



The lobby at the new Grand Times Hotel has a chic look that might feel more like Manhattan than Drummondville. GRAND TIMES HOTELS

CHECKING IN

Drummondville raises its glass with dazzling hotel



ROCHELLE LASH

If you're turned on by contemporary design, you'll get frissons at the striking new Grand Times Hotel in Drummondville.

At 12 storeys, it is one of the tallest towers between Montreal and Quebec City, an instant urban-style landmark that opened in March in a low-rise industrial town surrounded by farmland.

The 140-room hotel mixes business and pleasure, with its urban-cool design and casual air. The glass tower has a passageway that connects to Centrexpo Cogeco, one of the most advanced convention centres in Quebec.

But Grand Times also is a fresh-faced welcome stop for leisure travellers — both families and couples — who want to experience Drummondville's charms.

"It's an exciting project," general manager Francis Hince said. "It's big and beautiful and a great complement to the convention centre, but Drummondville also is very busy in summer with tourists."

Darling of design: The hotel's owner, Jean Audet, a businessman and real estate developer in Quebec City, is fascinated by Manhattan and his hotels pay tribute to the great metropolis. Grand Times has named its meeting rooms the Big Apple, Central Park, Union Square and Lower East Side.

The wow factor is the wall-sized window in each room bringing in light and sky. The city is prettier after dark when night lights sparkle, and on clear days

you can see Mont Orford and Mont St-Hilaire in the distance.

The lobby is a sweeping open space with white marble floors and an enormous charcoal leather sofa-in-the-round. A long, lean gas fireplace adds zip, and a synthetic white canopy back-lit with pastel lights gives the room a futuristic air.

The Grand Times also has an indoor pool and hot tub, also creatively designed. The ceiling is made of a special synthetic that mirrors the water and undulates in sparkling waves.

Guest rooms: Heading up, the rooms are just as impressive. Imagine colour and texture blocks of white, charcoal and navy, with contrasts of cool, rough concrete and smooth, warm wood. They're attractive, good-sized and functional, with mini-fridges, flat-screen TVs, high-tech lighting and gleaming white-and-glass bathrooms.

Some rooms have Murphy beds and others have go-go sofas with removable backs and cushions to create beds for kids.

Best of all, the accommodations are comfortable. Puffy white cotton duvets cover firm custom-made mattresses manufactured by Matelas Mirabel. The stylish furniture by Maison Williams of St-Hyacinthe is built to last in handsome charcoal flannel with wood frames.

In keeping with the owner's Manhattan bent, every guest room sports a laminated poster of the iconic 1930s scene called Men at Lunch or Lunch Atop a Skyscraper. It's a black-and-white image of construction workers perched precariously high on a steel beam during the construction of Rockefeller Center.

Food: For now, a basic continental breakfast and catered banquets are offered. An independent restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner will open in summer.

But there is bistro bliss on Rue Lindsay, an up-and-coming area. Le Plateau is an appealing resto with a striking contemporary decor, including a wood-slatted ceiling, a concrete bar, cushy slate leather sofas and orange colour pops.

Le Plateau has a huge summer-time patio built around a fire pit, so everyone in town gathers for good food and drinks. Creative

IF YOU GO ...

Drummondville is a one-hour and 15-minute drive from Montreal (about 105 kilometres) along Highway 20, and 150 km from Quebec City.

Grand Times Hotel: 844-474-5550, grandtimeshotel.com. Grand Times hotels also operate in Quebec City, at the Quebec airport and also in Sherbrooke.

Price: Rates fluctuate, but start at about \$140 for two, including continental breakfast, indoor pool and hot tub, Wi-Fi and guest computers.

Le Plateau Restaurant: 819-850-3030, restaurantle-plateau.com, 54 Rue Lindsay, Drummondville. Closed Sunday and Monday, open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tuesday to Friday, and 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday.

Tourisme Centre-du-Québec: 888-816-4007, tourismecentreduquebec.com.

cocktails are served in Mason jars and fancy glasswares, spiced with fresh basil and rosemary.

Le Plateau's cuisine of pasta, charcuterie, steak and fish is casual and delish, and the portions are huge. My trio feasted on a main-course salad brimming with healthy goodies, plus a juicy highrise burger with cheese and the evening's special — maple-glazed salmon atop a platter of beautiful baby veggies.

What to do: The Centrexpo Cogeco Drummondville is a high-tech exhibition centre with striking modern architecture and marble and glass interiors. It has a diverse roster of events. The Centrexpo Cogeco will present Le 16th Grand Bal de l'Orchestre symphonique de Drummondville on May 28.

The Festival De Musique Électronique 2016 will be a blowout of 15 hours of non-stop music spun by Quebec's top DJs, with a dance troupe, food and drink and applications of black-light makeup on the spot on June 18.

Drummondville tourism booms in summer. The cycling path called the Circuit des traditions follows the banks of the St-François River to St-François-du-Lac and Rang-de-l'Île St-Jean, where a pontoon boat crosses the river to Lac St-Pierre. The Odanak Abenaki reserve, home to Quebec's oldest First Nations museum, is near Pierreville.

Drummondville is best known for two tourism institutions. Le Village Québécois d'Antan is a recreation of life in the 1800s with costumed actors, games and music of the period.

The annual Mondial des cultures (July 7 to 17) is a performance extravaganza of musicians and dancers who this year hail from Canada, Taiwan, Belgium and Costa Rica.

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