

CHECKING IN

Ogunquit's Cliff House adds new cuisine, sports



ROCHELLE LASH

You see the road signs everywhere: Bienvenue au Maine. Canadians are a vibrant force in Southern Maine, and I was particularly pleased to see former Montrealer Gerard Kiladjian at the helm of Cliff House Resort & Spa near Ogunquit.

Kiladjian and I met when he ran a smart boutique hotel in Portland, Maine, and he also had been an executive in Montreal, at the fashionable Loews Hotel Vogue and the five-star Four Seasons (back when Montreal had a Four Seasons). But now he has been in lobster country, by the sea, for a while.

Cliff House's outstanding quality is its exceptional setting — yes, on a breathtaking cliff — overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, an ever-changing drama of waves, tides and colours crashing against the rocky coastline.

“Cliff House is a Maine landmark owned by the same family for 140-plus years,” Kiladjian said. “We’re expanding on that by enhancing the hotel, the food and the service, but we want to retain the history and tradition that make this resort special.”

The resort multi-tasks, appealing to different tastes at different price points. The 166 accommodations, all with private balconies and ocean views, are in three buildings: Cliffscape is home to the reception, dining room and lounges, plus spacious, upscale rooms. Cliff Spa has deluxe, adults-only guest rooms with gas fireplaces, king and sofa beds and wet bars. To please families, the wing called Cliff Top features budget-conscious king and double-queen rooms.

For sports fans, Kiladjian has opened 10 tennis courts and added a fleet of bicycles, in addition to the hotel's golf link with Cape Neddick Country Club, just across the street.

There is more to come because Cliff House's new owners are planning an overhaul that will start in 2016.

With his background in both the foodie city of Portland and cuisine-centric Montreal, Kiladjian has ramped up the fare at the dining room, the Pool Bar and the



Cliff House Resort & Spa, a landmark hotel near Ogunquit, Maine, has dramatic views of the Atlantic Ocean.
PHOTOS: CLIFF HOUSE RESORT & SPA



Cliff House has the most comprehensive spa in Southern Maine, featuring treatments with sea-based products, a sauna and steam room, a meditation labyrinth, a fitness centre, and an indoor heated lap pool.

Ocean Terrace. There will be a preview at the season's first Wine Tasting Dinner on April 25.

The updated dinner menu features baked, grilled or poached fish (haddock, halibut, lemon sole, Atlantic salmon and sea scallops), as well as Angus steaks, raw bar delicacies and decadent

bisque, lobster mac 'n' cheese, plus such Maine favourites as crab cakes and clam chowder.

Cliff Spa specializes in services using natural Maine ingredients like seashells, blueberries and lotions of white pine and sea salts.

The most comprehensive spa in Southern Maine, Cliff Spa has 10 treatment rooms, a sauna and steam room, a meditation labyrinth, a fitness centre, an indoor heated lap pool and a lounge, all with sweeping ocean views. Some of the signature treatments are the Atlantic anti-oxidant facial, the algae detox and the wild rose body wrap.

You can make a day of it, or a half-day, with such packages as the Gentleman's Day Away that includes a deep-tissue massage, a facial, a pedicure and a scalp massage. The Atlantic Well-Being Package features a scalp treatment, a full-body exfoliation with sea salts, a stone massage and a hydrating body wrap.

Here is a quick pick-me-up, and a great gift. The \$99 Spa Special Sampler includes mini-treatments plus a glass of wine and hors d'oeuvres (Sundays and Thursdays, 4-7 p.m.).

IF YOU GO

Ogunquit, Maine, is a 5.5-hour drive from Montreal via Vermont Highway 89 south to Interstate 93 south and Route 101 east to Interstate 95 north.

Cliff House Resort & Spa: 207- 361-1000, cliffhousemaine.com, Cape Neddick, Maine. Open April 22-Oct. 31. Pets, \$35 per day.

Price: Three buildings range from \$145-\$280 U.S. until June 4 and during Oct.; \$175-\$395 U.S., June 5-Sept. 30, including Wi-Fi, three indoor and outdoor swimming pools, hot tub, parking, local and long-distance phone calls (even to Canada), fitness centre. Children 12 and under stay for free except in Cliff Spa rooms, which are for 18 and over.

Packages: Wine & Dine (with lobster), Romance & Pampering (with spa and Champagne), Tee-Time (with golf at Cape Neddick Country Club) and Spa Splurges.

Cliff Spa: 207-361-6275, 10 treatment rooms; sample 50-minute services: blueberry body wrap, \$110; seashell massage, \$100; signature facial including a blueberry smoothie mask, \$125; includes spa lounge, sauna, steam room, outdoor meditation labyrinth, lockers, bathrobes and slippers. Without a treatment, spa access costs \$12 a day.

Dining: Ocean Terrace and Pool Bar are outdoors. The dining room serves daily breakfast, lunch and dinner and Sunday brunch buffet.

Maine Tourism: 888-624-6345, visit-maine.com; Ogunquit: ogunquit.org; The Yorks: gatewaytomaine.org.

Cliff House has a secluded setting, but casual shopping and beautiful beach life are at hand. The colourful Shoreline Explorer Trolley ferries guests up and down the coast. It stops at the hotel, costs a dollar or two and runs in high season, June 27 to Labour Day.

The perennially entertaining Ogunquit Playhouse will stage five plays this season, including Sister Act (May 20-June 20), Victoria-Victoria (June 24-July 18), and Saturday Night Fever, Sept. 23-Oct. 25 (Ogunquitplayhouse.org).

History abounds in The Yorks (York, York Harbor and York Beach). Locals say that the Nubble Lighthouse is one of the most photographed in the world, and the Old Gaol, among the oldest buildings in America, is where prisoners were forced to eat lobster because it was so plentiful.

Rochelle@rochellelash.com
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