of 9 hiking days (an average of 11 km per day). These day sections are separated by various types of lodging infrastructures, from camping platforms and mountain cabins with outhouses, campgrounds with full services to the luxury of the Gîte du Mont Albert with its renowned restaurant. This section of the trail is classed from intermediate to difficult, depending on the section. The trail winds its way over the crests of the Chic-Choc and the McGerrigle mountains, crossing valleys on its way. The viewpoints one attains at the summits of the crest make very clear why the Park adopted its slogan, 'A sea of mountains'!

The IAT in the Parc de la Gaspésie is classified by Adventure and Ecotourism Québec (AEQ) as an isolation zone 2. These zones range from 1 to 4, where 1 is a zone where the evacuation road is near and where the hospital is accessible within one hour, and where zone 4 is a zone where there is no trail, where the evacuation route is difficult to attain and where the hospital is more than 12 hours away by road.

Zone 2 is described as follows:

- The evacuation route is easy to access
- Hospital or ambulance services are less than 6 hours away by road
- The trail is well identified
- The level of difficulty is intermediate or advanced, with abrupt terrain
- The trail contains some obstacles

Other hiking destinations with the same isolation classification (zone 2) are the Parc des Hautes Gorges (Charlevoix, Québec) and the Parc du Saguenay (Saguenay, Québec). Of course, evacuation time depends on our proximity to an access road at the time of the accident, and at areas far from such a road, evacuation time may be more than 6 hours. At various points along the trail we are at the upper limit of the description of zone 2.

The weather and possible modifications to the itinerary to reduce associated risks

The altitude of these mountains greatly affects the climate in the area. The dominant winds are out of the North-West and their speed is generally twice that of the wind we receive along the coast. The climate of these mountains is colder and rainier than that of the coast. Imagine: The latitudinal equivalent with the most similar climate to these peaks is the Poste-à-la-baleine region on the East coast of Hudson Bay, at a latitude of 55°22' North! (Matane is located at 48°50'N).

The weather is an important risk factor for hikers. Humidity, cold winds and thunderstorms are threats to our safety. For this reason, the guide reserves the right to change the group's plans or itinerary to diminish risks for the participants. For example, we do not go higher than the tree line when winds blow faster than 60 km/h. As well, if we are facing an electric storm, we will not ascend to any mountain peaks. It is very important to bring along a good windbreaker, raincoat and polar fleece for your activities in these mountains.

The required physical capacities and prerequisite conditions for several-day hiking with camping in the Chic-Chocs

To be able to face this challenge, one must be in very good physical shape. This means that during the past two years you must have regularly brought your cardiovascular and muscular systems to work hard for more than 30 minutes at a time. Your joints, leg muscles and back must be in very good shape. You should also already have experience of several day hikes in mountainous terrain.

You must be able to walk on demanding terrain, several days in a row. As well, you should be able to face the challenges and discomforts of the trail with courage and a smile! For one-day hikes the minimum age is 6 years and for several day hikes the minimum age is 12 years. These hikes are not recommended for people with joint problems or with reduced respiratory or heart capacity.

If any of these elements make you doubt your ability to undertake the hike planned, please let us know. With the wide and varied territory of the IAT, we can adjust the itinerary to suit you better if need be.

Physical preparation

We suggest you prepare for this physical challenge by regularly practicing your favourite physical activity. You can choose to take walks including steep up- and downhills, or to visit the gym and ask the trainer to give you a program that prepares for this type of hike. If you exercise 3 times a week for at least a month before the hike, you'll really see the difference on the trail and your risks of having a sprain or other physical problem will be greatly reduced!

Equipment

We provide to you the list of equipment to be brought by participants. It is important to bring all objects on the list. Try to bring light objects. Since there is baggage transport service, you can bring along a couple of luxury items, (for example a book), but please don't exaggerate so that our colleagues who take care of the baggage don't risk hurting themselves in their manoeuvres.

New boots

For those who must buy new hiking boots before taking part in this hike, know that a long hike is not the place to break in new boots! I've seen many times proud hikers with new boots become quite miserable when the blisters start up...While buying, you should choose boots which allow you to put 1 finger between your heel and the inside of the back of the boot when the laces are not done up. When the boots are firmly laced, your heel should not lift up more than an eighth of an inch when you take a step.

Your new boots should take the shape of your foot **before** the big hike, so it is good to buy them well ahead of time and wear them at the office or at home every day. When they start to hurt your feet, take them off – but only until the next day! If you follow this procedure daily, after one week you should be able to keep your boots on all day. If you bought leather boots, before the big hike you can plan a day along a trail which encounters water. Dip your boots in when they are on your feet (walk through a small brook) and keep walking until the boots are dry. This will let them take the shape of your foot very quickly. All this preparation will greatly reduce the chances of developing a blister while on the hike!

Pre-departure briefings

Before leaving on a long hike, we will discuss with you the risks you may encounter along the trail (minor and major injuries, weather, black bear, dehydration and hypothermia). At each major leg (day or half-day), we will describe to you the terrain ahead and what risks are specific to that leg of the hike.

Language spoken by the guides

The main language spoken by our guides is French, though for English clients we send along a completely bilingual guide. It is important that all instructions and communications between the guide and the

participants be understood! We also have guides which speak basic Spanish and German. If you want to be guided by someone who speaks these languages, please let us know!

Respecting the environment and other participants

At Absolu ÉcoAventure, we proudly apply Leave No Trace principles during all the activities we organize. We ask our participants to act with the same respect for the natural environment. Through interpretation capsules, we will introduce you to various camping and hiking techniques which reduce our impact on the environment. For the security and respect of the other participants, we ask that you don't bring along drugs or alcohol and we also ask that you respect the instructions of your guide. This is for your security! Finally, we ask that smokers make sure that they do not smoke in the presence of non-smokers and also that smoke does not reach them. This means that smokers will have to foresee short walks to get far enough away from the campsite so as not to affect the air quality around the site!

To get to the meeting point

To get to meeting point of our hikes, namely the discovery centre of the Parc de la Gaspésie, take the 132 to get to Ste-Anne-des-Monts on the North coast of the Gaspé Peninsula. At Ste-Anne-des-Monts, turn South on the 299 and follow the indication signs leading to the park. Enjoy the view of the mountains which will appear once you pass through the small village of Cap-Seize. This is the crest we will be hiking on! After about 30 minutes (40 kilometres) you will arrive in the heart of the park, in the region of Mont Albert. Follow the signs to the discovery centre, (a left turn) just before the Gîte du Mont Albert.

We wish you happy preparations!

