

# Ste. Agathe's Hotel Spa Watel gets an extra star

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE DECEMBER 9, 2011



Hotel Spa Watel, at the heart of sports country in Ste. Agathe des Monts, recently was awarded four stars by Quebec Tourism. Owner Claude Fleurent says newly refurbished rooms are partly the reason.

**Photograph by:** Hotel Spa Watel, Hotel Spa Watel

Claude Fleurent, a man of many careers, now is a very happy hotelier. Last month, his inn was upgraded with one more star from Quebec Tourism, and now is a four-star establishment.

Hôtel Spa Watel already had been recognized as the top inn in the Laurentians in its category of one-to-three-stars, probably thanks to its terrific location overlooking Lac des Sables in Ste. Agathe and its formula of offering the good life at moderate prices.

This is the philosophy of Fleurent, a former Montreal police detective who decided to pursue his subsequent careers in the Laurentians. He became a ski instructor at Mont Blanc in St. Faustin as well as smaller stations around Ste. Agathe, and then he discovered the hotel business. Fleurent describes himself as a "bon vivant" because he loves to entertain, and he enjoys his surroundings as much as his guests do.

"I live in a paradise," Fleurent says. "I live where people pay money to vacation. Here there is no rushing, no traffic. I am looking at the lake and mountains, what could be more beautiful?"

True enough. After frost chills the night air, the snow-tipped landscape sparkles with icy crystals in the morning sunlight. This is the view from almost every vantage point at Watel.

About 20 years ago, Fleurent spotted a private house for sale with a wonderful lakefront location. He built on top and around the sides, and Hôtel Spa Watel gradually developed with various wings and styles. He recently invested heavily, gaining eco-points for recycling systems, new lighting and the use of natural gas. He also renovated, adding flat-screen TVs in all 31 rooms and suites, and fireplaces, mini-bars and whirlpool tubs in some.

Spa life is popular at Watel, even though the facilities are modest. The sauna and the three hot tubs are billed as being big enough for six people, but they would have to be six awfully close friends. And the steam room is more of a steam shower. Still, the outdoor hot tub is fun, especially in the evening, the indoor pool is a balmy 30 C and the spa offers treatments at good prices.

"We invested around \$750,000 over the past two years," said Fleurent, "and for a small hotel, we have a lot of services and newly refurbished rooms. That's why we were boosted to four stars."

Watel is hard to pin down. It has many hotel-style features, such as elevators serving its three floors and a new indoor swimming pool. Yet, its dining room has a vintage look, like that of a Laurentian ski lodge.

That's fitting because the cross-country ski trails are almost right outside the door. Snow conditions permitting, it is a short ski to Camping Sainte Agathe, a Nordic centre with 47 kilometres of groomed trails, including one gentle loop in the woods.

When the season takes off, Watel's snowmobiling guests also will have handy access to Trail 43, which connects with a larger network to popular points throughout Quebec, like Mont Laurier, Outaouais and Lanaudière. For short-haul excursions, snowmobilers can zoom over to the Linear Park of the P'tit Train du Nord which runs through Ste. Agathe, and head north to Mont Tremblant. The path is reserved for cross-country skiers at points south, from Val David to St. Jérôme.

Ste. Agathe has been at the heart of wholesome outdoor pastimes for more than a century. The town's annual Festi-Neige starts this weekend and runs until March 10 at Place Lagny, the downtown park on the lakeshore. The schedule changes constantly, with different family-fun events on different dates throughout the season. Skating on the lake is weather-dependant, but "carpet" sliding, kite-flying, kite-skiing and even a mini-downhill mountain are expected to take place with artificial snow. The site will buzz until 4:30 p.m. on weekdays and until 9 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights.

In summer, Watel has lounge chairs and sun-brellas on its porches and patios overlooking Lac des Sables. Major Beach, Ste. Agathe's largest of three, is across the street, and is hopping with California-style action at five beach volleyball courts and kiosks for sailboats, canoes, kayaks and bicycles.

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#### **IF YOU GO**

Ste. Agathe is a one-hour, 10-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 15 north to Exit 83.

Hôtel Spa Watel: 800-363-6478; [hotelspawatel.com](http://hotelspawatel.com); 250 rue Saint Venant, Ste. Agathe des Monts. Dining room is open Saturday nights until Dec. 21, and nightly Dec. 22-March 15.

Price: Rates include wireless Internet, use of indoor swimming pool, hot tubs and small saunas and steam room; in summer, an outdoor pool and beach passes (value of \$6 for adults, or \$4 for ages 6-17). Without meals, three levels of room \$47-\$57-\$67 p.p., double occ., on Sun.-Fri.; it is \$62-\$72-\$82 p.p., on Sat. Rates are higher Dec. 21-31 and Jan. 22-March 15. Add \$10 p.p. for breakfast, \$25 p.p. for dinner for inn guests, or \$28 p.p. for non-guests. Massages and spa treatments are extra.

Packages are available with spa services or snowmobiling, including all equipment. The Girls' Night Out combines massages, facials and wine. The Valentine's Package, offered in a suite with flowers and bubbly, is available year-round. The New Year's Eve Package will include a seven-course dinner and dancing to a live band.

Tourism info, Ste. Agathe des Monts: 888-326-0457, [sainte-agathe.org](http://sainte-agathe.org) and [facebook.com/festineige](https://www.facebook.com/festineige). Festi-Neige activities are free.

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