

Portland classic now a cool lifestyle leader



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

The shiny new Portland Westin Harborview Hotel is so much a part of Portland, Maine, that locals still call it by its old name, The Eastland.

At its opening in 1927, it was the largest hotel in New England and the go-to establishment for high-society balls and important business gatherings.

The Harborview à la 2015, is all that, plus, after a \$50-million renovation, it's also cool and contemporary.

The hotel's lobby is a fresh breeze of modernism, with a broad ceiling fixture of mirrored discs and large-scale abstract paintings. When I arrived on a recent Sunday, the entrance was buzzing with wedding parties and a conference of international chefs.

The 298 guest rooms and suites are attractive, bright and dressed for practicality in a wheat-neutral colour scheme. They're also loaded with such modern conveniences as reading lights embedded in the bed headboards, ergo-chairs, coffee-makers, mini-fridges, smartphone docks and plenty of charging outlets for mobile devices.

The Westin brand also draws guests for its Heavenly Bed, which has pillow-top mattresses and good-quality sheets.

The vibrant town of Portland has a stellar reputation for food and drink, and it struts its stuff in the frequent tasting events by Maine Foodie Tours (lobster included) and happenings like Harvest on the Harbour Festival, Oct. 21-25.

Top of the East, the Westin's penthouse lounge with a 360-degree panorama of Casco Bay and the Old Port, is among the top bars in town. The gorgeous view is a backdrop to terrific cocktails and an irresistible bar menu of lobster rolls, shrimp cocktails, seared tuna and charcuterie.

My hiking-shopping pal, Rae Turley, and I had driven to Portland from Montreal through the harrowing mountain pass at Dixville Notch, N.H., so I figured I had earned a taste of the Corpse Reviver, a potent shakeup of



Top of the East, the penthouse lounge at the Portland Westin Harborview in Maine, has a 360-degree panoramic view of Casco Bay and the Old Port. PHOTOS: PORTLAND WESTIN HARBORVIEW

absinthe, gin and lemon. She settled on a Pinot Noir from a respectable list of wines-by-the-glass.

We headed to dinner at C2 Congress Squared, the main-floor dining room that has a sociable mix of bar seats, communal booths and tables in a contemporary setting, with menus to match. The new chef, Brian Anderson, has crafted a Maine-centric feast of crab cakes, seafood cioppino, mussels and swordfish.

Children have their own choices, including tuna sandwiches, granola parfaits and deconstructed Caesar salads.

C2's bar has a daily happy hour, 4 to 7 p.m., and lots of other deals, like half-price wine on Wednesdays.

Breakfast offerings set a particularly healthy trend, with goodies like Maine blueberry-yogurt pancakes, artisan breads, omelettes, and smoothies blended with fresh fruit and veggies.

WHAT TO DO

- The Westin is at Congress Ave., which has been recognized as one of the most vibrant streets in the United States by the American Planning Association. It is the heart of Portland's Arts District, which is rich with art galleries, the Portland Museum of Art, the Maine College of Art and the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine.



The Portland Westin Harborview is contemporary and loaded with myriad conveniences in guest rooms.

- Portland's First Friday Art Walk, Maine's largest free monthly cultural event, is an open house through the streets, galleries and museums.
 - The Westin offers a shuttle around town so guests can sight-see and dine out without driving, and explore the Old Port, particularly the shops along Exchange and Commercial Sts. and the bistros of Wharf St.
 - The WestinWORKOUT Fitness Studio is open to all guests. The hotel also has jogging maps and New Balance exercise clothes on loan through the WestinWORKOUT Gear Lending Program. With RunWestin, a concierge leads guests on a jog through the streets.
 - The Akari Spa is a comprehensive beauty and relaxation centre, with a clothing and makeup boutique, hair and nail salons, peels and skin care for the face and back, massages and medical services such as Botox, facial fillers, skin resurfacing and laser treatments.
- The signature massage — for singles or couples — winds up with an Akari scent and soothing hot towels. Other options, especially if you have strolled Congress St. for hours, are the pain-management massage that relieves sore muscles, and reflexology, which works on pressure points in the feet.
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IF YOU GO

Portland, Maine, is a five-and-a-half-hour drive from Montreal through Coaticook and the Vermont border at Hereford to Dixville Notch, N.H., and U.S. Route 26 south through Bethel, Maine.

Westin Portland Harborview: 207-775-5411, 855-811-0043, westinportlandharborview.com; 157 High St., Portland. Pet-friendly (no extra charge), including Westin Heavenly Dog Bed. Starwood SPG benefits apply, including free Wi-Fi for online bookings. Kids' menu available.

Price: The hotel has a best-rate guarantee. Sun.-Thurs., from \$199; or Fri.-Sat. from \$259, including courtesy van, newspaper, in-room TV movies, business centre, evening turndown on request, fitness room and gear. Extra: Wi-Fi, \$9.95/day; 24-hour in-room dining. Prices are lower Nov.-March.

C2 Congress Squared: breakfast, lunch, dinner and bar daily. The Top of The East: Lounge menu and drinks, from 5 p.m. Mon.-Thurs., and from 4 p.m. Fri.-Sun.

Akari Spa: 207-775-5411, akari-beauty.com.

Portland: 207-772-5800, visitportland.com, liveworkportland.org; Maine tourism: 888-624-6345, visitmaine.com. Maine Foodie Tours: 207- 233-7485, mainefoodietours.com.

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