

VINTAGE TREMBLANT INN GETS A MODERN SPIN



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

Hôtel Mont-Tremblant 1900 is living history, and a delight to think about at the dawn of a new year.

The rambling building has been at the heart of the Tremblant community for more than a century.

But, which Tremblant community? The Laurentian municipality encompasses five sectors, each with its own character:

- Tremblant Resort, the busy slopeside village of hotels, shops, bars, restaurants and top skiing and riding, is a hub for year-round entertainment that includes zip-lining, concerts, wine tastings, lake cruising and golf. Nearby is international car racing.
- Downtown Mont Tremblant, known for 100 years as St-Jovite, is the gateway service town on Route 117, a busy crossroads of big-box stores and main street boutiques.
- Domaine St-Bernard, a pastoral paradise for cross-country skiers, borders the Rivière du Diable and is so far from city lights that it is home to the stargazing Pavillon d'astronomie Velan.
- Across the mountain lies Parc national du Mont-Tremblant, a wilderness that has been somewhat tamed for sports, fishing and wildlife observation.
- Mont Tremblant Village was founded in the late 1800s on the shore of Lac Mercier, near Rivière du Diable. Today it's a mix of country homes, B&Bs and a few outstanding enterprises that draw a sophisticated clientele, including the chic Boutique de Ski Daniel Lachance and the rustic-gourmet Restaurant Patrick Bermand.

EARLY DAYS

The P'tit Train du Nord arrived on the shore of Lac Mercier around 1900, serving remote chemical and lumber plants. At this point, Hôtel Mont-Tremblant was not yet a hotel — it was housing for workers.

The P'tit Train gradually spawned vacation villages and resorts throughout the Laurentians, and the workers' apartments in Tremblant Village were rebuilt as Hôtel Lac Mercier in 1918, welcoming the new railway tourists.

By the 1930s the P'tit Train was known as the Snow Train, which



"It's truly a family business," says Philippe Laudat, who is renovating his inn and working with a new crew — his daughters, from left, Sharlee, Adélaïde, and Maéva. J-F LECLERC

IF YOU GO

Hôtel Mont-Tremblant 1900 and Resto-Pub Au Coin, 855-275-8585, 819-717-1410, hotelmonttremblant.net; 1900 chemin du Village, Mont-Tremblant/Village sector.

Price: Watch for specials — second night at half-price or the third night for free. Bed & breakfast, weekday or weekend, \$105-\$135 for two, including Wi-Fi, bike and ski storage, parking. Gourmet Package adds table d'hôte dinner, from \$86 p.p., per night, double occ. Spa package, from \$126 p.p., per night, B&B, table d'hôte dinner, plus access to Scandinave Spa.

Tremblant Resort (ski-ride-activities): tremblant.ca, 888-738-1777. Tourism Tremblant area: 877-425-2434, mont-tremblant.ca

carried Nordic skiers from Montreal. But skiing and après-ski hit new heights with the downhill movement.

During the winter of 1932-1933, Alec Foster installed North America's first lift in Shawbridge, a rope tow powered by a car engine, and Tremblant's developer Joe Ryan built Canada's first chairlift for the 1938-1939 season. Lac Mercier Inn changed its name to Hôtel Mont-Tremblant to capture the spirit of the new development.

Eventually, the railway lost traction with the debut of the Laurentian Autoroute during the 1950s. Passenger service ground to a halt in the 1980s, and the Linear Parc P'tit Train du Nord, a cycling and cross-country ski trail, took over the tracks during the 1990s.

Today, Mont Tremblant Vil-

lage is a low-profile tourist town where clapboard cottages from another era have been turned into B&Bs and bistros. Hôtel Mont-Tremblant 1900 and its Resto-Pub Au Coin are the social hubs.

Philippe Laudat has owned the hotel for nearly 20 years and now has some special co-workers.

"My three daughters have come on-board, so I am very excited," said Laudat.

"It's truly a family business."

The 21-year-old twins, Sharlee and Adélaïde, handle the pub, and Maéva, 23, works the front desk.

BED AND BOUFFE

The 19-room hotel is in transition. With major updates, it is evolving into a pleasant, budget-priced getaway.

The establishment is entering 2016 with a rebuilt wing that has wide corridors, high ceilings and contemporary rooms with new features — flat-screen TVs, better windows, soundproofing and ceramic bathrooms with glass showers. The un-renovated rooms are rather outdated and plain, but clean and serviceable for skiers and riders who want the basics.

"The new wing adds modern appeal to the charm of an old hotel," said Maéva Laudat. "We're more competitive now — guests like the TVs and the simple, uncluttered look."

The hotel's Resto-Pub Au Coin, a vintage tavern with beautiful woodwork, is where the action is. There are 10 beers on tap, including the blond Au Coin microbrew, and another big draw is the pool table, which is free.

Au Coin serves an all-day, all-evening menu of wraps and paninis, fresh salads, onion soup, steak-frites, fish 'n' chips and eight kinds of burgers including

veggie and blue cheese. All the dishes cost \$10-\$15. The pub's special features comfort dishes like braised pork, chili con carne or Guinness stew, and includes a glass of wine or draft beer for \$20. The afternoon tapas menu includes coconut shrimp, cala-

mari, charcuterie and cheeses.

The evening table d'hôte (\$20-\$40) includes starters like mâche salad with duck confit or escargots in pastry, followed by main courses of pasta, lamb, roasted salmon, seafood and a specialty of Angus prime rib for two.

GREAT LOCATION

Hôtel Mont-Tremblant 1900 now is a two-star lodge out of a possible five on Quebec Tourism's scale, but it might inch up to three stars when the overhaul is complete.

In my book, this handy inn rates a high-five for its pivotal location, honest food and good prices. The Linear Parc P'tit Train du Nord runs right by the hotel. Next door, Place de la Gare houses an art gallery showcasing local talent. Plus, there is skating almost across the street when Lac Mercier is frozen.

The ski-friendly municipal shuttle bus stops near the hotel. It's \$3 for the four-kilometre ride to Mont Tremblant.

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