

Checking In: Lakefront inn shores up Venise-en-Québec

Town resurrected by new enterprise

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE MAY 30, 2013



The rooms at the new Auberge du Lac Champlain all have coffee machines, mini-refrigerators and private balconies with a view of the lake.

Photograph by: Michel Julien

Venise-en-Québec is a born-again town.

The Centre de Villégiature Venise-sur-le-lac embraces a trio of enterprises that are bringing new life and a new style to the village on Lake Champlain in southern Quebec.

Venise-sur-le-lac runs Les Croisières du Lac Champlain on tranquil Missisquoi Bay; L'Ô'Vive, a new establishment that promises to be a lively waterfront restaurant with entertainment; and l'Auberge du Lac Champlain, Chalets et Spa, which opens Tuesday across the street from the lake.

The Auberge is big news for the village of Venise-en-Québec, since it is one of the few lodging establishments between St-Jean-sur-Richelieu and the Vermont border. It is a modest lakefront inn with 32 rooms in the main building and several cottages clustered around. It all has a New England seaside look, with pale yellow clapboard exteriors and cranberry-coloured shutters.

L'Auberge du Lac Champlain is bright, modern and practical. The rooms are equipped with plasma TVs, coffee machines and mini-refrigerators. They all have queen-size beds, private balconies and decor in soft blues and beiges that recall Venise's beach and the lake. The main-lodge accommodations are all on the second floor — yes, there is an elevator — so they have views of the water. The cottages add an extra element of privacy, and are cute options for families or friends, each

with a kitchen, a living room and two bedrooms that can be configured to accommodate two to six people.

“We knew there was a need for lodging,” said Pierre Parent, the majority shareholder in Venise-sur-le-lac. “Visitors come for the Wine Route, the Club de Golf at Missisquoi Bay, cruises, cycling and the Circuit du Paysan, but they had nowhere to sleep.”

Parent leads a co-operative of locals who created Venise-sur-le-lac to boost business by transforming a neglected lakefront region into a tiny tourism haven. Among the civic improvements in recent years are new beachfront gazebos, two tennis courts, cycling paths and a walking trail that meanders through Neville Nature Park. Venise en fête, a day of picnicking and music, will rock the municipal dock on July 20.

The Auberge will organize golf, the Wine Route and massages, plus excursions to Parc Safari, the outdoor zoo in Hemmingford, and Arbraska, the tree-to-tree climbing adventure at Mont-St-Grégoire. To round out the family fun, the inn will rent bicycles, canoes, kayaks, pedalos and tennis rackets. Teens will love the “floating islands” — motorized rafts on which up to six people can splash and sunbathe. Kids can try out miniature remote-controlled sailboats.

You’ll want to get out and about. The inn has one meeting room, but no living or dining spaces. Guests can lounge on their balconies, at the saltwater swimming pool or at the municipal beach just down the road. The spa will be a draw for those who like a laid-back lifestyle. Comfortable for about 10 to 20 people at a time, it has a sauna, steam room, indoor whirlpool tub and two massage rooms.

The cruises: Venise-sur-le-lac has upgraded its cruise component. For two years, Les Croisières du Lac Champlain sailed on a 70-passenger ship, but this season it is launching a newly acquired, refurbished vessel that can accommodate 175. With a closed cabin and open-air decks fore and aft, Le Missisquoi is a floating entertainment centre with live music, a bar and several cruise options.

There are day and evening tours, with scenic views of the posh houses around the shore, as well as Mont Pinnacle and Vermont’s Green Mountains in the distance. Personally, I would pick the sunset cruise with dinner and entertainment: Maxime Farago in June, Caribbean nights in July, a disco theme for August and French pop music in September.

Cruises to the Eastern Townships Wine Route also are new this year. Departing from Venise-en-Québec, the ship will sail to Les Halles du Quai, a gourmet shop in St-Armand/Philipsburg, and then passengers will hop a bus for Domaine du Ridge, a nearby winery. Lunch will be at the picturesque, ivy-draped Domaine des Côtes d’Ardoise, which, at 30, is the oldest vineyard in Quebec.

The restaurant: L’Ô’Vive has a smart brasserie look indoors, and an inviting outdoor patio.

Run by Isabelle Charlebois, who also owns Bistro-Traiteur Le 8ième Ciel, a cute Mediterranean dining spot in St-Armand, L’Ô’Vive cooks up inventive French-Quebec dishes with local foods, such as duck confit, beet salad with goat cheese, steak-frites with cider sauce, warm wild mushroom salad and

gnocchi with bacon, asparagus and feta.

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