

ESTÉREL CONQUERS DREADFUL WEATHER



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

Don't like the weather? Don't worry. Estérel Resort, a stylish, contemporary getaway, has overcome the ups and downs of Quebec's quirky climate. Estérel has evolved into a vacation spot with activities that are not dependent on sun, snow or agreeable temperatures, even though it has a splendid Laurentian lakefront setting surrounded by forests.

Eat, sleep, spa. Repeat. Perhaps spend an afternoon lounging by the fireplace in your suite and gazing at the charming sight of skaters on Lac Dupuis. Or share a romantic Valentine's rendezvous with fine wines and foie gras.

Among the weatherproof luxuries at Estérel are the Amerispa, a sanctuary for beauty and body treatments, and The Lido, an extensive indoor-outdoor Nordic spa. The latest indoor indulgences revolve around the famed wine cellar of Bistro à Champlain, the epicurean temple that was a neighbour for nearly 30 years, which has relocated to Estérel. **All-suite hotel:** Reconstructed three years ago, Estérel encompasses 200 ultracontemporary suites in two adjacent buildings, with a central hub of three restaurants, the wine cellar, the indoor and outdoor spas and party rooms.

The striking feature of each suite is its glass wall that lets in so much light and opens to pastoral views. The décor is fresh and clean, with white beds, dark woodwork and taupe furniture. The suites are deluxe hideaways for two to four people, with glass balconies, queen beds or king beds, gas fireplaces, two flat-screen TVs, and living areas with sofa beds or Murphy beds, handy if you are travelling with children. Most have kitchenettes and a few extra-large suites have full kitchens, all with granite counters and stainless appliances.

Here is a Valentine-worthy idea: If you splurge on one of Estérel's 32 spa suites, you'll have a whirlpool bath only for you on your terrace.

Food & Wine: The arrival of talented executive chef Jean-Luc de La Bruère from the five-star Hôtel Quintessence in Tremblant, and the partnership with



Estérel Resort in the Laurentians has become a weatherproof destination with an Amerispa, the Lido Nordic spa, and the new Bistro à Champlain. PHOTOS: STÉPHANE GROLEAU/ESTÉREL RESORT



Estérel is the new home of the gastronomic landmark, Bistro à Champlain, known for its wine cellar.

Champlain Charest of Bistro à Champlain, whose wine collection is so prestigious, have elevated Estérel's food and beverage significantly.

De La Bruère and sous-chef Stéphane Gignac present a few classics such as foie gras, potage and grilled filet of beef, but mostly they go modern with eye-catching presentations,

tantalizing textures and innovative dishes of Quebec produce flavoured with ginger, anise, lime and maple.

Among De La Bruère's favourites are the sharing platters of beef tartare with Parmesan crisps, salmon cru with a crunchy white balsamic toffee and tuna tataki with ginger carpaccio. And main courses on the new winter

menu include: duck three ways with foie gras brûlée; venison with figs and daikon radish; black cod with glazed vegetables; and the outstanding dish of scallops over black Asian rice.

I enjoy Estérel's informal events as much as the formal dining. They draw a lot of young people for mingling and they're relatively affordable. On Fridays and Saturdays, the casual eateries Rok and 260 present oysters and Champagne by the glass. L'Apéro is a daily 3 @ 6 gathering with well-priced beer, wine, cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. Also daily, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., chief sommelier Jean-Sébastien Tremblay and Champlain's man Christian Rado orchestrate \$17 wine tastings in the cellar.

"It is not always about price ... you can choose a good wine for \$40," Tremblay said. "The rare wines like Petrus that cost \$9,000 make people curious to visit and learn. And connoisseurs can enjoy great Burgundies and Bordeaux that they would not find anywhere else."

Spa Life: The lakefront Lido Nordic spa is Estérel's most prominent feature and it's particularly impressive because of the lake setting. During the day, skaters and skiers glide by as the sun sparkles on the ice and snow. At night, the baths are open until 11 p.m. and the moon lights up the frozen landscape.

Guests soak in the hot outdoor whirlpools that bubble and steam in the cold winter air. Then it's a

IF YOU GO

Estérel Resort: 888-Ester-el/888-378-3735, 450-228-2571, esterel.com; Ville d'Estérel.

Price: Garden-view suites, from \$189 for two; lake view from \$209; suites with patio hot tub, from \$259. Rates are higher on Saturdays and lower on Sundays; there is a discount for a third night. Rates include The Lido Nordic spa, skating on Lac Dupuis and walking/snowshoe trails, and in summer, a heated swimming pool, the lakefront beach with small craft and walking trails. Various packages, starting at \$149 p.p., double occ., include flowers and Champagne, gourmet meals, and equipment for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing. The Estérel Club de Golf is adjacent to the hotel.

Amerispa Estérel: 450-228-8302 (direct), 866-AMERISPA/866-263-7477, www.amerispa.ca

Bistro à Champlain: Thursday-Saturday, six-course menu, \$90, wine pairings, \$60. Le Rok grill and 260, a resto-bar, are open daily.

quick dip into an icy bath for an intense circulation booster, followed by another round of heat in the Turkish-style hammam. The thermotherapy finishes with a siesta in the lounge. Spa experts suggest doing the circuit three times.

The in-house Amerispa has a full menu of beauty and body treatments. The two-hour Urbania package, \$165-\$180, includes an aromatic massage, a wellness facial and an express hand treatment. Among Amerispa's special services — great for gifts — are tandem massages for lovers, the rain massage for de-stressing, the scrub with ice-cider crystals and mani-and-pedis in the beautiful salon facing the lake.

If you are a client of Amerispa for two hours of treatments, you are invited to use The Lido Nordic spa, even if you are not a guest of the hotel.

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