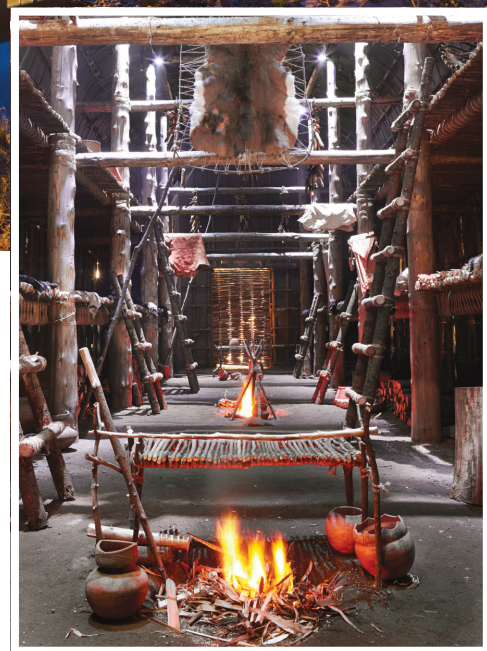




(Photos clockwise from top left) On frozen pond at Spa Eastman (tranquility room inset); Wendake's Hôtel Musée Premières Nations exterior; inside the longhouse; roasting bannock; Spa Eastman hot pool with mountain view.



Discovering the new

By Jane Muller

periences that just named a few. I offer here some highlights of the “new”.

Spa Eastman

Promoted as one of the best spas in the world, Spa Eastman stretches out over a 326-acre estate in the heart of the Eastern Townships. For more than 40 years it has provided a picturesque escape with an amazing view of Mount Orford and 15 km of wooded walking trails. The vacation spa's thermotherapy installation features two outdoor hot pools and in the winter the pond ice is kept open at the dock to accommodate a revitalizing cold dip. The cool pool inside the spa is always at a refreshing 11 degrees C and is right next to the toasty steam room (hammam). There are also several sultry saunas and an indoor pool.

Spa Eastman provides a health retreat with a selection of exercise, relaxation, spa treatments, massages and learning options. The all-inclusive stays allow time to unwind in a comfortable room and the chance to explore the surprising flavours of the spa's trademarked Tonique Cuisine. The ingredients for the healthy gourmet menu are gluten-free, dairy-free, non-GMO, local and seasonal. We all agreed that the exceptionally good bread

did not suffer from its lack of gluten.

It would be so simple to switch to a dairy- and gluten-free diet if all of the food tasted this good. While enjoying this feel-good retreat, guests can also treat their bodies to yoga, Pilates or qigong (pronounced chee gung), an ancient Chinese mind-body practice with movements similar to Tai Chi but fewer and simpler. The challenge is to slow down and that is also ultimately the benefit. A therapeutic massage followed by a tranquility walk along the snowy trails continued the calm.

It was suggested that guests stay at least two nights to reap the spa's benefits. For an even more impactful outcome, stay for a week and also sign up for follow-up support when back at home to keep on the path to better health. After a full day and two nights, the positive effects of a spa retreat in this tranquil setting could be felt.

Wendake

It is possible to sleep in an authentic longhouse and toast bannock over an open fire just 15 minutes from downtown Quebec City. Situated within the traditional territory of the Wendat people, the four-star First Nations Hotel and Museum bring the culture of the first nations together with a modern boutique hotel, impactful exhibits and restaurants featuring a taste of Huron-Wendat dishes prepared with wild game meats, wild berry sauces and forest herbs. All of the rooms face the Akiawenrahk (Saint Charles) River and forest landscape that we explored during a snowshoe hike led by our guide Andawa Laveau. The 19-year-old's name means “river” in the Wendat language. A proud member of the bear clan who bears a beautiful tattoo on his forearm as a tribute to his heritage, Laveau had us settle into the longhouse



around one of the natural gas fuelled fire pits to hear about his nation. Listening to myths and legends is part of the visitor experience that can also extend to spending the night in the longhouse where beds are platforms created from pine logs and covered in mats and furs. Guests also have a room in the hotel and are provided with sleeping bags for their campout.

Our immersive cultural experience was similar to the 90-minute Myths and Legends program that requires a reservation. We warmed up with a round of herbal Labrador Tea served in clay cups after toasting bannock on a stick over the coals of the outdoor wood fire. Dipped in blueberry jam, the bannock prepared by our guide made for a unique dessert, and yet another addition to the “new” list.



Auberge Saint Antoine room with terrace

Auberge Saint Antoine

Old Quebec is on UNISCO’s prestigious list of world heritage cities and the only city-citadel in North America to have preserved its fortifications intact. Topped with a row of cannons, the historic wall was the horizon of the view from the arched terrace doors of my sixth-floor room at Auberge Saint Antoine. The heritage of the area is apparent throughout this unique museum hotel with artifacts unearthed during an expansion project displayed in niches. Shards of china and decorative oil lamps, tobacco pipes, other personal and household items date back to the 1600s.

Beckoning guests from its location below the hotel lobby, the sleek modern vibe of Bar Artefact contrasts with remnants of the past that include a cannon. Owned by the Price family, also with a



Artifact display at Auberge Saint Antoine

deep history in Quebec, this boutique hotel offers a mix of accommodations from loft-style character-filled rooms with exposed rafters to modern spaces, all with luxurious amenities. There’s a spa offering a range of treatments, a nicely appointed gym and a yoga room that features classes on weekends. The restaurant, Chez Muffy, occupies a 19th century dockside warehouse and boasts rough-hewn beams, exposed stone walls, towering ceiling and a round fireplace as a centrepiece. What was new about the hotel was really what was old and the marriage between the two.

With Old Quebec on our doorstep, Jocelyne Belleau of HQ Tourism Services guided us from the hotel to the most famous street, Petit-Champlain, Place Royale town square, up the funicular (hillside elevator with a view) and to Dufferin



Auberge Saint Antoine’s Bar Artefact

Terrace’s Toboggan Slide Au 1884. Quebec’s tour guides share their passion and knowledge and tips like where to find the best coffee. It’s at Café La Maison Smith by the way.

Le Monastère des Augustines

Our guide delivered us to Le Monastère des Augustines, a haven of heritage, culture and wellness. It is located in the historic wings of the Hôtel Dieu de Québec monastery, from which emerged the first hospital on the continent north of Mexico. Building from the historic monastery and incorporating modern elements, it is an incredible legacy to the nuns who came from France and established the monastery in the 1600s. Le Monastère encompasses a spa, museum, restaurant and hotel accommodations, operating as a non-profit organization with charitable status. In



Medical supplies at Le Monastère des Augustines

the spirit of its founders, some retreats include a silent breakfast while programming focuses on mind and body. We were introduced to a form of meditation that begins with shaking out tension, both physical and mental. The 25 minutes of activity was followed by 15 minutes of total relaxation. Activities like this take place beneath the monastery where the stone walls, ceiling and arches have been whitewashed to create a pristine yet rustic space.

A large glass case nearby holds a display of sacred objects, just a few from the vast collection seen throughout the monastery. One striking display in the museum shows the multiple layers of clothing worn by a nun, each hung in succession. The museum honours their dedication to caring for the sick and injured and features medical

equipment as well as the tools used by the nuns to create stunningly intricate paper flowers. There are still eight nuns living in the monastery, the older of whom would recall when the rules that kept them cloistered within the monastery were changed in the early 1960s.

Their simple way of life is seen in the 33 guest rooms that reflect the monastic spirit. Also housed in the restored cloister are 32 contemporary rooms that have been renovated to include ensembles and modern finishes. Rooms are offered at a deep discount to those accompanying cancer patients being treated at the adjacent hospital. Emotional support is also available to patients and their caregivers. Eating well is another part of the experience. The dining room Steeped in the history of the Monastery and its founders, Le Res-

taurant offers healthy Nordic-inspired cuisine by promoting local and organic foods and combining their recognized virtues.

Fairmont Chateau Frontenac

It's fitting that there's a majestic castle within the walls Old Quebec. Since 1893, Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac has reigned over the view of the historic district. A recent multi-million dollar restoration has achieved a blend of the 610-room hotel's original allure with modern amenities. The epitome of posh, Fairmont Gold accommodations reside on the top floors of the hotel and offer guests exclusive access to a private lounge where afternoon canapés are served. There is a suite dedicated to the memory of Princess Grace of Monaco (American film actor Grace Kelly) that

features photos and memorabilia. She is one of a long line of notable guests, evidenced by photos displayed in hallways. We dined like celebrities at Le Sam Bistro with an impressive view of the St. Lawrence River. Enjoying a meal at this iconic hotel provides a taste of all it has to offer.

Le Don

A relatively new restaurant to Old Quebec, Le Don serves 100 per cent vegan and vegetarian dishes. Our group of mostly meat eaters was introduced to the meatless fare with a selection of dishes served family style. From the Caesar salad and DONplings to the mushroom fettuccini and ravioli, all were fully enjoyed. The traditional poor man's pudding (white cake with maple syrup sauce) provided an outstanding finish.



Calming space beneath the monastery



Le Monastère des Augustines basic guest room



Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac aka the castle



Le Sam Bistro at Le Chateau Frontenac