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CHECKING IN

# HIP DOWNTOWN HOTEL OFFERS IDEAL STAYCATION DESTINATION



ROCHELLE LASH

The new-in-2016 Renaissance Montréal Centre-Ville is an entertaining downtown staycation with a next generation vibe. The Renaissance is hip and happening, already a hit for its buzzy rooftop scene, playful art-centric interiors, DJs in the lobby and pan-Asian cuisine. It is an urban experience, an in-the-moment destination and very different. “We have an indie feel,” said Alexandre Tessier, director of sales and marketing. “At our core, our goal is to be intriguing, but with local flavour.” **A hotel, with edge:** The public spaces at many hotels — lobbies, bars, dining rooms — often are all

too quiet. Not so at Renaissance Montréal. The hotel has permanent platforms for DJs in the lobby, and local stars Bruno Bernikoff, Kevin Olsen and Tomas C. Laverdière entertain five nights a week, mixing lounge beats, hip-hop, R&B and electro house music. The service is sharp. The Front Desk Ambassadors and concierge-style Navigators are young, keen and well-informed. In contrast to the colourful, vibrant lobby, the 120 guest rooms and 22 suites are less intense, soothing spaces, softly lit and bathed in greys and whites. They’re well-equipped with deluxe bedding, Nespresso machines, flat-screens and sparkling bathrooms with walk-in showers. You can upgrade to a loft room, which are super-sized corner units with 180-degree views; a hospitality suite with a wet bar and living room for entertaining;

or the truly distinctive presidential suite, which has French doors opening onto a private terrace. The hotel is mostly about eating and drinking, but Renaissance Montréal also has a fitness room and a heated plunge pool wedged beside the Air Terrace rooftop restaurant. Big enough for a dip, it’s about two by five metres, but there is no space for sunning, only a few lounge chairs on a separate deck. **Art & design:** The once-conservative Renaissance brand calls its interior look “fearlessly chic” and is rolling out similar progressive designs at 170 hotels, including the new Renaissance New York Midtown and Renaissance Paris République. The concept is a high-low blend: luxurious materials such as marble and fancy millwork contrast with gritty concrete, iron trim and street art. Designer Pierre Brosseau from Camdi in Montreal chose to create a showcase of the city’s

creativity, so there is a variety of visuals, all created by locals. Alex Scanner, as well as street artists Philémon, Jaber and Tehug created graffiti-inspired wall art, edgy murals of cityscapes and pop-art portraits. Nicolas Ruel, a photographer and artist, projects a video art installation depicting Montreal landmarks, parks and events. **Food & drink:** The 12th-floor Air Terrasse is the only rooftop resto in the city core (not counting Old Montreal). It’s a striking space, surrounded by glass with a view looking south down University St. to the St. Lawrence River. Artful cocktails, sangria, wine and beer are the coolers and a summer-fresh menu for lunch or supper features sea bass ceviche with coriander and mango, burgers, beef tartare and quinoa salad, as well as sharing platters of charcuterie and cheese. East is Renaissance’s signature restaurant, decorated with murals of mysterious old Hong

Kong and subdued lighting. Serving piquant pan-Asian cuisine, East dishes up papaya salad, dim sum, Tom Kha soup, Singapore noodles, pad Thai and sashimi. Favourites include Peking duck, miso cod, beef panang curry, steak Siam with red chilis and lobster kung pao. East Bar has caught on with Montrealers who are drawn to the music and pop-up Happy Hour events such as gin tastings or a punch bowl for all. The neighbourhood: Renaissance Montréal is across the street from Place Ville Marie, with its connection to the Underground City, and within a block of The Bay, Promenades Cathédrale and Place Montréal Trust. It’s a few streets from Place des Arts and the Quartier des Spectacles. So, culture and shopping are at hand, but don’t do the obvious. “Our Navigators — we don’t call them concierges — are prepped to offer visitors insider tips — addresses even Montrealers don’t know,” Tessier said. “It could be the best coffee house in Mile End or a riverfront picnic on Île Ste-Hélène.” *Rochellelash@gmail.com* *twitter.com/rochellelash*

IF YOU GO

**Renaissance Montréal Centre-Ville:** 514-657-5000, 855-567-5005, marriott.com/yulmd or renmontreal.com; 1250 Boul. Robert-Bourassa at Cathcart St., Montreal. High-tech meeting space available. **Price:** Prices fluctuate and start at approximately \$269, including Wi-Fi, in-room coffee, fitness centre, baby gear, live music on Tues.-Sat., rooftop plunge pool. Extra: valet parking, \$35; room service; pay-per-view movies; pet-friendly, \$50 per visit; cots, \$25. Children under 12 stay for free in certain rooms. Suites and Marriott Gold and Platinum Rewards Members get evening turndown. Senior (62 and older) and CAA discounts and Marriott Rewards apply. **East Restaurant & Bar:** 438-386-9088; eastpanasiatique.com. Breakfast from 6:30 a.m. to midnight, for breakfast, lunch, dinner, cocktail hour and Sunday brunch.

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