

Casino du Lac-Leamy, marking its 20th year, is home to live shows, a nightclub and one of Quebec's top dining

# GATINEAU'S BIG HILTON SPARKLES AFTER UPDATE



ROCHELLE LASH Checking In

The five-star Hilton Lac-Leamy is a Big Hotel.

Among the tallest buildings in Gatineau, the flashy 21-storey glass tower and its casino structure are home to eight restaurants and bars, as well as a terrific indoor-outdoor saltwater pool system, an Amerispa, a conference centre and party venues for bachelors and bachelorettes.

The Hilton's biggest draw is the Casino du Lac-Leamy, which attracts about 50 per cent of the Hilton's clientele for gambling, live entertainment or both. More than 2.7 million people pass through the casino each year, for the tables and slots, and also because it presents free entertainment with parking for the price of a cocktail or a buffet dinner.

Akin to glitzy hotels in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, the



The Hilton Lac-Leamy in Gatineau is a convention hotel and urban resort. MARIE ANDRÉE BLAIS/CASINO DU LAC-LEAMY

Hilton has extravagant décor, with marble floors, brass fittings and a grand lobby that pops with colourful glass sculptures by artist Dale Chihuly. It's also home to part of Loto-Québec's important art collection, including pieces by Tom Hopkins.

Any special requests? One of two five-star establishments in the National Capital Region (along with the Fairmont Château Laurier), the Hilton has an attentive staff, 24-hour room service, a bath butler service, a gift boutique and a conference centre.

**Renovations:** The hotel recently wrapped up a one-year, top-tobottom update that includes renovations to the indoor and outdoor pools and steam rooms.

The Hilton has 349 guest rooms and suites, with classic, ornate European-style décor - elaborate headboards and

reproductions of fancy antique furniture. There are blackout drapes if you have been on a latenight roll and in-room coffee if you need a boost. The carpets, bedcovers and curtains have all been changed and the bathrooms redone with new baths, showers and vanities.

High rollers opt for the extralarge executive rooms on Floors 18 through 20, which are newly equipped with smart-touch controls for temperature, lighting and TV. These rooms access the Conrad Lounge, a privileged space with deluxe continental breakfast, afternoon canapés and soft beverages on the house.

The presidential suite — ideal if you win big at the casino - sports a grand piano, a gas fireplace, a dining room and a balcony. **Urban resort:** The Hilton has an  $exceptional\ setting-surrounded$ by waterways, groves of trees and recreation paths — and overlooks Lac Leamy and Lac de la Carrière.

It is an ideal urban resort, with heated indoor and outdoor swimming pools, whirlpools, a sauna and steam, two outdoor tennis courts, a fitness centre and an Amerispa for après-sports.

Spa fans can head for Amerispa or craft an in-room experience – great for a special occasion or a gift — with specialty baths that include bubbly, chocolate treats and the bath butler's tip. Cleopatra's Bath is enriched with goat's milk to hydrate the skin, and children love the Tutti-Frutti Bath, which comes with candy and milk.

You can walk or cycle along the lakeshore and through gardens, a beach and picnic areas. (The Hilton's bikes are free.) The Canadian Museum of History (formerly the Museum of Civilisation) is four kilometres away and Parliament Hill is a little farther, just across the Victoria Bridge bikeway.

**Food and drink:** At the top of the upscale is Le Baccara, the chi-chi dining room in the casino, which boasts a five-diamond rating from CAA/AAA. The Champagne flows, the sommelier pours grand cru and the chefs dish up delicacies like foie gras, lobster, bison tartare, Quebec lamb, roast bison and braised veal cheek.

Arôme Seafood and Grill has gorgeous lake views, summertime patio dining and a menu of Angus beef aged for 70 days, plus seafood platters and appetizers such as sweet potato poutine and spicy squid. Watch for Brazilian barbecues during July and August.

The handsome Bacchus bar is a clubby hideaway with leather seating, a cigar lounge and a connoisseur's selection of port.

The Hilton has lots of casual options: the TGV operates poolside; Banco serves informal

### IF YOU GO

The Hilton Lac-Leamy is five kilometres from Ottawa's Parliament Hill, 4.5 kilometres from the Lac des fées entrance of Gatineau Park and about 200 kilometres from Montreal.

**Hilton Lac-Leamy and** 

Casino du Lac-Leamy: 800-665-2274, 819-772-2100, casinolacleamy.ca; 1 Blvd. du Casino, Gatineau. Honours members get 25 per cent off when booking in advance. **Price:** Prices are approximate and fluctuate. Rates include outdoor parking, Wi-Fi, indoor-outdoor pools, fitness centre, newspapers, two car charging stations, tennis, bicycles and gardens.

For children: cribs, videogaming with Xbox, toddlers' pool. Rooms start at \$219, but promotions pop up on Facebook; executive rooms start at \$309, including Conrad Lounge; suites start at \$299 (Presidential Suite costs more). Packages available with meals, casino and Amerispa.

Extra: 24-hour room service; pay TV; business centre; valet parking, \$20; specialty baths, \$39.95-\$54.95; pets, \$50 per visit; babysitting. Dining: Le Baccara: Wed.-Sun. from 5:30 p.m.; Arôme: daily breakfast, lunch, dinner and Sunday brunch.

Gatineau tourism: 800-265-7822, tourismeoutaouais.com.

fare and Sunday brunch; and Le Café at the casino does breakfast, sandwiches and salads, plus popular new caramel doughnuts. Casino du Lac-Leamy: The casino is marking its 20th anniversary in 2016 and has several happenings at the 1,000-seat Théâtre du Casino, including the musicals Elvis Experience (June 16-18, 24-25) and La Revue American Story Show (July 8-9, 15-16, 22-23).

There is a charge for theatre shows, but most of the casino's entertainment is free with a drink and/or food.

The nightclub ALÉA has VIP tables, bottle service, and DJs and high-tech sound systems pumping out the latest house music. Bar 7 presents DJs on Wednesdays and Thursdays and live bands on Fridays and Saturdays.

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