

# saintlo

St. Lawrence Youth Hostels inc.

2023 – 2024 Annual Report





# table of content

Mission	3
Board of directors & Executive director	3
President's message	4
Executive director's message	5
Saintlo hostels	7
Saintlo Collective	19
Sustainable development	21
Marketing and communications	24
Human resources	33
Saintlo Foundation	35

## mission

We are a team who are driven by our passion for tourism, dedicated to youth accommodation since 1938. As committed players in the social economy, we proudly contribute to the growth and visibility of Quebec and Ontario.

**Our mission is to create positive encounters between people from here and around the world and to promote the discovery of our territory.**

## the 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

**Julie Allard**, Board Member  
Senior Director, KPMG Private Entreprise

**Gabrielle Caron**, Board Member  
Assistant Manager, Saintlo Montréal

**Jay Cuylits**, Board Member  
Senior Director, BBA Consultants

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

**Mohamed Reda Khomsi**, Board Member  
Professor, School of Management, UQAM,  
Montreal



## executive director

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

## membership class

**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

Dear Members,

As we approach this pivotal time of the year, I would like to share some significant developments within our organization that will shape our future actions.

We are pleased to welcome Julie Allard, CPA, as a new member of our Board of Directors. Her expertise in accounting enhances our budgetary analysis and brings clarity to our financial strategies. On the other hand, Ryan Collins–Swartz has stepped down from the Board. We wish him great success in his career development. Additionally, we extend our warm congratulations to Gabrielle Caron on her new role as a mother.

In line with our commitment to continuous improvement in governance, and as announced last year, we have adopted new internal policies: Sustainable Development, Personal Information Management, Sound Financial Management, and a Code of Ethics and Conduct for Board Members. We also conducted performance evaluations for both the Board of Directors and the general management, involving board members and staff alike. These initiatives strengthen our organizational culture and ensure an ethical and inclusive working environment for everyone.

In November 2023, the general managers of our three hostels (Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto) presented their respective operational visions to the Board of Directors. It was a unique opportunity to hear directly from those working on the ground and to engage in meaningful dialogue with them.

The Board of Directors held a two–day meeting in Toronto in September 2024 to better understand current and future challenges facing the organization, particularly in the areas of the environment, human resources, marketing and technology. This gathering allowed us to collectively explore potential strategic solutions. The dedication of our Board and leadership team was remarkable, and we



left with fresh and motivating perspectives. This trip was undoubtedly a valuable experience for our organization.

In preparation for the retirement of our Executive Director in 2026, we have established a Succession Committee. This group is tasked with ensuring a smooth transition and planning for the future of our organization. The succession process for this key position is critical, as it ensures the continuity of our strategic vision and values while welcoming new perspectives and talents.

To the head office and hostel teams, thank you for your continued dedication and teamwork. It is thanks to you that we have what it takes to grow the Saintlo Collective.

Finally, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to the members of the Board of Directors. Your expertise and vision are indispensable to the success and growth of our organization.

**Nathalie Brière,**

President

## executive director's message

It's hard to capture the full scope of everything we've accomplished over the past year. Some actions, quiet yet essential, have had a far greater impact than one might imagine, while others, more visible, sometimes played a more modest role than they appeared to.

The 2023–2024 year was marked by exceptionally high satisfaction rates from young travelers staying at Saintlo hostels: a 96 % satisfaction rate for Saintlo Montréal and 90 % for Saintlo Ottawa Jail on the HostelWorld.com booking platform. This success is the result of collective effort, unwavering commitment from our teams, and the strength of both long-standing and newly established partnerships.

Another source of pride is the Saintlo Ottawa Jail. Our hostel is housed in a former prison, which was regarded as austere and inhumane throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The prison, which closed its doors in 1972, was converted into a youth hostel the following year. Since then, it has welcomed over a million guests and maintains a 90 % satisfaction rate. Now 51 years old, this hostel has truly come a long way.

In 2023–2024, Saintlo Ottawa completed its first full post-pandemic year. For the second consecutive year, we invested heavily in its upkeep and improvements. Combined with investments at Saintlo Montréal, we allocated a total of \$570,000 to these properties during the last fiscal year. This comes on top of the \$936,000 invested the previous year, bringing our two-year investment in these properties to over \$1.5 million.

Our Toronto property also required some maintenance investments, albeit more modest. Currently, the building remains leased to the city to provide housing for refugees. However, we've begun planning its reopening, scheduled for summer 2026. To this end, comprehensive assessments have been conducted by architects, engineers, electricians and



other specialists to evaluate the building's condition and determine the necessary improvements for its relaunch. Beyond this fiscal year, we remain actively focused on developing a strategic plan to ensure a successful reopening.

On the sustainability front, we've partnered with the sustainable development agency Ellio to craft a sustainability policy that aligns with Saintlo's values and mission. As of September 30, 2024, this work is nearing completion and will be finalized in the fall of 2024, during the next fiscal year.

In June, several team members traveled to Belgium to meet with three European associations managing youth hostels: Les Auberges de Jeunesse of French-speaking Belgium (LAJ), AJ 17 of Charente-Maritime, and HI France. These meetings aim to unite French-speaking hostels worldwide, providing opportunities to exchange insights on hostel management while exposing participants to the different realities faced by these associations in their respective countries.

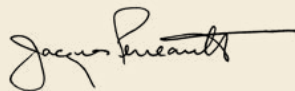
Saintlo maintained its commitment to the Saintlo Youth Tourism Foundation in 2023–2024. This commitment went beyond financial support, as we also invested time and human resources to support its various projects.

In the following pages, you will find highlights of key moments, progress made and areas where we still need to advance. Our hope is to provide you with a comprehensive, inspiring overview of Saintlo's journey.

I want to thank all 75+ team members from Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa, as well as the nine members of our Board of Directors, our partners, the hostels within our collective, bloggers, and anyone else I may unintentionally overlook here. Without these people and organizations, Saintlo wouldn't be what it is today. You all have my deepest gratitude.

Congratulations to each and every one of you for another year of outstanding work. Let's always remember that every small contribution, every effort and every idea helps build the foundation of our collective success.

Thank you, as well, to all our members for continuing to take an interest in what our organization does for youth travel.



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



# saintlo hostels

We provide social accommodations that encourage sharing, discovery and meaningful connections, while supporting the values of today's youth. Through our responsible and locally rooted approach, we contribute to the visibility and accessibility of our destinations, promoting respectful, inclusive travel where everyone feels welcome.

Only Saintlo Ottawa Jail and Saintlo Montréal were operational between October 1, 2023, and September 30, 2024, as Saintlo Toronto remained leased by the City of Toronto to temporarily house refugees. This lease is set to end in less than two years.

Here are some key statistics and highlights from the 2023 – 2024 year for our three properties and their teams.

## statistics: october 2023 – september 2024

A change in the method of counting overnight stays, due to the implementation of a new management system, has created a discontinuity in our data, making direct comparisons between 2022 – 2023 and 2023 – 2024 challenging. Unlike previous years, where we calculated overnight stays per person (e.g. a private room with two people for one night = two overnight stays), we now use a unit-based method that does not account for the number of occupants (e.g. a private room with two people for one night = one overnight stay). It's important to keep this in mind to avoid drawing inaccurate conclusions about our performance this year, as this change has resulted in a slight statistical drop in the total number of overnight stays.

Additionally, since 2023 – 2024 marks the first full year of operation for Saintlo Ottawa Jail following its post-pandemic reopening in May 2023, direct year-over-year comparisons for this property are not feasible. As a result, some statistics are compared to those from the 2018 – 2019 fiscal year.

Our hostels welcomed both local and international guests, showcasing their appeal and diversity. Whether guests were on a local getaway or an adventure across the globe, we designed spaces where they could feel comfortable and at home. Altogether, our two hostels hosted visitors from 188 different countries.



## saintlo ottawa jail in figures

### Total overnight stays:



### Top 3: Canadian markets (% of total overnight stays):

- Ontario (24%)
- Québec (15%)
- British Columbia (3%)

### Booking sources:

- Direct bookings: 41%
- Third-party online bookings (OTAs): 59%

### Canadian markets vs. International markets:



Compared to: 39% vs 61% in 2018 - 2019



### Top 5: International markets (% of total overnight stays):

- France: 10%
- Germany: 7%
- United States: 5%
- United Kingdom: 4%
- Australia: 2%

### Groups VS Individuals overnight stays:

	2018 - 2019	2023 - 2024
Groups	7%	7%
Individuals	93%	93%

The conversion rate for group bookings at Saintlo Ottawa Jail is 52%.

### Groups origins:

- Canada: 77%
- United States: 10%
- Europe: 13%

### School groups:

- 36% of groups were school groups.





## saintlo montréal in figures

### Total overnight stays in 2023 - 2024:



### Top 3: Canadian markets (% of total overnight stays):

- Ontario (10 %) - (10 % in 2022 - 2023)
- Québec (8.5 %) - (8,5 % in 2022 - 2023)
- British Columbia (4 %) - (4 % in 2022 - 2023)

### Booking sources:

- Direct bookings: 42 %
- Third-party online bookings (OTAs): 58 %

### Canadian markets vs. International markets in 2023 - 2024:



Compared to: 32 % vs 68 % in 2022 - 2023



### Top 5: International markets (% of total overnight stays):

- France: 24 % - (25 % in 2022 - 2023)
- United States: 13 % - (11% in 2022 - 2023)
- Germany: 5 % - (5 % in 2022 - 2023)
- United Kingdom: 4 % - (4 % in 2022 - 2023)
- Belgium: 2 % - (3 % in 2022 - 2023)

### Groups VS Individuals overnight stays:

	2022-2023	2023-2024
Groups	11%	13%
Individuals	89%	87%

The conversion rate for group bookings at Saintlo Montréal is 41%.

### Groups origins:

- Europe: 45%
- Canada: 41%
- United States: 13%
- Other: 1%

### School groups:

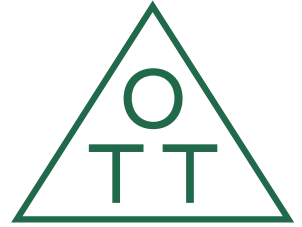
- 48 % of groups were school groups.



## saintlo ottawa jail

### Continued improvement

The 2023-2024 year marked the first full year of operations for the hostel since its post-pandemic reopening in May 2023. Over the past year, we have continued to optimize the guest experience while preserving the authenticity and charm of our historic, 162-year-old building.



Major renovations were completed in the self-catering kitchen, cafeteria, several shared rooms and the cells on the eighth floor. The kitchen and cafeteria are now more ergonomic and welcoming, and a new co-working space was added to meet the growing demand from digital nomads.

Room upgrades included adding an ensuite bathroom to Room 501 and introducing ten new capsule-style beds. These beds provide more privacy and comfort in shared rooms while maximizing available space. A ten-bed, women-only, shared room with an ensuite bathroom and shower was also created on the second floor. On the eighth floor, 17 new single cells were added, along with two new bathrooms for added comfort. These renovations were completed just in time for the summer season, contributing to increased traffic and revenue.



### International collaboration and new technologies

We engaged in discussions with our counterparts in France and Belgium regarding the best revenue management tools. Notably, one of these associations has adopted a new AI-based revenue management system, prompting Saintlo Hostels to further explore the solution best suited to our needs.

A Request for Proposal (RFP) was approved to begin the search for a new revenue management system for the organization. Following a thorough negotiation process, we selected a platform to support our sales strategies and unit management. Implementation is set to begin in the first quarter of the next fiscal year.

### Revenue management

With the additional units now available year-round and the implementation of new revenue strategies, we recorded a 21% increase in accommodation revenue compared to 2018 - 2019.

The introduction of new room types and single cells on the eighth floor increased the hostel's overall capacity by nearly 25%. These additional units were particularly beneficial during peak periods, such as weekends, from spring to fall. They also enabled us to offer a broader range of accommodations for large groups throughout the year.

### Human resources

The hostel team demonstrated exceptional collaboration, earning plenty of positive feedback from guests both online and in person. To further enhance the hostel atmosphere and enrich the guest experience, we hired a new Experience Curator. Her initiatives not only diversified the activities offered but also increased the hostel's appeal by providing unique, memorable experiences that cater to our guests' diverse expectations.



### Partnerships

We are proud to be the preferred hostel for the Fringe Festival. Guests, staff and performers from both the Fringe Festival and Undercurrents are referred to our hostel, and in return, we offer discounts on select festival-related events.

Escape Bicycles is another key partner, offering exclusive discounts through a loyalty card program. Guests presenting an "Escape Bicycles" card can enjoy benefits such as 10% off bike rentals or tours and 25% off the Ottawa Express tour every Friday.

## Programming

The historic jail tour, included with every stay, remains a cornerstone of our "jail experience." This activity continues to be the most popular on our program, with nearly 5,500 participants this year. Tours reached up to 55 participants on the busiest days, averaging 14 guests per session. In late August, a French-language tour was added to the Friday afternoon schedule, attracting 154 participants so far and proving to be a success.

Tours for the general public began later in the year, with 223 attendees participating in the new public jail tours. Offered three evenings per week, this initiative marks the first step toward sharing the hostel's and the jail's history with a broader audience.

The creation of the Experience Curator role revitalized our activity program. Over the year, we organized unique events such as a "Pruno Party," where guests learned how to make "prison wine," and a guided walk along the Rideau Canal. We also took advantage of free museum nights every Thursday and continued the classic bar crawls. On average, we offered three activities per week, with a participation rate of about 10% of occupancy—roughly 8 to 12 attendees per event.

Special programming was also introduced for major Ottawa festivals. Highlights included a Tulip Tour for the Tulip Festival, exclusive access to openings at the SAW Gallery, and a fall foliage experience at Gatineau Park.



# saintlo montréal

## Major and minor renovations

Our efforts to ensure that Saintlo Montréal remains modern and vibrant continued this year, with an investment of nearly \$300,000 during the 2023 – 2024 fiscal year. While these are substantial sums, the results speak for themselves.

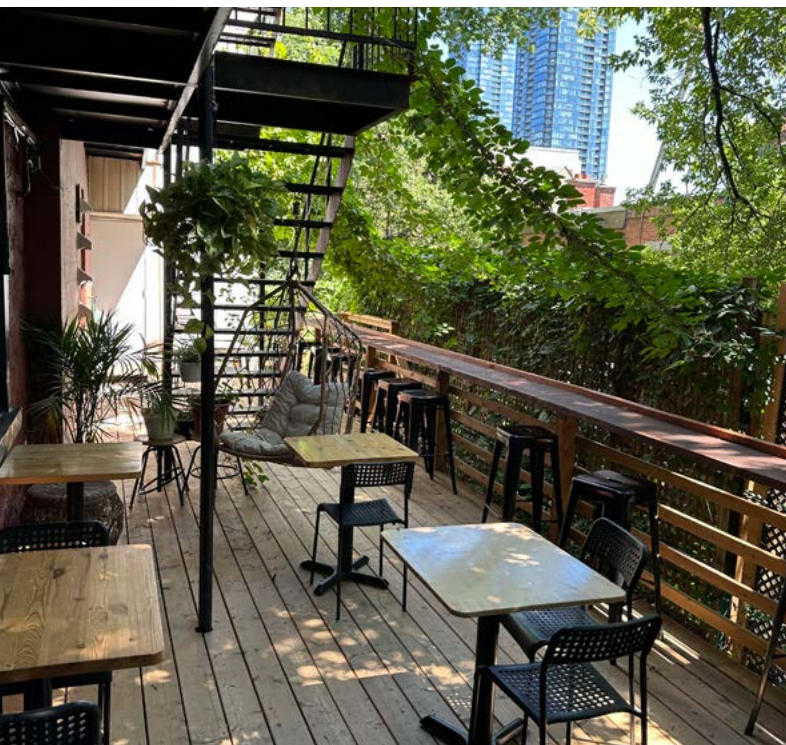
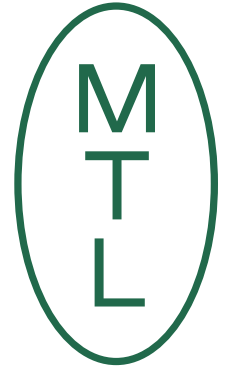
Starting in October 2023, we began renovating the back area of the hostel to build a terrace—an essential addition that had been missing from our offering. Nestled in a quiet, green setting, this new terrace is now accessible daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., providing our guests with a space to eat, work or simply relax.

During the winter months, six bathrooms were fully renovated, blending modern design with functionality. The renovations maximized space while incorporating water-efficient fixtures. Simultaneously, the adjoining rooms were refreshed, with updates to electrical outlets, lighting, heating and some flooring, significantly enhancing guest comfort.

The hostel also invested in new washers and dryers for the laundry room, marking a strategic shift after years of renting equipment. The purchase of these more efficient high-capacity machines, now maintained by a reliable partner, allows us to save both time and money.

Lastly, between November and April, we completed the replacement of the remaining 50 bunk beds, concluding a project started the previous year. This initiative, carried out in collaboration with two other social economy enterprises, has undoubtedly reinvented the bunk bed model to meet guest comfort expectations while making them easier to handle for the housekeeping teams.

We extend our gratitude to PME MTL, which renewed its support for the hostel by providing a \$30,000 grant for this project.



© CESIM – Sylviane Robini

## Revenue management

Saintlo Montréal experienced a stable year with modest growth across all revenue categories. Nightly revenue increased by over 4%, while revenue per available unit (RevPAR) and average daily rate (ADR) grew by approximately 2%. Despite these modest increases, the hostel achieved another record-breaking year in total revenue, which enabled us to offset rising costs due to inflation.

Group management strategies, such as minimum-stay requirements, alternative date recommendations for special-event bookings, and optimized room assignment to prevent underutilized room types after group departures, played a critical role during the peak group travel season.

Additionally, restrictions on online travel agency (OTA) platforms, such as limiting or closing inventory during high-demand periods, were key to our revenue strategy. These measures reduced commission costs and encouraged direct bookings through our own channels. While we successfully increased revenue during events such as the Formula 1 Grand Prix and Osheaga, Saintlo Montréal remained one of the most affordable and competitive options for travelers in the city.

## Human resources

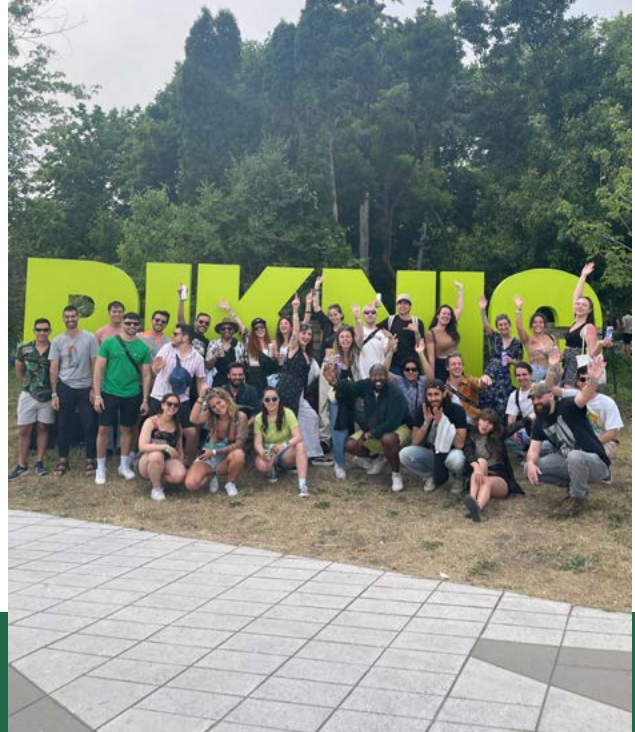
To ensure smooth operations, a large and dedicated team is essential. Our volunteer team is a unique feature of the hostel and represents a significant part of our workforce, both in terms of quantity and quality. Between October 2023 and September 2024, a total of 39 volunteers contributed to fostering a welcoming, friendly atmosphere on-site. By using the services available within the hostel, these individuals act as our eyes and ears, identifying maintenance issues or other problems that guests might hesitate to report.

Volunteer program applications are particularly popular among travelers holding work visas. By welcoming them, we often provide these individuals with their first work experience in Quebec, offering a gentle introduction to the local culture.

With the high occupancy rates the hostel has experienced since the end of the pandemic, we decided to create a new Front Desk Supervisor position. This role supports management by focusing specifically on the reception department. Responsibilities include ensuring excellent customer service, maximizing room availability, supervising guest accounts, and fostering a positive work environment for the front desk team.

The value added by this new position has already been evident, bringing enhanced efficiency and cohesion to the team.





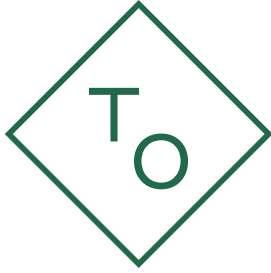
## Activity program

This year, our activity program continued to bring energy to the hostel, with one to two activities offered daily, typically one in the afternoon and another in the evening, either on-site or off-site. In 2024, we aimed to reorient our activities, grounding them more firmly in local culture and sustainable practices. A standout example is the thrift store tour, led by volunteers, which promotes responsible consumption while introducing guests to the Plateau neighbourhood.

Participation rates varied between 5% and 10% of the average occupancy rate (15 to 20 participants per activity). Seasonal and demographic factors influenced engagement: in summer, shorter stays led to guests exploring the city independently, whereas in winter, the hostel attracted more backpackers and newly immigrated individuals who were eager to join our programming and explore Montreal in good company.

The events and activities organized by the hostel contributed significantly to guest satisfaction, as reflected in numerous positive reviews on online booking platforms. They also played a key role in fostering strong connections between guests and staff, enhancing the sense of community within the hostel. This dual benefit — guest satisfaction and team fulfillment — highlights the importance of our activity program in creating a memorable, enriching experience for everyone involved.





## **saintlo toronto**

Although the operational framework of our Toronto property currently differs from that of Saintlo Montréal and Saintlo Ottawa — since the hostel remains leased to the City of Toronto — we still carried out several maintenance projects in 2023–2024. These efforts are aimed at ensuring the building’s longevity and minimizing unexpected issues ahead of the hostel’s reopening.

Among the work completed, we finalized the moisture treatment on the lower section of the south exterior wall in November 2023. Additionally, we carried out in-depth maintenance on the heating and air conditioning units (PTAC) in each room.



## **recognition**

### **Thanks to traveler reviews: Saintlo shines at the Hoscars!**

Each year, Hostelworld.com, the online booking platform specializing in hostel accommodations, presents its Hoscars Awards to the most popular and highly rated properties on its site.

### **Kudos to Saintlo Ottawa Jail!**

Following its reopening after the pandemic, Saintlo Ottawa Jail was recognized in the "New Hostel" category at the Hoscars. This year, it proudly won the award for Best New Hostel in Canada.

### **Congratulations to Saintlo Montréal!**

Our Montreal hostel earned the prestigious title of Best Large Hostel in Canada – 2024.

These awards underscore the exceptional quality of our offerings and our unwavering commitment to creating outstanding guest experiences.







## online reputation

Reviews keep coming in, compliments keep flowing

### Saintlo Ottawa Jail

Having only been open for five months during the 2022 – 2023 period, it's challenging to directly compare Saintlo Ottawa Jail's online review performance with that of the current year. However, the hostel clearly made its mark in 2023 – 2024, as reflected in the 2,300 reviews<sup>1</sup> it received across booking platforms and Google. Of these, 81% were positive and 13% neutral. As of September 30, 2024, Saintlo Ottawa Jail held an impressive overall score of 86%.<sup>2</sup>

*"One of the best free hostel breakfast. Nice facilities. Located right downtown. The entire jailhouse ascetic is certainly a unique experience. would stay again."*

Kyle – Canada, January 2024, Hostelworld

*"Awesome place to stay to enjoy Ottawa. Based in a really social area of the city and within 30 mins of all attractions, we only spent one night here but loved it so much. It made me laugh that Hostelworld asks if the place was safe... it's an old prison! The doors are made from 3 inches of steel. The staff are really friendly and one even gave us a tour of the old prison as we had to leave before the 11am tour that day. Great place! "*

Joshua – United Kingdom, October 2023, Hostelworld

<sup>1</sup> Statistics compiled by ReviewPro between October 1, 2023, and September 30, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Overall Score: A weighted average based on key variables, such as total review volume, guest satisfaction levels, and review source quality.

## Saintlo Montréal

In 2023–2024, 2,600 guests took the time to leave a review about their stay at Saintlo Montréal. Of all reviews shared on Google and third-party booking platforms<sup>3</sup>, 97% were either positive or neutral, a 1% improvement over 2022–2023. For the year as a whole, Saintlo Montréal achieved an impressive overall score of 90%.<sup>4</sup>

*"My favourite hostel I have stayed in. Never write reviews but this hostel deserves one. People were great, staff were great. It was super friendly and very sociable. Rooms were really clean and the beds were comfy. Would definitely stay again."*

Alice – United Kingdom, May 2024, Hostelworld

*"The hostel was excellent! Breakfast was simple but filling, the staff were super friendly and helpful, and the location is very convenient— it is near the airport and on a walking distance of the mount Royal and the old Montreal. The room was simple but had all the necessary amenities. 100% recommended."*

Esther – Spain, July 2024, Booking.com

For both of our hostels, customer service was a key factor in boosting overall scores. A heartfelt thank you to all our teams for their dedication and exceptional work over the past year.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics compiled by ReviewPro between October 1, 2023, and September 30, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Overall Score: A weighted average based on key variables, such as total review volume, guest satisfaction levels, and review source quality.



# the saintlo collective

It's important to highlight that hostels that join the Collective automatically become members of Saintlo and can actively participate in the association's democratic governance.

We are pleased to emphasize the importance of collaboration between Saintlo Hostels and independent member hostels within the Saintlo Collective. While we pursue a unified marketing strategy, we also respect and celebrate the unique identity of each member hostel. This partnership strengthens the Collective's position in the market and creates added value for all members.

Throughout the year, several initiatives were undertaken to enhance the visibility of the Collective's independent hostels. For instance, bloggers were invited to discover and share their experiences at Saintlo Collective hostels with their audiences, generating authentic and engaging content. Our social media platforms, enriched with stunning imagery and strategic visibility collaborations, played a vital role in amplifying these efforts. Further details about these marketing initiatives can be found in the dedicated section of this report.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the independent member hostels of the Collective. Saintlo's mission could not be fulfilled without their invaluable collaboration:

- **Auberge internationale de Rivière-du-Loup**
- **Auberge Festive Sea Shack**, Sainte-Anne-Des-Monts,
- **Auberge Griffon Aventure**, L'Anse-au-Griffon
- **Auberge La Secousse**, La Malbaie



Auberge internationale de Rivière-du-Loup



Auberge Le Secousse

## 20 years of festivities at the sea shack: a must-visit in haute-gaspésie

This year, the Auberge Festive Sea Shack celebrated two decades of success, marked by an unwavering commitment to providing a festive, creative and welcoming atmosphere. Since its inception, the hostel has continuously pushed boundaries, offering guests more than just accommodation — a true local experience and a sense of unique community.

Over the past 20 years, the Sea Shack has established itself as a leading destination in the sector, becoming a hub for thousands of travelers and locals alike, drawn by the breathtaking location, engaging activities, vibrant music scene, and the incredible people behind it all.

The dynamism and authenticity of the Sea Shack team have earned the establishment a stellar reputation, making it a shining example of destination development in the tourism industry.

Saintlo extends its warmest congratulations to the entire Sea Shack team for this remarkable achievement and wishes them many more years of success!



# sustainable development

## strategic pillar: sustainability

Sustainability is at the heart of our 2022 – 2026 strategic plan. This commitment includes defining a sustainability vision and implementing an actionable plan to reduce environmental and societal impacts, guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In fall 2024, with the expertise of Ellio Consulting, we finalized our sustainability vision and began developing a three-year action plan, which will be officially launched in the next fiscal year.

### saintlo's vision

We aspire to position Saintlo Hostels as the accommodation choice with one of the lowest environmental footprints in its region.

By staying at our hostels, guests are invited to experience a way of travel that positively influences their perspective on the world. This experience promotes a lifestyle aligned with socio-ecological transition principles, emphasizing slower living, collaboration, local engagement, responsible travel, and striving for zero waste.

To support a strong local economy, we prioritize local and collaborative sourcing while turning our hostels into hubs for fostering and supporting community and citizen-led initiatives.

Our hostels are also being adapted to address the realities of climate challenges.

Internally, our teams are empowered to contribute to social, economic and environmental commitments through participatory governance that promotes inclusivity and personal growth.

Finally, as part of the Saintlo Collective, we spotlight initiatives from all member hostels and share resources when needed. Together, we aim to elevate the profile of hostels in the tourism industry as models of responsible, solidarity-based, and equitable travel.





While we await the completion of the plan, our teams have already implemented or advanced numerous initiatives addressing environmental, social and economic sustainability. Here are some highlights:

### Saintlo Ottawa

- Improvement of signage for recycling and composting. The composting program, launched at the end of last year, is now operational. While the full results of this initiative are still being evaluated, we anticipate a significant impact on waste reduction.
- Searching for alternatives to replace the gas boiler with a system that has a lower environmental impact. The hostel has encountered some setbacks due to its electrical capacity. Discussions are ongoing.
- Prison tour. By offering a prison tour to the general public, we encourage discussion on inequality and human rights.
- Participation in Ottawa's Open House days. As a popular historic building in the region, we were pleased to participate in this local event celebrating unique architecture in the city. The hostel welcomed 1,100 visitors over the weekend. These individuals gained insight into our history, including the death row corridor and gallows.
- Free use of our parking lot. At no cost, the Fringe Fest and Capital Cinema were able to use our parking lot to host a special screening of The Rocky Horror Picture Show. This event attracted over 300 attendees, helping to increase the hostel's visibility within the local community.

### Saintlo Montréal

- Continuation of the circular economy program jointly managed by the Quebec Hotel Association and Recyc-Québec, and led by specialists. Over the months, the hostel, under the coordination of a dedicated project manager, successfully implemented several initiatives to reduce its environmental impact: acceleration of bulk purchases, donation of equipment, introduction of bottle deposit systems, team training, creation of informative videos, and replacement of all thermostats, etc. The investments made in actions related to the circular economy program were substantial. However, the hostel benefited from major support, as the program compensates up to 80% of certain incurred expenses.
- Obtaining the Green Key 4 Green Keys certification, highlighting our commitment to sustainability. This certification recognized 70% of our activities as sustainable.
- Finalists for the Tourisme Montréal Distinction Award in sustainable tourism.
- Participation in the Social Economy program, which aims to connect buyers and service providers in the social economy.
- Participation in the Québec Loisir 2024 Forum held last spring. The hostel's director participated in a panel discussing recreational tourism.

### Saintlo Toronto

- The in-depth maintenance of the heating and air conditioning units in each room has improved their energy efficiency.
- The outdoor Tiki bar equipment on the fifth floor of the hostel was demolished this summer, and the equipment was donated to Habitat for Humanity.

## Marketing

- Renewal of our merchandise offer, focusing on sustainable and local products, such as natural cotton bags, organic t-shirts, and items made in Quebec.
- Creation of friendly awareness posters located in the hostels to remind everyone that small actions make a difference.
- Integration of sustainable development messages into our social media communications.
- Creation of a video to help all visitors, regardless of their country of origin, understand our approach and waste sorting system. This content was integrated into the wifi page of the hostels, which accumulated more than 60K views this year.



## Human resources

- Inclusion of a sustainability video in our onboarding and integration process to raise awareness among our employees about these critical issues. This video was made by Angelica Azucena Espejel Garcia, a housekeeping staff member at Saintlo Montréal. An educational video on our eco-friendly practices was created to ensure our team is ready to explain and promote these initiatives to our guests.

All these initiatives demonstrate our commitment to adopting responsible and sustainable practices across all our actions, with the aim of reducing our ecological footprint while making a positive impact on the social issues that matter to us. Although the precise evaluation of the impact of these actions is difficult to quantify at this time, the mobilization and engagement of the teams were evident during their implementation.

## community engagement

Members of the Board of Directors and senior management of Auberges Saintlo are actively involved as volunteers in various boards of directors, committees and roundtables. Their involvement in these bodies reflects our commitment at Auberges Saintlo to contribute to the advancement of the sector and strengthen connections with other players in the tourism and social economy fields.

- Social Economy Council of Montreal (CÉSÎM): Nicolas Lemaire, Vice-President of the Executive Committee
- Corporation of the Tourism Industry of Quebec (CITQ): Vincent Bérubé, Youth Hostel Representative to CITQ
- Saintlo Youth Tourism Foundation: Julie Allard and Nathalie Brière, Board Members
- Meet4Impact: Kathleen Murphy, Board Member
- ISTO – International: Vincent Bérubé, Board Member
- ISTO – Americas: Vincent Bérubé, Treasurer

# marketing and communications

## a third year bearing fruit

This year, we witnessed a significant increase in traffic to our website, while our social media platforms and digital campaigns captivated a growing audience. Thanks to successful partnerships, enhanced content creation efforts, and influencer marketing, we fostered authentic connections with our community. Sustainability was at the core of our strategies, reflecting our commitment to responsible practices.

These marketing efforts enriched the customer experience, solidified our brand image, and strengthened our position within Canada's travel landscape.



## industry trends

### Authentic experiences as a key driver

The rise of digital nomadism and Generation Z presents exciting opportunities for our hostels. These young travelers increasingly seek unique, off-the-beaten-path experiences, drawn to authenticity and local discovery. The share of digital nomads has grown from 0.6% in 2017 to 1.9% in 2023.<sup>5</sup>

To capture this growing interest, we promoted hostel experiences and local activities that allowed travelers to experience destinations in a different, more immersive way.

### Social media: The new travel guides

Young travelers are turning to social media for inspiration and travel planning. Over half of Generation Z uses these platforms to organize their trips, with a particular preference for short-form videos on TikTok and Instagram. The hashtag #traveltiktok, which generated 659 million views in just one month, highlights this trend.

Strengthening our presence on these platforms is essential to connecting with this digitally savvy and influential generation.

<sup>5</sup> WYSE Travel Confederation, New Horizons 5: Solo Travellers. Presented at WYSTC.



## Sustainability beyond ecology

The 18-to-35 demographic prioritizes immersive, eco-conscious travel, embracing sustainable, slow and regenerative tourism. These travelers care deeply about the environmental and social impact of their choices. Support for sustainable travel initiatives has jumped from 15 % in 2017 to 24 % in 2023.<sup>6</sup>

Adopting sustainable practices is not only a way to meet the expectations of our engaged clientele but also a necessary step toward creating a more responsible and balanced future for the planet and future generations.

## A hyper-connected generation

According to the travel site Hopper, Generation Z spends around 40 % of their day online.<sup>7</sup> With an increased reliance on mobile devices, their travel experience hinges on easy access to information. This underscores the importance of having an intuitive, mobile-optimized website and a strong online reputation.

Over the past year, we continuously worked to refine the browsing experience to meet the expectations and needs of this connected generation.

## The rise of artificial intelligence

This report would be incomplete without mentioning the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and its significant impact on the behaviour of travelers. AI is set to transform travel planning and booking.

A survey by La Presse<sup>8</sup> (October 2024) reveals that 43 % of Quebecers are considering using AI to simplify their travel planning, with particularly strong adoption among millennials (62 %) and Generation Z (71%). AI can enhance customer service through "chatbots", a feature that Saintlo is exploring.

This rise highlights the importance of optimizing our natural search engine ranking (SEO) and online partnerships so that Saintlo is "discovered" by generative AIs.

<sup>6</sup> WYSE Travel Confederation, New Horizons 5: Solo Travellers, presented at WYSTC

<sup>7</sup> Berg, Hayley, Summer 2024 Travel Disruption Outlook, sur <https://media.hopper.com/research/summer-2024-travel-disruption-outlook>

<sup>8</sup> Cave, Christopher, L'intelligence artificielle, la nouvelle agence de voyages? (2 octobre 2023) In La Presse <https://www.lapresse.ca/affaires/2023-10-02/le-forum-des-affaires/l-intelligence-artificielle-la-nouvelle-agence-de-voyages.php>



## objectives 2023-2024

### Strengthen our presence in the industry

This year, our participation in international trade shows such as RVC (Rendez-vous Canada) and WYSTC (World Youth and Student Travel Conference), as well as the Media Marketplace (Winter and Spring), has solidified our network within the tourism industry. Through our existing relationships with influential organizations and new collaborations, we have expanded our visibility in the market and strengthened our position in the eastern part of the country.

Over 80 contacts have been made: tour operators, travel agencies, destination management organizations, as well as media outlets and content creators.



© CESIM – Sylviane Robini

## Media coverage

Media coverage is of great value to our collective, as it strengthens our credibility and the authority of our brand, both online and offline. Here are some examples of media mentions and coverage this year:

- **CityNews** – October 5, 2023  
Ottawa Jail Hostel celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- **Radio Canada Ohdio** – October 19, 2023  
Saintlo Ottawa Jail Hostel, in the heart of downtown Ottawa
- **Radio-Canada** – October 26, 2023  
Would you dare sleep in a former prison? (video report)
- **Silo 57** – October 27 and 29, 2023  
We tried it: A stay in a haunted former prison in Ottawa
- **Le Journal de Montréal** – October 27, 2023  
Sleep in a haunted former prison in Ottawa
- **Global news** – October 30, 2023  
Haunted Canada: 14 creepy places that will scare your socks off
- **24 heures** – October 29 2023  
We tried staying in a haunted former prison in Ottawa
- **La Presse** – January 16, 2024  
Youth Hostels 2.0
- **Apt613** – May 16, 2024  
Saintlo Ottawa Jail Hostel: A hostel like no other
- **La Tribune** – June 23, 2024  
Back to youth hostels
- **Rando Québec** – June 2024  
Youth hostels, not just for young people (online and print)
- **Montréal Secret** – August 12, 2024  
A beach less than an hour by bike from Saintlo Ottawa Jail Hostel
- **Toronto Star** – September 27, 2024  
Behind bars: The historic Ottawa Jail Hostel could be your next fall getaway
- **Narcity Toronto** – September 30, 2024  
You can sleep in a 150-year-old jail cell with OG iron doors at this unique Ottawa hostel





## Partnerships

We have strengthened our relationships with partners and developed new collaborations that enrich the guest experience while reinforcing our involvement in the community.

Our partnerships often rely on visibility exchanges with organizations that have engaged communities aligned with our target audience. By collaborating with these partners, we increase brand awareness and offer tangible benefits to travelers (exclusive deals, prizes, group rates).

- Bonjour Québec
- Escape Bicycle
- Gatineau Hot Air Balloon Festival
- Mutek Festival
- Groupe Multicolore (Piknic Électronik Montréal, Palomosa, and Igloofest)
- International Social Tourism Organization (ISTO)
- Kayak Sans Frontières
- Kilroy – Travel Agency
- Montréal Complètement Cirque
- NomadTALKS
- Nuits d’Afrique
- PVTISTES.net
- Rencontres Internationales du Documentaire de Montréal (RIDM)
- Tourisme Montréal
- Tourisme Ottawa
- TrailFinders UK – Travel Agency
- Concordia University





## website

Once again, we've seen a significant increase in visits to [saintlo.ca](https://saintlo.ca), with nearly a 40% rise compared to last year (237K vs. 171K). This growth includes major increases in organic traffic (+58%) and referral traffic (+267%).

The number of pages viewed per visitor also increased, from three to over four pages. Visitors primarily come from Canada (70%), the United States (11%), and France (8%).

There has also been notable growth in users from France (+134%), Mexico (+90%), United Kingdom (+80%); Germany (+41%), United States (+36%), Canada (almost+30%).

This indicates that after two years of a primarily Canada-focused visibility strategy, Saintlo is also gaining recognition internationally. The most visited pages on our website are Saintlo Ottawa Jail and Saintlo Montréal.

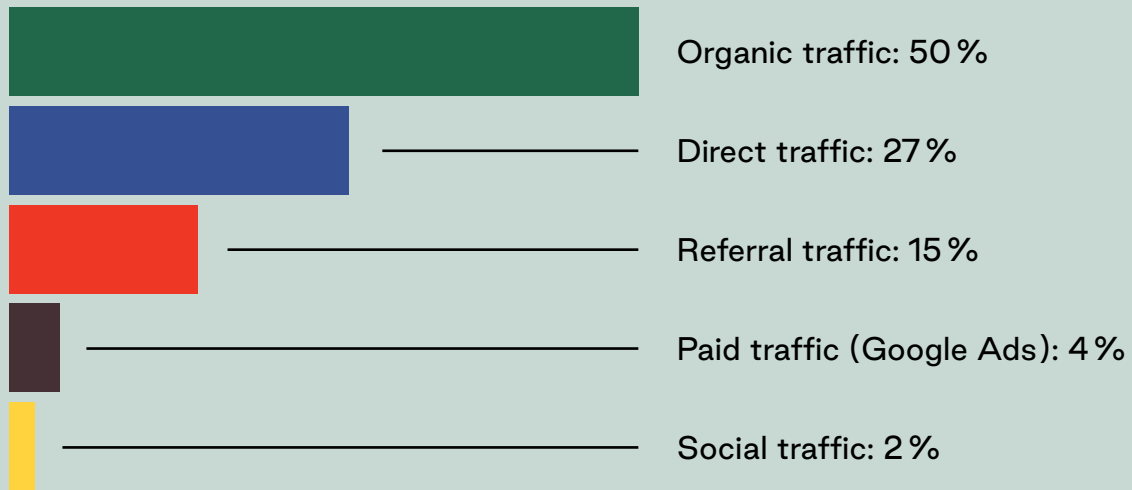
Since the launch of [saintlo.ca](https://saintlo.ca), our Domain Rating (DR) has increased from 28 to 35 (+7 points), including a 2-point rise over the past year. This score, on a scale of 100, evaluates the "strength" of a domain based on the quantity and quality of inbound links.

### Keyword strategy (SEO)

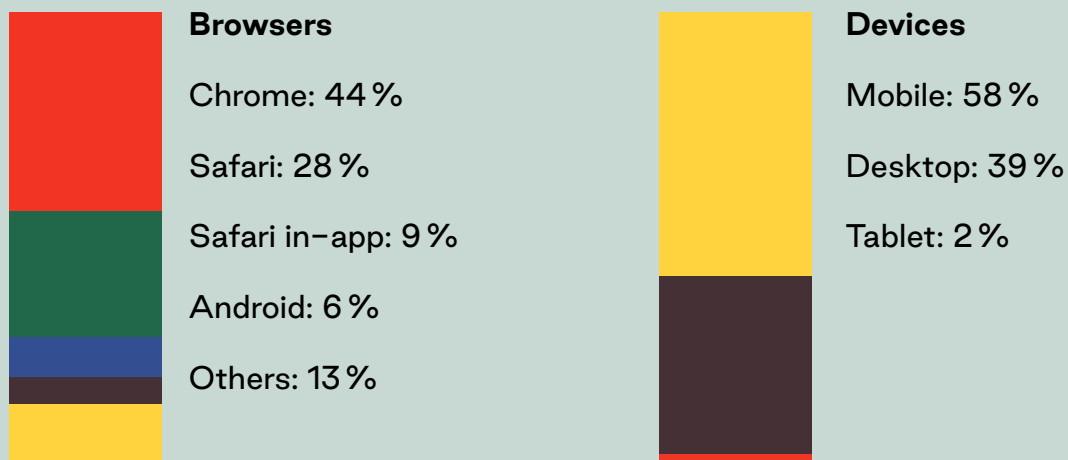
The rise in organic traffic from 101,116 sessions to 159,501 sessions is due to the quality of our site and content. SEO initiatives will remain central to our 2024 – 2025 projects to ensure steady growth in organic search engine positioning and visibility on generative AI platforms.

The number of referring domains has doubled, from 150 to over 300. This is partly due to our press relations efforts in 2023 and the development of numerous partnerships.

#### Traffic % in 2023 - 2024



#### Devices and browsers



## Saintlo blog

In 2023–2024, we published 18 blog articles. We continue to collaborate with experienced writers, often travel professionals based in Canada.

- Jennifer Dallas Doré – Moi mes souliers
- Nomad Junkies
- Pamela Mac Naughtan
- Laetitia Clouzot
- Phil Eastman
- Anne Larue

Top 5 most-viewed blog articles:

1. **How to travel with Via Rail on a budget.**  
(20 000 views, English version)
2. **How to make friends while travelling solo.**  
(nearly 9500 views, French version)
3. **A guide to buying locally made souvenirs.**  
(over 6500 views, English version)
4. **Best views in Montréal.**  
(nearly 6000 views, French version)
5. **What to do in Montréal when it's raining.**  
(nearly 5700 views, French version)

We also published articles on sustainable travel topics, such as the impact of overconsumption while traveling, using AI for more eco-friendly trips, and slow tourism. These pieces strengthen our positioning as a responsible organization.



## Newsletter

We released four newsletters last year, one per season. Faced with a slight decline in open and click rates, we adjusted our newsletter strategies throughout the year. We redesigned it to be more dynamic and diverse, incorporating a variety of content to better capture readers' interest.

Additionally, we launched promotional initiatives on our website to grow our database and reach a larger audience of travelers.

## social media

### Followers and reach

The year 2024 saw significant growth across our social media platforms, highlighting the effectiveness of our content strategy.



#### Instagram

On Instagram, our follower count more than quadrupled, growing from 1,004 followers in September 2023 to 4,483 in September 2024, with a reach of 156,000 people (+655% compared to last year).



#### Facebook

Our Facebook account grew from 314 to 521 followers, with 1,637 engagements and an overall reach\* of 121,000 people, an increase of 82%.



#### TikTok, a new wave of visibility

Launched on September 28, 2023, our TikTok account represents a strategic step in attracting young travelers seeking inspiration.

With 48,000 views since its launch — including 10,000 views for a winter-themed video about Quebec — TikTok has become a key tool for expanding our influence. We also recorded 1,974 interactions and 61 followers in just a few months.

### Advertising and conversion

Our efforts on Instagram generated 5.5K clicks, with 5,253 coming from advertisements — a 10,400% increase. Meta campaigns have proven particularly effective in reaching new audiences and enhancing our visibility.

\*Total number of people who have seen our posts at least once, representing our potential audience.



## Digital collaborations making a difference for the Saintlo Collective

Our collaborations with content creators have significantly boosted our visibility and strengthened audience engagement, including:



**Whatsupclaire:** Highlighted the Saintlo Ottawa Jail Hostel, generating 699,000 views and 11,700 reactions.



**IndianScribbles:** A partnership with this Toronto-based content creator, popular among the Indian community, resulted in a +14,000 % increase in visits from India and boosted reservations for the Ottawa Jail Tour. This collaboration highlights the potential of targeting India, an emerging market that now ranks among the leaders in global tourism.<sup>9</sup>



**Nomad Junkies:** Hosted a contest to win nights at the Sea Shack Hostel, reaching 171,000 views and 13,700 reactions, increasing awareness of our offerings.

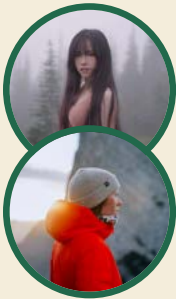


Photo collaborations:  
 – **Toxickbunny** (1,100 reactions)  
 – **Clouzote** reached 900 accounts

Both showcased the unique experience of the Saintlo Ottawa Jail and the "dog-friendly" appeal of La Secousse.



**Piknic Électronique partnership:** a collaborative video generated 42,000 views on Instagram, strengthening our local presence.

## Instagram VS Facebook

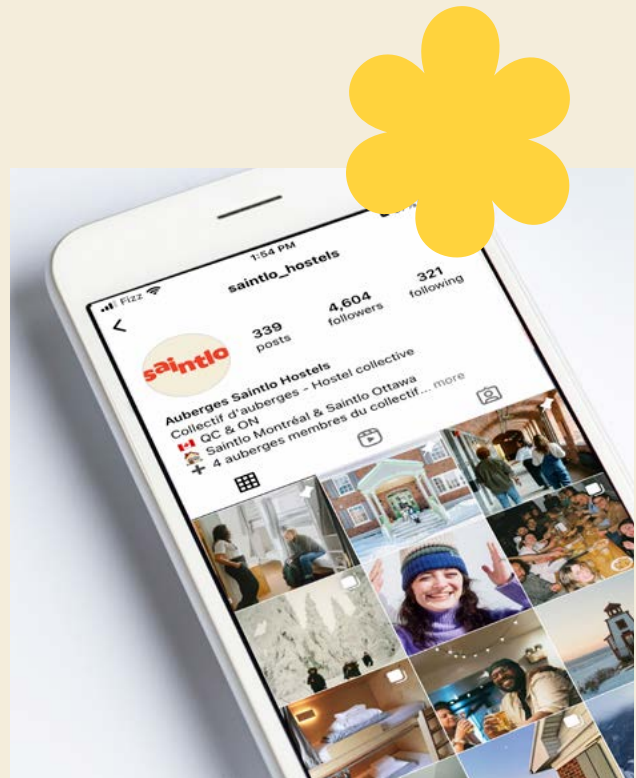
We merged our Instagram and Facebook accounts under standardized names:

Instagram : Saintlo\_hostels

Facebook :

- Collectif d’auberges – Saintlo – Hostel Collective
- Saintlo Ottawa Jail (This page will be renamed as more Ontario hostels join the network.)

This standardization allows us to adopt a unified voice optimized for the Saintlo Collective, focusing our efforts on platforms where our audience is most engaged. By centralizing our advertising budget on Meta, we’ve also maximized our return on investment, enabling the algorithm to better target future campaigns.



<sup>9</sup> China recovers its position as top spender in 2023 as Asia and the Pacific reopens to tourism. (June 5, 2024) on UN Tourism, [www.unwto.org](http://www.unwto.org)



# human resources

## our employee community in numbers

- **46 new hires** during the year: ↓ 14
- **75 employees** worked for Saintlo as of September 30: ↓ 1
- **39 volunteers** at Saintlo Montréal this year: ↑ 11

## seniority

- Average seniority in 2024 = **4 years and 1 month**
- Average seniority in 2024 = **3 years and 4 months**
- Average seniority in 2024 = **4 years and 6 months**



## number of employees by location

Site	2022	2023	2024
Saintlo Montréal	36	38	37
Saintlo Ottawa Jail	1	22	22
Saintlo Toronto	1	1	1
Regional Office	12	15	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>75</b>

## contributions to the hostelling movement

We’d like to highlight the long–running contributions of members who have contributed to our mission in 2023–2024:

- **Daniel Ménard**  
Chief Accountant, Regional Office **25 years**
- **Paola Viera**  
Maintenance Manager, Saintlo Montreal **25 years**
- **Flor Belinda Romero de Centeneo**  
Housekeeping Attendant and Assistant Supervisor, Saintlo Montreal **15 years**
- **Iris Vasquez Suarez**  
Housekeeping Attendant, Saintlo Montreal **10 years**
- **Julianne Brunet**  
Group Service Agent, Regional Office **5 years**

## human resources enter the modern era

To optimize the management of its human resources, Saintlo implemented several modernization initiatives during the past fiscal year. These projects aim to improve efficiency, agility and the employee experience, while supporting the long-term strategic development of the organization.

In December, the organization rolled out the TEAMS platform to its frontline employees after its successful adoption by the leadership teams. This extension aims to foster collaboration between different teams and improve overall organizational efficiency. Employees can now use TEAMS not only to communicate with each other but also to submit leave requests, check their work schedules, make maintenance requests, and access various internal policies, guidelines and procedures. This initiative is part of our effort to simplify administrative processes and promote seamless, centralized communication within the organization.

In September, Saintlo also implemented a Human Resources Information System (HRIS), a key step in modernizing its HR processes. The decision to acquire an HRIS was driven by the need to better manage employee data and make informed decisions based on accurate, up-to-date information.

The platform enables, among other things, the extraction of data on HR trends (such as turnover and absenteeism rates), as well as the management of our recruitment process, onboarding and training programs.

## a new training program

Given the linguistic diversity of our employees and clientele, Saintlo has implemented a language training program. Employees wishing to take French courses or any other language courses useful for their work can request them through the Human Resources department.

To promote professional development, Saintlo reimburses training expenses that have been pre-approved, upon presentation of a certificate of completion for the program.

This initiative—especially with regard to French courses—is part of a broader set of actions aimed at obtaining the Francisation Certificate from the Office québécois de la langue française and reinforcing the organization's commitment to the development of its teams' skills.



## exchanges with peers and colleagues internationally

Last June, several members of our teams traveled to Belgium to meet with three European youth hostel associations: the French-speaking Youth Hostels of Belgium, AJ 17 of Charente-Maritime, and HI France. These meetings aimed to bring together French-speaking hostel managers to share experiences and best practices in youth hostel management from various perspectives, such as pricing ethics, human resources, marketing and day-to-day operations. These types of meetings provide participants with an opportunity for professional development by learning about practices from other youth tourism environments.

Such gatherings also serve as a form of continuing education, allowing participants to enhance their skills by discovering innovative approaches and best practices implemented in different contexts, while also having the chance to share their own expertise and solutions tailored to the youth tourism sector.

# saintlo foundation

## Continuing our commitment to the Saintlo Foundation

As part of our five-year contribution agreement, we renewed our financial commitment to the Saintlo Youth Tourism Foundation for the second consecutive year. In April 2024, Saintlo Hostels donated \$150,000 to the Foundation. This financial support is crucial for enabling the Foundation to continue its restructuring and mission, making a real difference in the lives of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Like the Foundation, we believe that even a short trip can transform a life. It acts as a catalyst for young people’s development, allowing them to broaden their horizons and unlock their full potential.

In addition to this financial commitment, Saintlo has continued to offer the Foundation its expertise by mobilizing its staff to assist with tasks such as marketing. Specifically, six staff members from the headquarters have contributed around ten hours per month each, working on the website, accounting, general coordination, and philanthropic activities of the Foundation.

This year, we worked to refine the positioning and mission of the Foundation. We re-focused its messaging by emphasizing the positive impact on young people, as well as the values of discovery, inclusion and personal development. Among the major projects, the restructuring of the website was a key focus. We revisited its content and structure to make it more intuitive, inspiring and aligned with the strategic direction of the Foundation, while also enhancing its ability to mobilize support.

The Foundation plans to hire a permanent employee starting in October 2024 to strengthen its operational capacity and reduce the workload on Saintlo teams, who have provided valuable support up to now.

## mission of the saintlo foundation:

Helping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds thrive through the benefits of youth travel.



In conclusion to this annual report, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to an exceptional year, marked by numerous achievements.

Every member of our teams—from front desk staff to management—our volunteers, and our partners have played a vital role in creating unforgettable experiences for our guests. Together, we have not only upheld the quality of our services but also launched new initiatives that have strengthened our position in the market.

We eagerly look forward to building on this momentum and tackling the new challenges that lie ahead. Thank you all for your dedication and contribution to our shared success.



**saintlo**  
HOSTELS

220–5450 Chemin de la Côte-Des-Neiges  
Montreal (QC) H3T 1Y6

514.731.1015

[saintlo.ca](http://saintlo.ca)

