

Brome inn reborn with new spa, décor and cuisine



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

The usually tranquil Knowlton area has sizzling news. No, really. The new Auberge Lac Brome in the Eastern Townships is hot stuff, popping with chic guest rooms, an elegant wedding rotunda, a spa and a romantic dining room serving classic French cuisine.

To be precise, Auberge Lac Brome isn't really new and it's actually in Foster, near Knowlton; both are part of the larger Lac Brome community. It is the old Auberge Quilliams on Rte. 243, almost totally overhauled after one year and \$6 million of renovations, with details to be completed by spring.

The refurbished inn reflects the best of the Townships, principally with its lakefront location, duck on the menu and spa services. Traditional, but updated, it's an ideal destination for Valentine's Day or Mother's Day.

"We are refined," said general manager Mamadou Sow, "but we also are accessible — our location is ideal, our cuisine is uncomplicated and our prices are realistic." Sow brings international experience from Europe as well as Townships' know-how from the five-star Ripplecove Lakefront Hotel and Spa.

THE NEW LOOK: The 38 guest rooms have been gutted and redone with soothing pale grey walls, white beds and colour pops of aquamarine or canary yellow. Guests have a choice of bed configurations — king, queen, or double-doubles — and views of either Lac Brome (across the street) or the pastoral Quilliams Wildlife Reserve.

The new management wants you to have everything, so every room is equipped with a 32-inch plasma TV, terry bathrobes, a work desk, a pod-coffee machine, a mini-refrigerator, individual climate control, a glass-fronted balcony and a sparkling bathroom with top-of-the line fixtures.

The impressive two-storey suites add luxe: soaring cathedral ceilings, living rooms with fireplaces that burn eco-logs, kitchens with bar seating, plus bedrooms upstairs. Using sofa-beds, these suites can accom-



This two-storey suite at Auberge Lac Brome features a view of Lac Brome, living-room fireplace and bedrooms upstairs. PHOTOS: AUBERGE LAC BROME



With turquoise accents to reflect the lake, La Brise du Lac is the new lakefront dining room-in-the-round at the renovated Auberge Lac Brome.

modate up to six, so they're ideal for families. There are two bathrooms, one truly fancy, with a double vanity, a power shower, a free-standing soaking tub and an enclosed WC.

FOOD & DRINK: La Brise du Lac is an inviting dining room-in-the-round overlooking Lac Brome. It has been redecorated and now is a smart contemporary space with turquoise accents to reflect the lake and birch trees bringing in a bit of nature.

Dinner is French-inspired, with lots of local ingredients and dishes such as lamb, Highland beef, sweetbreads, venison osso bucco with sea buckthorn from nearby Mont Echo, Brome Lake duck breast, guinea fowl from Miboulay Farms in Marieville and cheese from Fromagerie La

Station in Compton. Wednesdays are Vin à Vingt à Sylvain, a toast to \$20 bottles selected by sommelier Sylvain Labrie. And on Saturdays, a pianist rolls out dinner classics.

A small lunch menu stars duck confit and BLT's with duck. And indulgent breakfasts are a must in the countryside. Auberge Lac Brome does classic dishes like cretons and sausages, as well as innovative main courses of eggs benedict with duck confit or crêpes with orange sauce and fruit.

SPA LIFE: The Auberge is owned by the Brunelle family, and one of the daughters, Martine, has created Spa Brumar, just off the lobby.

It has a compact, indoor therapy set-up — a whirlpool,

sauna and steam room — with nine treatment rooms, a Vichy shower and a unique feature — the NeoQi energy cocoon. This is a pod-like bath with light therapy that is said to rejuvenate and relax both mind and body. There is a full slate of face and body services, including manicures, pedicures, facials and massages.

WHAT TO DO: Winter is in full force with sleigh rides, ice-fishing and slide sports at Mont Sutton or Bromont, montagne d'expériences (that's the new name of the ski area), which both are a 20-minute drive, although in different directions.

In summer, Auberge guests can use the heated outdoor pool and a little beach across the street on Lac Brome. You'll be able to kick back in a sun chair, paddle a kayak or take a leisurely lake cruise.

The hotel backs onto the Quilliams Wildlife Reserve, a water sanctuary that is home to 35 species of birds as well as otters, beavers, muskrats, deer and giant turtles. A kayak excursion takes about two hours and the Auberge will prepare picnic lunches.

Auberge Lac Brome will have golf packages at three courses plus visits along the Wine Route. Lac Brome is cycling country, too. The Auberge has indoor bike storage and maps of the Townships' trail network, including the car-free Estriade.

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IF YOU GO

Foster/Lac Brome is a one-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 10 East and Exit 90.

Auberge Lac Brome: 450-243-0404, aubergelacbrome.com; 572 Chemin Lakeside, Foster/Lac Brome.

Price: during winter, rooms cost \$139-\$169, suites, \$239-\$279, including thermal spa experience, Wi-Fi, outdoor pool (summer). A 15-per-cent discount is offered on last-minute reservations. Prices will increase in June.

Seasonal packages available with meals (three, four or seven courses), Spa Brumar treatments; golf at Owl's Head, Inverness, Lac Brome and Waterloo courses; kayaking through the Quilliams Wildlife Reserve; Wine Route Lovers Package with tastings.

La Brise du Lac: Lunch, Wed.-Sun., 12 p.m.-2 p.m.; dinner, Wed-Sat., 6 p.m. — 9 p.m.; Sun. dinner by reservation; three-course dinner, \$39, four courses, \$49.

Spa Brumar: 450-242-6891, spabrumar.com.

Eastern Townships information: 800-355-5755, www.eastertownships.org; Knowlton: knowltonquebec.ca.

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