

saintlo

St. Lawrence Youth Hostels inc.

2022–2023 Annual Report





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mission

Our mission is to create positive encounters between people from here and around the world and to promote the discovery of Québec and Ontario.



pillars

Sociable

We promise to offer sociable accommodation. Hostels designed to encourage sharing, discovery and socialization.

Young

We are for the youth and we are young in spirit. We embrace the values of today's youth and support their ideals.

Local

We promote our destinations and encourage their discovery through an offer of affordable accommodations.

Lively

We adapt and evolve continuously, like the world and the youth we represent.

Mindful

We encourage a more responsible way of travelling, celebrating diversity and creating environments where everyone feels they belong.

st. lawrence youth hostels inc. board of directors

Nathalie Brière, President
Corporate Director, Montreal

Vincent Bérubé, Vice-President
Director, Rivière-du-Loup International Hostel

Charlène Baron, Treasurer Director
CAA-Quebec Travel – Montreal

Jacques Perreault, Secretary
Executive Director, St. Lawrence Youth Hostels inc., Montreal

Gabrielle Caron, Board Member
Assistant Manager, Saintlo Montréal

Ryan Collins-Swartz, Board Member
Co-Executive Director, Tapestry Community Capital, Toronto

Jay Cuyllits, Board Member
Senior Director, BBA Consultants

Peter Harrison, Board Member
Vice-President, CPCS, Ottawa

Mohamed Reda Khomsi, Board Member
Professor, School of Management, UQÀM, Montreal



types d'adhésion

Class "A" Members: People who have an interest in the mission of the association and who are not in an actual or potential conflict of interest with respect to the affairs of the association. These persons must reside in the territory of Quebec or Ontario, have completed the membership form, paid their dues and have been duly accepted by the Board of Directors.

Class "B" Members: People who work as employees for the association.

Class "C" Members: This class is made up of a maximum of one delegate per member youth hostel with a marketing and membership agreement in force with the Association.

president's message

The entire Board of Directors would like to recognize the past year's accomplishments and congratulate the great team led by Jacques Perreault!

With the adoption of the 2022–2026 Strategic Plan, Saintlo launched a number of projects, including the sustainable development, relaunching the Saintlo Youth Tourism Foundation and strengthening the procedures to modernize its Toronto hostel.

These activities were rolled out with the board's support and the contributions of the different committee directors.

For the reopening of the Saintlo Ottawa Jail hostel, the board closely monitored the renovations. A meeting was held in September in Ottawa so that the directors could observe the work. These major investments demonstrate our attachment and commitment to this heritage hostel— a hostel that's been on the travel scene for 50 years this year — so that everyone can continue to enjoy it in the future. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the City of Ottawa for recognizing this history during the anniversary celebrations.

In terms of governance, modifications were made to the association bylaws during the transition to Saintlo. The board created a governance committee to make more in-depth revisions to the regulations in order to reflect a more modern, effective and efficient governance.

We also welcomed two new members to the board. Mohamed Reda Khomsi and Ryan Collins–Swartz, with their respective expertise, have enriched the board's existing skillsets.

After generously accepting to renew his mandate several times, Peter Harrison left the presidency of the board this year, but has continued on as a



board member. Mr. Harrison acted as President of the Board of Directors for ten years: a very colourful decade during which Saintlo dreamed up an ambitious strategic plan and found its wings.

I would like to acknowledge Peter's priceless contributions and unwavering commitment to the association.

I would also like to personally thank my colleagues on the board for their commitment and invaluable contributions.

Saintlo has entered an exciting phase driven by a talented team who have the perfect tools to develop a collective of engaging hostels. The coming year looks to be just as action-packed as this past year!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "N. Brière".

Nathalie Brière,

President

executive director's message

Although the Saintlo brand has only existed for 18 months, we had the pleasant impression on September 30, 2023 that we've been working and growing under this identity forever. The dynamic, young, welcoming brand image that we created is a perfect fit.

Our new visual identity looks so good that it even received a few awards. Recognitions included Tourisme Montréal's 2023 Distinction Award (Prix Distinction) and Tourism and Product Development Award (Prix Développement de l'offre touristique et du produit) in the accommodation category.

The Saintlo brand name also represents the Saintlo collective, a concept that's been fine-tuned over the past few months to now include four independent hostels in addition to the Saintlo properties. We are proud to count the La Secousse Youth Hostel in La Malbaie, the Rivière-du-Loup International Hostel, the Festive Sea Shack Hostel in Ste-Anne-Des-Monts and the Griffon Adventure Hostel in Anse-Au-Griffon as collective member hostels. As pillars in their communities, they have all been playing a major role in the collective's growth and success.

Saintlo Montréal's actions this year were driven by social economy ideals. The hostel was selected for the "vitrine de l'économie sociale" project involving Recyc-Québec and the Ministère du Tourisme, and it initiated a project to provide new youth hostel beds by working with two other social inclusion businesses: Formétal and Mains Utiles. This innovative project received financial aid from PME Montréal and will also involve Desjardins in its second phase.

The Saintlo Ottawa Jail hostel played an essential role in its community during the pandemic as accommodations for a vulnerable population.



After this period of assistance, which ran until the end of March 2023, Saintlo reappropriated the premises and launched back into the work that had been put on pause since the City of Ottawa rented it. More than \$650,000 was invested in upgrading the service infrastructures in just a few months.

What's more, the 50th anniversary celebration of the hostel's existence in the heritage building generated impressive media coverage and strengthened ties within the Ottawa community.

Our building in Toronto remains rented out to the city. The clientele temporarily housed in the hostel premises has changed from the homeless to refugees. When the lease ends in two and a half years, we will be undertaking major work to upgrade the premises to make it a 21st century hostel, like we did with Saintlo Ottawa Jail. To this end, we have created a development fund specifically for the project.

A year and a half ago, we started the restructuring of the Saintlo Youth Tourism Foundation. With training from the Saintlo team, the Foundation's redesign and relaunch team launched the new website and visual identity at the end of spring 2023, laying the groundwork for a range of engaging philanthropic initiatives to come.

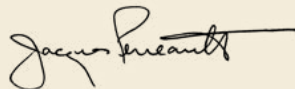
The elements in this report stem from the 2022–2026 strategic plan. This was developed at the start of the financial year by the Board of Directors in collaboration with Saintlo management and their teams. It includes five key axes:

- **Axis 1**
Sustainable development (socially, ecologically, and economically more responsible)
- **Axis 2**
Development of the Saintlo identity and product
- **Axis 3**
Development of the Saintlo collective
- **Axis 4**
Organizational and financial sustainability
- **Axis 5**
Development of the Saintlo Youth Tourism Foundation

An operational plan was created to deploy the strategies as concrete actions for the association.

All the accomplishments described here were made possible with the support of the operations teams, the head office and the Board of Directors. The Saintlo teams gave it their all so that our communications now reflect our image and our values, the clientele is satisfied more than ever with our facilities and services, and the workplace is both inviting and inspiring.

I would like to express my gratitude to each and every one of you for contributing to making this year so exceptional.



Jacques Perreault,
Executive Director,
St. Lawrence Youth Hostels inc.



saintlo

IN FIGURES

 **75 EMPLOYEES**

at Saintlo as of September 30, 2023

58 CLASS "A"

Saintlo members

The average years of service of employees in 2022-2023 is:

3 YEARS & 4 MONTHS

This year, the Saintlo hostels welcomed travelers from



172 COUNTRIES

3052 COMMENTS

left by travellers on the different online reservation platforms (OTAs)* during the year for **Saintlo Montréal** and **Saintlo Ottawa Jail**

171 500
USERS

tallied on saintlo.ca



9000
VIEWS

of the collective's "More than a Place to Sleep" video on Facebook



6 ROOMS

completely renovated this year at **Saintlo Montréal**

10 CANDLES

on the **La Secousse** hostel birthday cake



50 CANDLES

on the **Saintlo Ottawa Jail** birthday cake

52 259

nights booked at **Saintlo Montréal** between October 1, 2022, and September 30, 2023

of which **5500** nights were booked for groups



+2,000 Instagram followers for **Saintlo Montréal**
+3,000 Instagram followers for **Saintlo Ottawa Jail**

2.5 YEARS

left in the rental agreement between **Saintlo Toronto** and the City of Toronto



0 GHOST

seen at **Saintlo Ottawa Jail**



12 077

nights booked at **Saintlo Ottawa Jail** between May 15 and September 30, 2023



4 independent Saintlo collective member

HOSTELS

62%

of people visiting saintlo.ca use a cell phone

wow!

the saintlo hostels

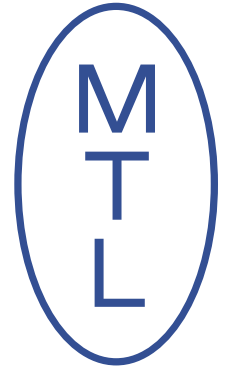
Condensing an entire year of operations into a few pages is not an easy task. We would like to highlight a number of stand-out accomplishments while also paying tribute to all our teams' daily actions that also play such an important role in the association's success.

We are proud of the progress we made over this year, progress that strengthened our commitment to a sociable, high-quality accommodation experience.

saintlo montréal

The hostel's success this year is most likely thanks to a happy mix of the "revenge travel" phenomenon, Montreal's powerfully attractive *joie de vivre*, and the hostel's affordable, high-quality services. Saintlo Montréal tallied over 52,000 overnight stays – an increase of 31% over last year – an excellent year for the hostel. Compared to last year, our Canadian clientele's overnight stays increased by 8 % while the international clientele's increased by 46 %.

As the staff team had to plan all the renovations around this traffic, this boost in clientele posed a significant but feasible challenge that they rose to with flying colours.

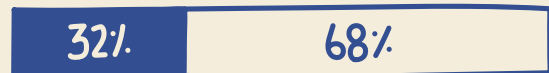


saintlo montréal in numbers

Total overnights
2022-2023:



Canadian Markets vs
International 2022-2023



origin of our markets



Canadian Markets Top 3 (% on the total of overnights)

- Ontario (10 %) – (7 % in 2021-2022)
- Québec (8.5 %) – (5 % in 2021-2022)
- British Columbia (4 %) – (3 % in 2021-2022)



International Markets Top 5 (% on the total of overnights)

- France (25 %) – (23 % in 2021-2022)
- United States (11 %) – (8 % in 2021-2022)
- Germany (5 %) – (5 % in 2021-2022)
- United Kingdom (3 %) – (7 % in 2021-2022)
- Belgium (3 %) – (2 % in 2021-2022)

renovations and improvements

Phase II of the replacement of the heating, ventilation and air conditioning units came to an end and signalled the conclusion of the overall project. The ground floor was specifically targeted during this phase, with the replacement of the four air conditioning units by energy-efficient electric heat pumps, four furnaces and four ventilation systems.

The first phase to replace beds extended over the year, with 27 bunk-bed units exchanged for more robust models. These new beds with privacy curtains better meet the needs of the current clientele. Considering our housekeeping team's intense physical work, we had these custom beds specially designed to make access to the mattresses easier. This design is the result of a tight collaboration between social economy organizations: the hostel for the ideation, Formétal for the production and Mains Utiles for the curtain design. This collaboration will continue until the remaining 56 bunk-bed units are replaced.

The room renovation work continued from September 2022 to June 2023, with six rooms in all completely renovated. Finally, the bathrooms were completely reconstructed, maximizing the available space to install low-flow taps and faucets, better lighting and more adequate ventilation.

In terms of human resources, the 2022–2023 year signaled the end of the major recruiting difficulties caused by lack of job applicants. The pre-pandemic pace got back up to speed and made hiring easier.



© CESIM – Sylviane Robit

What's more, we decided to maintain two full-time employees to carry out technical maintenance. A few years ago, one person alone could manage the work required, but today a minimum of two people are necessary to honour our high-quality promise.

This year, over \$350,000 was invested in the hostel and its different projects. The City of Montreal, via its *Accelerate sustainable investment – social economy program*, granted us a sum of \$45,000 for Phase II of the air conditioning system installation. PME MTL Centre-Ville also generously supported our development by offering expert advice and an envelope of \$15,000 to cover nearly the half the cost of the acquisition of the 27 bunk-bed units received.



Activities are rolling again

This year, the activities programming got back up to its pre-pandemic speed with one or two activities per day offered to the hostel's clientele. On average, the participation rate fluctuated between 7 and 10 % of the total occupation rate (10 to 13 people/activity). On foot, bicycles or skates, in a bar or on a patio, around a collective meal enjoying a typical Montreal dish, at a public market, or admiring the fireworks from the peak of Mount Royal, the diversity of Saintlo Montréal's activities pleased everybody!



Sustainable development pilot project

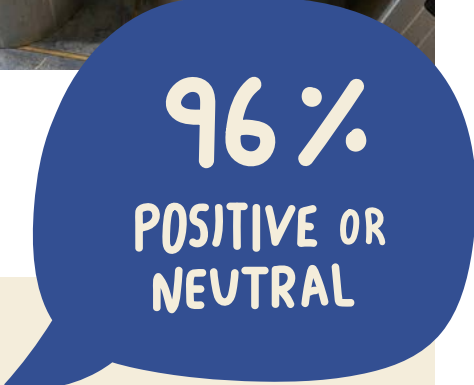
This year, the hostel was selected to participate in a circular economy accompaniment program overseen by the Association Hôtellerie Québec and Recyc-Québec and guided by specialists. The hostel was accompanied to target select fields of action, establish more sustainable strategies and financially support certain beneficial processes.

We took advantage of this initiative to recruit a sustainable development resource person as part of a three-month project pilot. The results were so conclusive that the mandate was extended for four additional months. A variety of actions were promptly implemented, such as the reorganization of waste materials management, bulk buying, informative signage, staff training, carbon footprint measurement and the drafting of a sustainable development policy. The Saintlo hostel can now be prouder than ever of being a promoter of positive change in its field.

The hostel is giving its all to play a greater role in Montreal’s social economy ecosystem. To this end, the Saintlo Montréal Director, after several years as a member of the Conseil de l’économie sociale de l’Île de Montréal, has been Vice-President for one year now. This network offers opportunities to develop business relationships and get to know the different aid and support programs for social economy players so that we can make the most of them.

The 2022–2023 year was a great success for Saintlo Montréal if we measure it by all the positive comments from the clientele, each sustainable and operational initiative, and last but not least, the resulting surpluses. This success would not have been possible without the entire team’s intensive efforts and great creativity.

Thank you so much everybody!



online reputation

Of the 2,184 comments left by travellers on different online reservation platforms (OTAs)* during the year, 96 % were positive or neutral.

Saintlo Montréal worked at the top of its game all year so that every visitor received a warm welcome. Bravo to the entire team for these undeniably positive results.

*Statistics collected by ReviewPro between October 1, 2022, and September 30, 2023



saintlo ottawa jail

The doors have opened at last!

After two years of renting it out to the city of Ottawa as a social-distancing centre, the hostel team took back possession of the hostel on March 31, 2023. Saintlo Ottawa Jail is particularly proud of having contributed to helping its community through such a difficult period for so many people. We would like to underline the extraordinary work of the teams of City of Ottawa professionals for their great accomplishment offering daily support to a vulnerable clientele during the pandemic.

The hostel progressively reopened its doors to its regular tourist clientele starting May 15, 2023, barely 45 days after returning to the premises. Once the majority of the work on the washrooms was done, the hostel was officially open to full capacity on June 30, and it hasn't looked back since.

In terms of traffic, the return to operations was a little slower than expected. The 12,000 overnight stays tallied between May and September 2023 represent a drop of 35 % compared to the same period in 2019.



saintlo ottawa jail in numbers

(Statistics covering the period from May 15, 2023 to September 30, 2023)

Total overnights:



Canadian markets vs international markets 2022-2023:



(37 % in 2019)



(63 % in 2019)

origins of our markets



Canadian Markets Top 3 (% on the total of overnights)

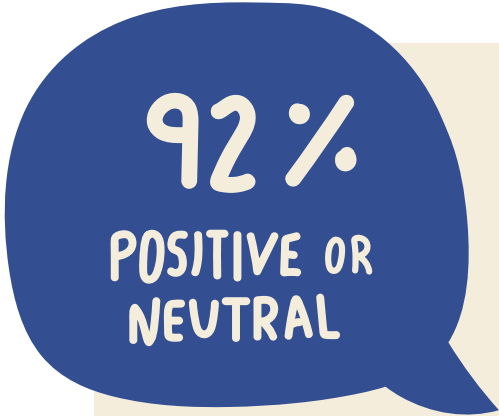
- Ontario (18 %) - (12 % in 2019)
- Québec (14 %) - (6 % in 2019)
- British Columbia (4 %) - (2 % in 2019)



International Markets Top 5 (% on the total of overnights)

- France (11 %) - (4.5 % in 2019)
- Germany (8 %) - (4.5 % in 2019)
- United Kingdom (5.5 %) - (2.5 % in 2019)
- United States (5 %) - (5.5 % in 2019)
- Australia (2.5 %) - (1 % in 2019)

With only three members returning, the hostel team had to train its new 19–person team in record time. The hostel manager and assistant manager recruited dynamic, committed employees who were not afraid to get their hands dirty to contribute to the reopening.



online reputation

Between the reopening of the hostel and the end of the fiscal year, 92 % of the 868 online comments* were positive or neutral. These figures testify to the new team’s know-how, their embodiment of Saintlo’s values and their desire to offer their clientele an exceptional stay.

*Statistics collected by ReviewPro between May 15, 2023, and September 30, 2023

Renovations and improvements

Among the significant improvements and renovations, we’d like to mention having the entire hostel painted, a gargantuan task if there ever was one. We also installed a new plumbing system. All the leaky, rusty old pipes were replaced by a new highly efficient and environmentally effective infrastructure with a functional, aesthetically pleasing design. Twelve showers and four washrooms were also redone. These renovations allowed us to replace our old shower heads and faucets with low flow taps and faucets.

As part of our commitment to improving our sustainable development practice, we also added a composting program. We now compost all our food products, and we encourage our guests to do the same. The composting and recycling bins are now collected each week, plus we reduced the size of our garbage receptacles by 50 %, moving from 8–metre to 4–metre containers. This year’s somewhat modest first steps open the way to other initiatives now that the hostel is fully operational.

Over this very short transition period, almost all of the hostel was emptied of its contents. Practically everything was replaced: box springs, mattresses, reading lamps, bedding, furniture, flooring, chairs, and sanitary and electric facilities. These gave way to new, higher–quality articles with the goal of offering a top–quality accommodation experience in a heritage setting.

In total, our association invested over \$650,000 in the property this financial year, the most significant financial investment in the 50 years since the hostel first opened its doors.





A little more history

Our daily history tours guided by the internal team were relaunched with great enthusiasm, enriched with captivating new information collected by a former employee studying the Canadian penal system. The hour-long tour is much appreciated by our clientele, of whom nearly 60 % participate during their stay. At the same time, with marketing team support, we replaced all the historic signage in the hostel to give our clientele the opportunity to explore the prison history at their own pace.



Strategic reorientation

In September 2023, we made the decision not to renew our partnership with the Haunted Walks guided tour company. Although we were pleased with our collaboration over the years, this seemed like the opportune time to take back control of the spaces we had made available for the tours. Starting January 2024, the hostel can add accommodation space that contributes to increase the financial reinvestment in the hostel. With the re-appropriation of the magnificent back courtyard, we can develop a new program of activities to offer our clientele an even more inspiring stay. We will continue to offer access and tours to the public as well as our guests, but we will do it on our own terms.

The successful reopening of the hostel in such a short period could not have happened without the collective efforts of our committed, enthusiastic team.

We wish to thank Gabriela Fagundes Bet and Yann Ocsomber, who worked long hours to prepare the hostel and train the complete reception and housekeeping teams. We also wish to highlight the efforts of Charlie Brockmann, Aidan O'Keeffe, Benjamin Ruetz, Simon Seline and Hana Woo, who joined Saintlo Ottawa Jail just before the end of the financial year.

Saintlo Ottawa Jail is delighted to welcome new travellers — which is the organization's first mission. We remain determined to offer exceptional accommodations with historic, one-of-a-kind experiences, and to create memorable moments for everybody who passes through our doors.

a half century in prison called for a party

August 2, 2023, marked the 50th anniversary of the existence of the Ottawa hostel in the old Carleton County prison. A jail from 1862 to 1972, the building was transformed into a youth hostel in 1973.

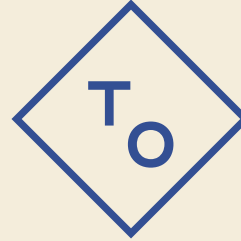
We celebrated the hostel's 50 years this past October 5. Although the following information goes a little over the period normally covered by this annual report (October 2022 to September 2023), we wish to convey just how much this beautiful moment has been engraved in our hearts.

Here's a short recap of this evening celebration:

- Nearly 130 people responded to the call, including Ottawa Tourism, the Rideau–Vanier Ward councillor, precious collaborators and former team members.
- Radio–Canada contacted us following the evening for a [radio and television interview](#).
- Le Journal de Montréal stayed at the hostel after hearing about the 50th.
- Stéphanie Plante, Councillor for Rideau–Vanier, gave a very positive speech that looked to the hostel's future and posted about the evening on Twitter and Facebook the next day.
- Mark Sutcliffe, the Mayor of Ottawa, thanked our association by email for operating the hostel and wished us plenty of success in the future.
- A [video recap is available](#) to testify to the evening's celebratory atmosphere.

Fifty years of proudly saying "Welcome to Ottawa" and offering a one-of-a-kind stay to over 1,000,000 travellers — it's well worth celebrating, and that's exactly what Saintlo did!





saintlo toronto

The temporary closing continues

In 2023, Saintlo Toronto's rental agreement with the City of Toronto entered its third year, and there are two and a half years remaining. The association has enjoyed helping support and accommodate the vulnerable clientele in this community.

During the year, the city undertook a number of renovations and additions. To be completed by the summer of 2024, this work is to more properly welcome their new clientele of refugees.

- UVI air purification units were installed in each room.
- The ground floor and basement were demolished; all the non-structural walls were removed.
- All the electric, plumbing, fire safety, heating, ventilation and air conditioning equipment was removed and the preparations for the new construction are in process.
- A new reception and a complete commercial kitchen will be installed by the city on the ground floor.

Saintlo also invested considerable sums in the building. We located some deterioration in structural beams, as well as damage due to humidity. The work was immediately set in motion to correct the situation. Quotes were also requested by Saintlo in order to repair the roofs of the 5th and 9th floors. The current structural work is essential, no matter who occupies the nine-storey building.

Keep in mind that we will take back the building in 2026, so the work currently being done will not be in vain.

Saintlo would like to thank all the members of the municipal team for the exceptional collaboration we've enjoyed since the start of the lease, as it has greatly facilitated the rental relationship that we maintain. Thanks also to Saintlo Toronto hostel manager for his proactive approach to maintaining the building and managing relations with the city.



the saintlo collective hostel members

Saintlo's mission is to create positive encounters between people from here and around the world and to promote the discovery of Quebec and Ontario. It would be difficult to carry out this mission without the support of the Saintlo collective's independent member hostels.

The Saintlo hostel collective and its independent member hostels form a strategic alliance that not only capitalizes on Saintlo's brand awareness but also shares expertise that is greater than the sum of each member's know-how.

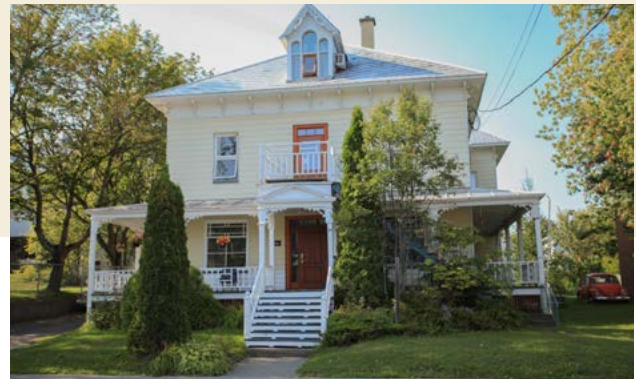
This year, Saintlo finalized the collective's commercialization and membership agreement. This was simplified so that being part of the collective requires mainly just 5 key criteria:

- Have a registration number with the Corporation de l'industrie touristique du Québec (CITQ) in the categories Établissements d'hébergement touristique jeunesse or Établissements d'hébergement touristique général
- Commit to a sustainable tourism approach and demonstrate the desire to continually improve.
- Be in operation for at least two years
- Have an evaluation of 80 % + on Google Reviews when joining the collective.
- Have the minimum equipment and services required by Saintlo, among others:
- A reception that's open 24 hrs (or an alternative solution)
- Beds in dormitories and private rooms
- Common areas and a self-service kitchen
- A transactional website

Saintlo is proud to confirm that the hostels listed here have all signed the commercialization and membership agreement. They have put their trust in Saintlo, and we thank them for this.

- Rivière-du-Loup International Hostel
- Festive Sea Shack Hostel, Sainte-Anne-Des-Monts,
- Griffon Aventure Hostel, L'Anse-au-Griffon
- La Secousse Hostel, La Malbaie

VISIT
SAINTLO.CA
→



In 2024, Saintlo will start canvassing for other hostels with the help and recommendations of the collective hostel members.

Each hostel in the collective is a catalyst in its community and plays an essential role by helping build the collective's reputation as a symbol of excellence in social entrepreneurship and tourist accommodation in Quebec and Ontario.

10th anniversary of the La Secousse hostel

The La Malbaie youth hostel celebrated its 10 years this summer, and to fully celebrate it, it treated itself to a new brand image:
La Secousse – Auberge–Resto–Pub–Plein air.

Located in the Charlevoix Biosphere Reserve, La Secousse promotes local Charlevoix and Quebec products and culture through its partnerships and events. It's also the first youth hostel in Quebec to be heated by biomass.

Saintlo congratulates La Secousse and raises a glass high to their 10 years of innovating in sustainable tourism!



saintlo and groups

Groups can count on Saintlo

When groups request quotes, the responses are now more complete, and we send them from the very first email with our reservation and cancelation policies, the total price for the stay and documentation supplying additional information.

The addition of a second employee in the groups department has helped ensure we respond to potential groups within 24 hours, a speed and proactivity that sometimes even takes them by surprise. This addition has also made collaboration between the groups department and the marketing department tighter and some groups-related communication projects more efficient.

For example, we implemented an automatic post-stay email project that includes a satisfaction survey exclusively for groups. This survey for group leaders is sent from our reservation system and helps us better understand our group clients, our successes and any challenges we can improve on.

A special offer for the low season was also sent to over 450 contacts and potential groups. This initiative will enable the groups department to keep in contact with their potential clients and propose an attractive offer for their next stay.

Improved procedure

The hostel registration procedure for groups was improved. It now includes an exhaustive list of crucial hostel information and regulations that must be signed by the group leader, who must also supply a means of contact, so that they can be reached promptly if there's a problem. All this means better management of expectations for both parties.

Saintlo Toronto

A dozen requests for reservations were received, all of which were refused because the hostel is still closed.

Saintlo Ottawa Jail

Due to the progressive reopening of the hostel, reservations for groups started only in mid-July 2023. Six groups were welcomed between July and September 2023, for a total of 457 overnight stays. The conversion rate for reservation requests from groups at Saintlo Ottawa Jail is 38 %. All the groups were from Ontario and Quebec, except one from the United States.

Saintlo Montréal

More than 5,500 overnight stays were booked for groups at Saintlo Montréal this year, which represents an increase of 30 % compared to the same period the previous year. The most significant markets for groups this year were Canada, France and the United States. With the exception of requests for reservations made during the temporary closing of the hostel, the conversion rate of group reservation requests into confirmed reservations is 48 %.



marketing and communications

saintlo, a brand is born

During the 2022–2023 year, Saintlo proudly undertook several marketing projects that paid off: creating the Saintlo brand, developing our website, promoting our member hostels, boosting our engagement on social networks, plus reopening the Saintlo Ottawa Jail hostel and running its public relations campaign.

The team demonstrated great agility managing so many major marketing projects. We'd like to thank Catherine Blais, Senior Visual and Digital Production Coordinator, who played a crucial role in the reopening's success and the change in brand for the Saintlo Ottawa Jail hostel. We also thank Eva De Narkevitch, Senior Marketing Coordinator, who gave her all on the Saintlo video production project, and Sara Hini, who applied all her creativity to develop our top-calibre social network content.



responding to youth travel trends

It's important for a young, dynamic brand like ours to keep up to date on the new aspirations of young travellers and adapt to the needs of this constantly evolving market.

Renewed interest in outdoor adventures

Youth aspiring to authentic adventures became interested again in the outdoors and cultural immersion, but what they want most of all are meaningful social interactions! With this in mind, we promoted the social aspect of the Saintlo experience and the possibility of meeting people in our hostel collective via our video productions, social networks and media coverage.

Increase in the cost of living

These travellers avid for authentic experiences also prefer off-the-beaten path activities that are affordable, which is why we produced travel articles that give low-budget original ideas for travellers visiting Quebec and Ontario.

Short videos

Of course, technology plays a major role in how youth plan and experience their trips. The young (and young at heart) use technology not only to search for information, but also to share their experiences and inspire their communities. Video, preferably in short-and-sweet formats, is by far young people's favourite communication support. This is why this summer we invested in producing videos not only for the collective but also for each member hostel.

Tiktok is (still) exploding in popularity

The most popular social networks with 18–35-year-old travellers are Tiktok (1.5 billion users, including 45 % who are not on Instagram) and Instagram. The Saintlo videos that we produced were posted on these two platforms.

Ease of reservation

Ease of payment is obviously essential, particularly in a context where OTAs (online travel agents) have increased dramatically in popularity (1.2 billion users on booking.com, including 50 % via cellphone). We thus decided to revamp the Saintlo homepage to make the search for accommodations easier, and we integrated our reservation system into the site for the Saintlo-owned hostels.

Search for meaning and social impact

Finally, the search for meaning and engagement is an important element in the life of 18-to-35-year-old travellers. Organizations that have a strong social impact are increasingly attracting the attention of youth. Starting this year, one dollar per overnight stay is donated to the Youth Tourism Foundation for each stay at the Saintlo Montréal and Saintlo Ottawa Jail hostels, and even at Saintlo Toronto, though it's temporarily closed: Saintlo extrapolates the number of nights that Toronto would be booked if it were open.

the birth of the saintlo brand

Prizes and distinctions

In terms of industry recognition, we had the honour to be:

- Finalist for the Prix Excellence Tourisme from the Alliance de l'industrie Touristique du Québec in the communications/marketing category
- Winner of the Prix Distinction 2023 from Tourisme Montréal and Prix Développement de l'offre touristique et du produit in the accommodation category
- Bronze winner in the Idéa creative communications awards
- Applied Arts Toronto winner in the design category

These are great showcases for Saintlo in both the Quebec tourism industry and the Canadian creative field.



Media coverage

In 2023, the collective continued to maintain a significant presence in local media. This media coverage not only reinforced the Saintlo brand's credibility, it also offered us greater visibility and awareness in the east of Canada, particularly in recognized newspapers.

- **Le Devoir**
[Auberge de jeunesse : le fleuve comme trait d'union](#)
- **Le Soleil**
[Montréal en auberge de jeunesse](#)
- **CIHO FM**
[Un retour aux sources pour l'auberge de jeunesse La Malbaie](#)
- **Radio-Canada**
[Émission Pénélope](#)



This coverage also played a part in encouraging local community support, especially in the case of Saintlo Ottawa Jail. The hostel enjoyed attention via nearly 20 media pieces in the major Canadian newspapers, a great success for this press relations campaign that was launched at the start of summer 2023.

- Vancouver is awesome – [Haunted Hotel you can stay at](#)
- Global News – [Canada haunted places](#)
- Narcity – [Haunted hotels in Canada where you spend the night](#)
- Journal de Montréal – [Dormir dans une ancienne prison à Ottawa](#)
- 24 heures – [Séjour dans une ancienne prison](#)
- Radio-Canada, Ottawa-Gatineau – [Reportage au journal télévisé du 26 octobre 2023](#)
- The travel.com – [Best hostels for digital nomads in Canada](#)
- Radio Canada, Ottawa-Gatineau – [Reportage du 19 octobre 2023 à la radio](#)
- City News – [Ottawa Jail Hostel celebrates 50th anniversary](#)
- CBC Radio – [Saintlo Ottawa Jail Hostel in its 50th year housing travellers](#)
- Le Droit – [Le charme improbable d'une nuit en prison](#)
- CBC news – August 2 TV report
- Ottawa Citizen – [Unique hostel experience in former jail](#)
- Radio-Canada, Ottawa-Gatineau – [Auberge Saintlo Ottawa Jail : 50 ans à dormir dans une ancienne prison](#)
- Radio-Canada – Entrevue radio – [Auberge Saintlo Ottawa Jail : 50 ans à dormir dans une ancienne prison](#)
- Narcity Ottawa – [You can spend a night in this converted jail hostel](#)
- Urbania – [La petite histoire du 75 rue Nicholas](#)



Partnerships

Our participation in international trade shows, media meetup, and connections within the tourism industry has facilitated the establishment of numerous partnerships with major organizations.

- TrailFinders UK (travel agency)
- Kilroy (travel agency)
- ISIC Korea (travel agency)
- PVTISTES.net
- Tourisme Durable Québec
- Ottawa Tourism
- ISTO (International Social Tourism Organization)
- Concordia University (groups)
- RIDM – Rencontres internationales documentaires de Montréal (groups)
- Multicolore Group (Picnik Electronik Montréal and Igloofest)
- Mutek Music Festival
- Tourisme Montréal
- Bonjour Québec (winter and summer 2023 guides)

Representation during media markets and international salons

In spring 2023, we participated in the Bonjour Québec media market (Bourses des medias), an excellent opportunity to develop our visibility and our network of contacts in the Quebec and Canadian tourism world. Numerous collaborations came about from these meetings with content creators, influencers and media.

In January and September, we also participated in the WYSE Travel and WYSTC (World Youth and Student Travel Conference) salons, where we had the pleasure of meeting nearly 60 agencies, tour operators and potential suppliers. These salons are great opportunities for international visibility for our collective, learning about the industry and business development — all key to remaining competitive and building our credibility in the youth travel industry.

website

From October 1st, 2022, to September 30, 2023, the saintlo.ca website counted 171,500 users, an increase of 144 % compared to the previous fiscal year.

In one year, our Domain Rating (DR) went from 28 to 33 (+5pts). This evaluation is an SEO concept on a scale of 100, measuring the strength of a given domain. Here the DR examines the quantity and quality of the links leading to our website.

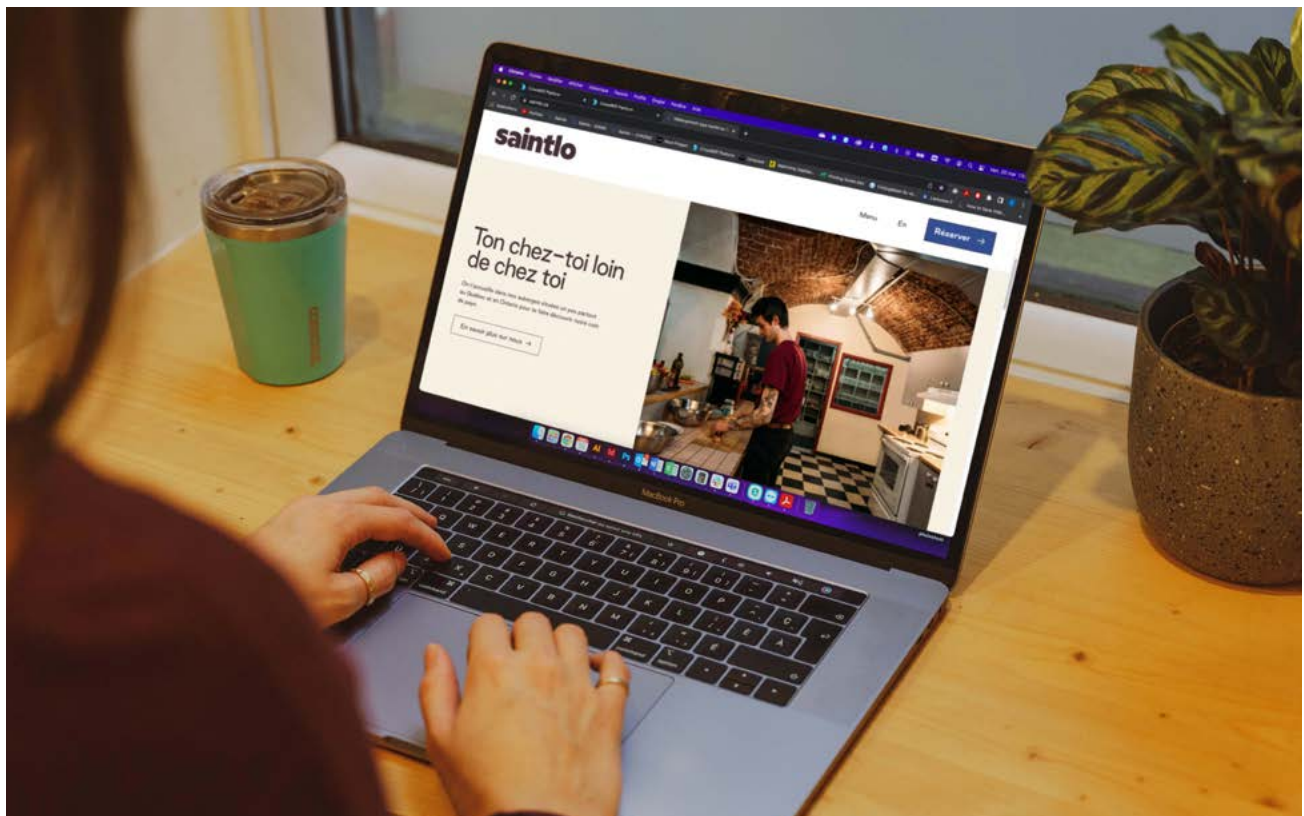
Key word strategy (SEO)

Our two first sources of traffic are direct traffic (42 %) and organic traffic (42 %). Organic traffic to our site rose dramatically by 149 % this year (2021–2022 fiscal year versus 2022–2023). In one year, Saintlo went from 800 to 9,500 organic (unpaid) key words thanks to the many published blog articles and the quality of our translations.

Paid traffic strategy, pay per click (SEM)

Some 7 % of our traffic is from paid traffic (pay per click): advertising pieces that we programmed via our Google Ad Grant account. We saw a significant increase compared to the last fiscal year, with over 12,000 users coming from our paid advertisements, versus 2021.

The groups of advertising pieces that perform the best are those from Montreal (in French), Ottawa (in English) and the Griffon Aventure Hostel (in French).



SEO strategy

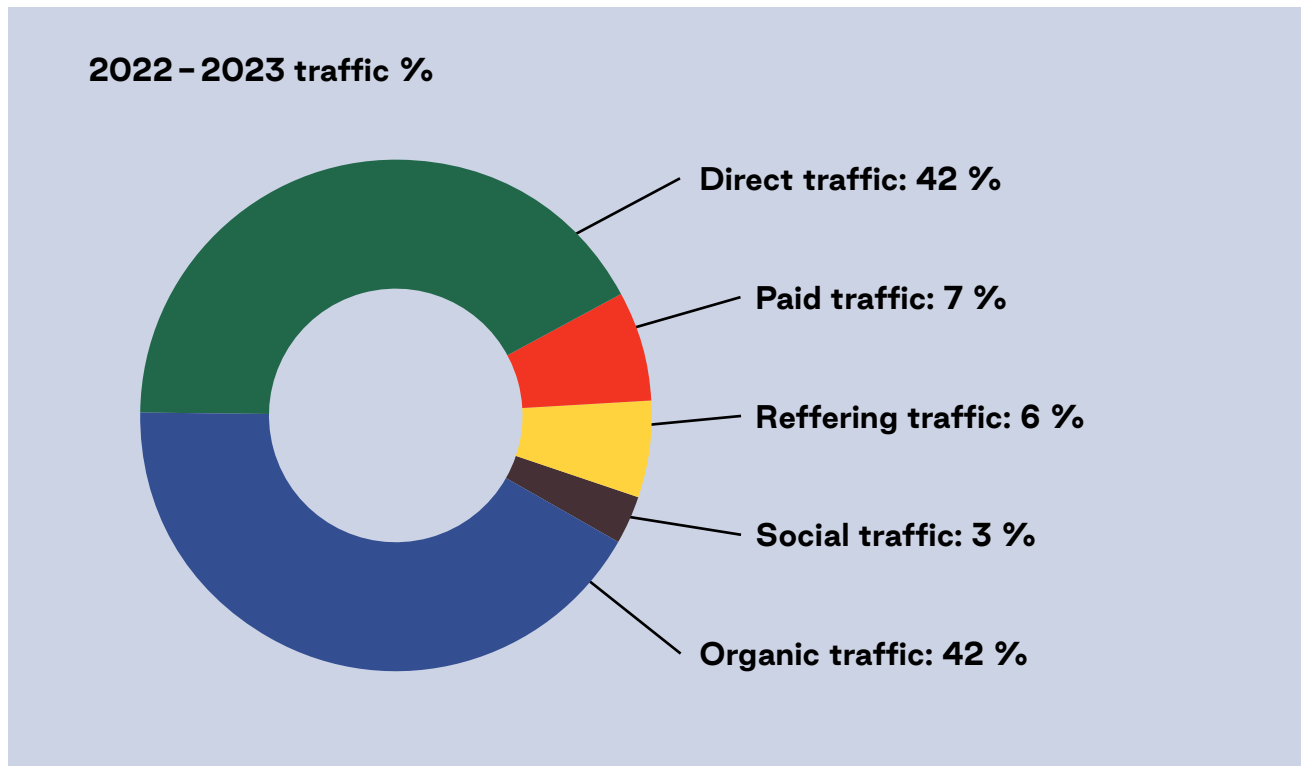
Today, we count nearly 400 referring websites that lead to our site (382) and over 1,403 backlinks. The referring websites add up to 6 % of the traffic on our site, an increase of 240 % compared to the preceding year. Our public relations efforts certainly contributed to this increase, with media coverage in dailies and trusted blogs with considerable audiences, such as:

- Narcity (5M monthly visits)
- Global News (21M monthly visits)
- Le Journal de Montréal (17M monthly visits)
- Radio-Canada (20M monthly visits)
- Ottawa Citizen (1.8M monthly visits)

Social traffic strategy

Traffic coming from social media represented 3 % of our total traffic this year, a traffic source that’s been evolving over the 12 last months and should continue to increase with the creation of the position of content creator and social media community manager in August 2023.

	fiscal year 2021 - 2022	fiscal year 2022 - 2023	% increase
Users	70 200	171 500	144 %



Saintlo blog

In 2022-2023, we published no less than 30 articles, an average of two to three articles per month. We worked with reputed travel professionals in the Canadian tourism landscape:

- Jennifer Dallas Doré – Moi et mes souliers
- Nomade Magazine
- Nomad Junkies
- Pamela MacNaughtan

The articles they wrote greatly helped our natural SEO and provided useful tips and advice to our traveller community.



Origins of our audience

- Canada 78 %
- United States 11 %
- France 5 %
- United Kingdom 1 %
- Germany 1 %
- Mexico 1 %



Newsletter

Over the past twelve months, four newsletters were sent: one for each season. Our average opening rate is 35 %.

social networks

Awareness

This year, we created a part-time position dedicated to content creation and social network community management. These publications allow Saintlo to share its story value through sincere, appealing content.

By combining several of the following strategies, we are building a greater presence on social media.

Engagement

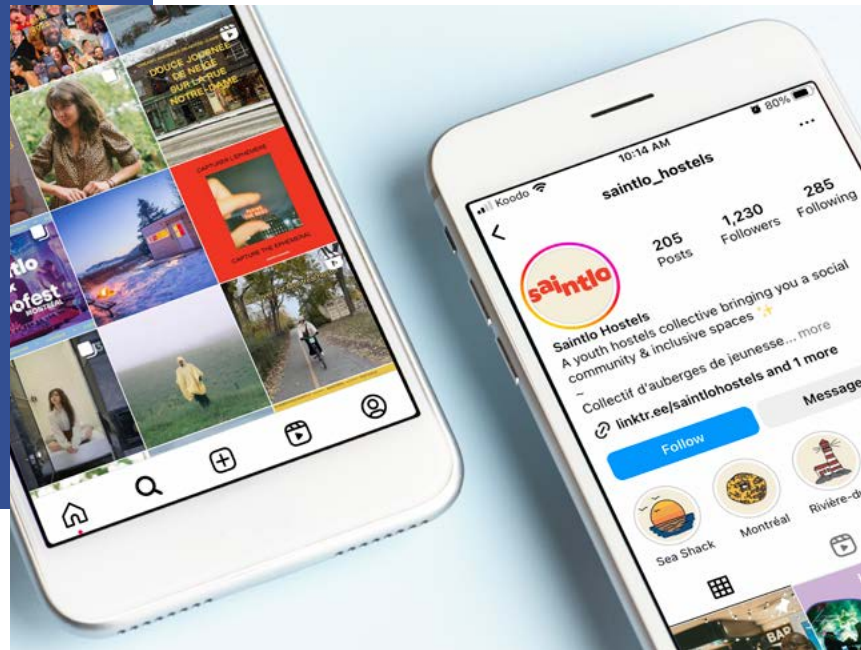
We registered a rise in our social media page reach over the past twelve months.

A 28 % increase on Facebook.

A 672 % jump on Instagram for the Saintlo account.

On Instagram, the Saintlo community rose above:

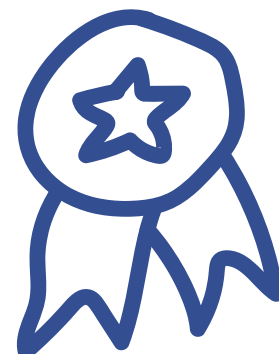
- 1,000 followers for Saintlo Hostels
- 2,000 followers for Saintlo Montréal
- 3,000 followers for Saintlo Ottawa Jail



Partnerships

Pour créer du contenu engageant, plusieurs concours ont aussi été organisés tout au long de l'année en partenariats, avec les organisations suivantes, pour en nommer quelques-unes :

- **Igloofest and VIA Rail – Saintlo Hostels**
 2,700 entered the contest
 1,445 new subscribers to the Saintlo newsletter
 500 followers or more on Instagram
 300 followers on FB
- **Ottawa Tourism – Saintlo Ottawa Jail**
 1,200 likes
 540 comments
- **Piknic Electronik – Saintlo Montréal**
 100 likes
 380 comments



Influencers and content creators

In 2023, we collaborated with several content creators who promoted the member hostels and the collective as a whole. With these collaborations, we reached new audiences and strengthened our brand's credibility.

- **Lydianne autour du monde**
Followers: 152,000 Facebook; 72,000 Instagram. Stay at the Rivière-du-Loup Hostel – Summer 2023
- **La Grande Déroute, Bianca Pomerleau, Writer for the Lonely Planet**
Followers: 3,200 Facebook; 3,000 Instagram. Stay at the Griffon Aventure Hostel – Summer 2023
- **Rando Québec**
Followers: 36,000 Facebook; 19,000 Instagram. Stay at the La Malbaie Hostel – Summer 2023
- **Filles du Nord**
Followers: 10,000 Facebook; 21,000 Instagram. Stay at the Sea Shack Hostel – Summer 2023
- **EDM**
Followers: 1 million on Instagram. Stay at the Saintlo Montréal Hostel – Summer 2023
- **Toxick Bunny**
Followers: 100,000 Instagram. Stay at the Saintlo Ottawa Jail Hostel – Fall 2023



Videos

Short videos have become extremely popular with young travellers. They are incredibly effective at capturing attention and they show what Saintlo offers with sincerity.

This year, we invested in producing short videos: a video introducing the collective and one video for each collective member hostel. Here are the results of these "reel"-type videos for the Saintlo image:

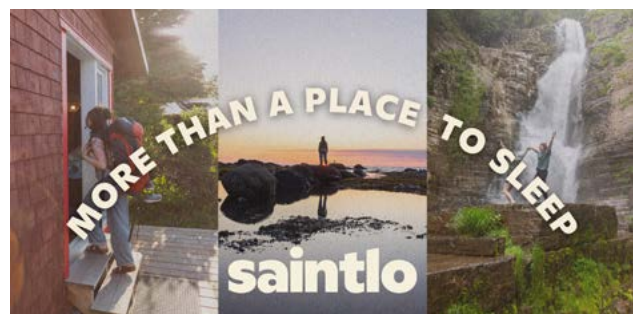
Collective video "More than a place to sleep":

- **Facebook:** nearly 9,000 views on our Facebook pages (including 8,700 on the Saintlo Hostels page)
- **Instagram:** nearly 2,000 views and 1,100 new accounts reached

Vidéos courtes par auberge (Reels):

- **Saintlo Montréal:** over 1,100 views
- **Saintlo Ottawa:** over 1,000 views
- **La Secousse:** over 800 views
- **Rivière-du-Loup International Hostel:** over 1,200 views
- **Festive Sea Shack Hostel:** over 900 views
- **Griffon Aventure Hostel:** over 500 views

In average, each "reel" counted 50 reactions or comments in shares.



Tiktok

All the videos above were also published on the Saintlo Tiktok account. As the majority of young travellers use this platform to plan their next trips, our vision is to increase our presence on this platform in the coming months.

reopening of the saintlo ottawa jail

Saintlo Ottawa Jail was reopened with impressive speed. On a very tight deadline, the marketing team revamped the hostel's signage and supported the operations team in messaging for its clientele in all the hostel spaces.

The reopening of this iconic hostel was also an opportunity to re-introduce ourself to local tourist organizations, like Ottawa Tourism, which we invited for an introductory tour, with more than 12 marketing people taking part.



towards a more sustainable organization

We continued to raise awareness among youth about ethical and responsible travel through our blog articles, which present concrete solutions to reduce their environmental footprint. Some of the things they encourage readers to discover are Eastern Canada, local products, and local communities.

Again in 2023, all Saintlo merchandise was made in Canada (t-shirts, tote bags, sweats, tuques). Throughout Saintlo's development, we have favoured local partners, with our writers, translators, design agencies and web developers all based in Quebec and Ontario.

The marketing team also helped Saintlo Montréal create its sustainable development policy and post it online.



revenue management

Saintlo Montréal

The financial year that has just ended marked the return to the first "normal" season for Saintlo Montréal since 2018–19. The more than 30 % increase in overnight stays over the past year bears witness to this. With this renewed affluence, we could adopt a more dynamic rate strategy than we had during the pandemic. The essence of this approach resides in the necessity of granting ourselves the resources necessary to maintain our facilities, continue to more fairly remunerate our staff, and deal with rising costs related due to inflation and other factors.

Here are a few new strategies put in place over the financial year:

- A 5 to 7 % increase in base rates in every type of room over the preceding year.
- Selective strategies for managing groups during the high season.
- Implementation of minimum stay restrictions on weekends during the high season and special events.
- Differentiated management of the types of rooms available on OTAs (online travel agents) in high traffic periods.

With these strategies, together with various performance practices, the hostels boosted their revenues compared to the preceding year.



saintlo.ca, online reservation agencies and revenue management

Since the reopening of Saintlo Ottawa Jail, we have observed a nice increase in the hostel's occupation rate and revenue. With 38 % of reservations made directly versus 62 % via OTAs, we still have a way to go to encourage our clientele to reserve directly for better reservation conditions and better rates. Some 6 % of the direct reservations came from groups.

With regard to Montreal, we are finishing the year with nearly 45 % in direct reservations, including 60 % attributable to the website and 19 % to groups. More than 55 % of the reservations were booked via OTAs. The trend skews more to OTAs during the high-traffic summer months, with an average of 65 % of reservations on OTAs during the months of June, July, August and September.

All this proves the importance of our *Best Price Guaranteed* policy on the saintlo.ca website. The association must continue to invest in a robust, reliable transactional website that offers a seamless, efficient reservation experience. Although OTAs help enlarge clientele and participate in a more diverse rate grid, our organization can minimize the financial impact of commissions to these third-party platforms (on average 18 % of commissions).



Saintlo Ottawa Jail

Establishing our online presence with our own website, OTA, search engines, and so on, was a priority to ensure a smooth transition to the return of reservations at Saintlo Ottawa Jail.

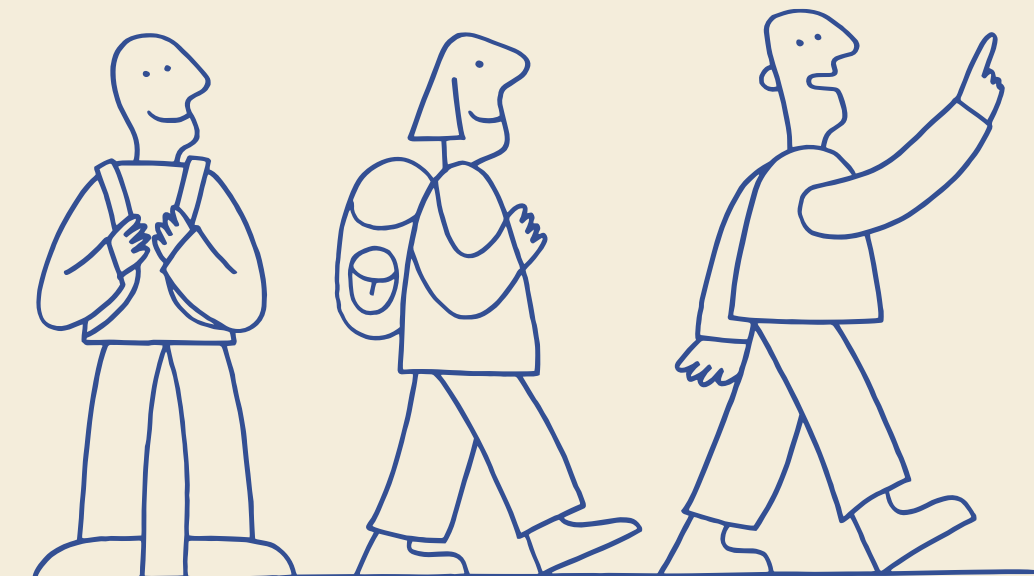
Over the first month and a half, Saintlo Ottawa Jail focused on the private accommodation option in the building's prison cells. As the façade of the building was still under renovation, the months of May and June saw a slightly skewed average daily rate (ADR) of 109 and 107 dollars respectively. These figures should stabilize in the months to come once the dormitories are open again to accommodation.

Knowing that it would take some time to re-establish our online presence, we chose not to modify the rates significantly over the summer. We continued our *Best Price Guaranteed* policy in order to promote direct reservations.

The number of accommodations reserved from one month to the next (1,168 in June to 3,263 in September) indicates that our strategy of "progressive" reopening was crowned a success for 2023.

International collaboration

This year also saw the first annual collaboration between revenue managers from Belgium, France and our association. These virtual meetings allowed us to discuss best practices in revenue management, particularly with regard to technological tools, managing distribution channels and market trends. We look forward to continuing these discussions in the future.



saintlo teams

our employee community in figures

- **60 employees** on the payroll throughout the year: ↓ 15
- **76 employees** working for Saintlo on September 30, 2023: ↑ 26
- **28 volunteers** giving their time to Saintlo Montréal: ↑ 20

seniority

The association became more youthful with the arrival of the new Ottawa team:

- Average years of service in 2023 = **3 years and 4 months**
- Average years of service in 2022 = **4 years and 6 months**
- Average years of service in 2021 = **6 years and 4 months**



number of employees per establishment

Establishment	2021	2022	2023
Saintlo Montréal	22	36	38
Saintlo Ottawa Jail	1	1	22
Saintlo Toronto	1	1	1
Regional office	10	12	15
Total	34	50	76

a new way to evaluate performance

Saintlo implemented a new way to evaluate staff performance. We replaced the traditional 1 to 5 ranking with an evaluation that leads to a genuine discussion between employee and manager. The evaluation encourages introspection on the part of the employee, guided by a questionnaire on a number of subjects, such as communication, teamwork, management priorities, as well as motivation and engagement. This leads the two parties to have a conversation that helps identify the challenges and objectives to come and of indicate the tools and the support necessary to get there. There is also a section reserved for continuous improvement where the employee can share their training needs. This questionnaire was implemented to give employees a say in their development.

recruitment

The human resources department was very active this year, focusing a part of their efforts on supporting the hostel managers and head office in their recruitment process to ensure their teams were filled out in harmony with the association's values. Saintlo recognizes the unique contribution of each individual to the entire organization.

mobility policy

Saintlo implemented a mobility policy that allows employees to enjoy work experiences in Saintlo hostels and independent member hostels. This objective of this initiative is to enrich employees' professional experience, strengthen commitment to the collective, improve operational flexibility and create a competitive recruitment advantage. This policy offers employees the option to request a transfer to one of our hostel properties for a few days or take unpaid leave without losing benefits and/or seniority to go work in one of the collective's independent member hostels.

This initiative helps fully realize our mission to *encourage people from here and elsewhere to meet*.

TRANSATLANTIC VISIT

fostering innovation via sharing ideas

In October 2022, in order to consolidate Saintlo's international ties and discuss different models of strategic and operational tourist deployment, Saintlo and its independent member hostels welcomed delegates from the Association des Auberges de La Rochelle (AJ17). The delegation visited Saintlo Montréal, the Rivière-Du-Loup International Hostel, the La Secousse hostel in La Malbaie and the Québec International Hostel.

Then, in March 2023, a delegation from Saintlo and its independent member hostels visited La Rochelle to learn from their hostel colleagues there and continue the exchange from a few months before.

Discussions around best practices focus on themes such as:

- Sustainable development and community involvement
- Human resources
- Strategies in revenue management and ethics for not-for-profit organizations



Also present in La Rochelle were a representative from ISTO-Amériques, Les Auberges de Jeunesse (LAJ) and HI France.

Saintlo would like to thank all the hostels in the collective that graciously welcomed the French delegation and took part in the inspiring exchanges. We look forward to continuing these discussions and collaboration in the coming years.

sustainable development

The Board of Directors made sustainable development the key axis of its 2022–2026 strategic plan. At the core of our commitments to operational excellence are environmental responsibility and our impact on the communities our hostels evolve with.

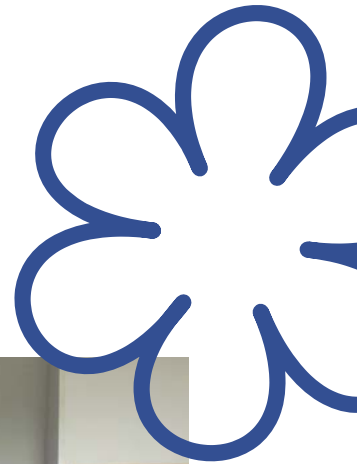
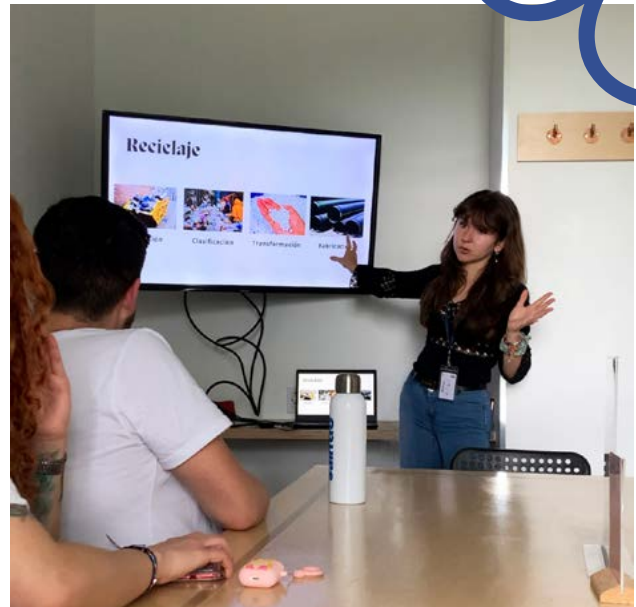
The association selected sustainable development consulting agency Ellio to accompany it in order to:

- Carry out a detailed diagnosis of every Saintlo department according to the United Nations Organization's 17 sustainable development objectives
- Identify the top-priority sustainable development challenges for our activities
- Draft a sustainable development action plan

The action plan should be ready by summer 2024. However, you'll notice on reading this annual report and preceding reports that Saintlo did not wait to launch sustainable development initiatives. Here are a few of them:

- Installation of a new plumbing system to avoid wasting water (Saintlo Ottawa)
- Composting (Saintlo Montréal and Saintlo Ottawa).
- Conservation of a heritage building (Saintlo Ottawa)
- Recruitment of a resource person dedicated to sustainable development (Saintlo Montréal)
- Purchase of local and/or bulk food (Saintlo Montréal and Saintlo Ottawa)
- Having Saintlo merchandise made in Canada
- Training staff in sustainable development (Saint Montréal)
- Creating a sustainable development webpage (Saintlo Montréal)

The realization of sustainable development actions may seem simple in theory, but making these initiatives a reality in an environment with diverse sociocultural values like youth hostels can be a significant challenge. Saintlo would like to congratulate the teams who progressively and passionately seek solutions so that in the end the planet comes out the winner.



saintlo youth tourism foundation



**saintlo
foundation**

Thanks to the human resources that Saintlo generously lent to the Saintlo Youth Tourism Foundation (Saintlo Foundation), the key steps of its restructuring moved forward.

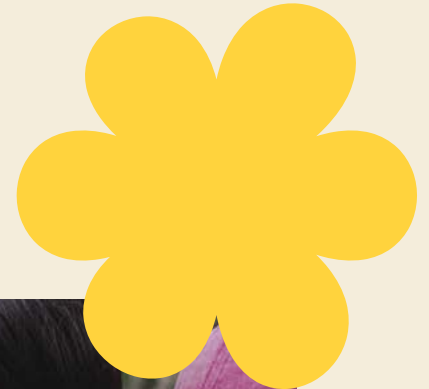
The Saintlo marketing team played a crucial role in creating the Saintlo Foundation brand image and website this year. The mandate was to transform the established strategy into an impactful visual identity with minimal reference to Saintlo hostels. The ambition of the website was to become a window on the Foundation and its mission as well as an appealing portal for potential philanthropists. At the end of spring 2023, the unveiling of the new foundation's website with the all-new visual identity on display marked the start of a series of engaging philanthropic initiatives.

The first initiative will consist of offering educational workshops in primary and secondary schools

in the greater Montreal region, followed by a number of field trips for groups from these schools. Linked to this initiative will be an impact study on the effect of the trips on youth, coordinated by researchers from the Université du Québec à Montréal.

To support the Saintlo Foundation's restructuring, a financial agreement was signed in March 2023 with Saintlo guaranteeing \$750,000 over five years to help underprivileged young blossom through opportunities to travel. This amount is equal to \$1 per overnight stay in Saintlo properties.

We wish to express our profound gratitude to the Saintlo marketing team for first of all believing in the foundation, secondly for devoting so much of their time, and finally for bringing its mission to life both visually and in words.



involvement in boards of directors, committees and roundtables

St. Lawrence Youth Hostels Inc. board members are involved as volunteers on various boards, committees and roundtables.

- **Conseil d'économie sociale de l'île de Montréal CÉSÎM:**
Nicolas Lemaire, Vice-President
- **Corporation de l'Industrie touristique du Québec (CITQ):**
Vincent Bérubé, representing youth hostels
- **Youth Tourism Foundation:**
Gabrielle Caron and Nathalie Brière, Board Members
- **Meet4Impact:**
Kathleen Murphy, Board Member
- **ISTO – International:**
Vincent Bérubé, Board Member
- **ISTO – the Americas:**
Vincent Bérubé, Treasurer

St. Lawrence Youth Hostels is also member of the following organizations:

- Alliance de l'industrie touristique du Québec
- Association Hôtellerie du Québec
- Regroupement Loisir et Sport du Québec
- Conseil québécois du loisir
- Tourisme Montréal
- Toronto Tourism
- Greater Toronto Hotel Association
- Heritage Ottawa
- Ottawa Tourism
- Tourisme Durable Québec
- International Social Tourism Organization (ISTO)
- World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation (WYSE)

