

HOTEL INTEL

OWL'S HEAD REVAMPED, BUT YOU'LL FIND FAMILIAR FACES AMID THE RENOVATIONS



ROCHELLE LASH

Owl's Head, the vintage resort area in the Eastern Townships, is having an uplifting second debut.

The top-drawer 2018-2019 transformation represents the first phase of a new life for this vintage ski and golf getaway that dates to the 1960s.

To start, it now is named the more posh Owl's Head sur-le-Lac. And it has launched stylish new cuisine, updated mountain facilities and all-suite lodging in the reimagined MTN Haus ski lodge.

"We're ecstatic over the changes, especially the accommodations," said Jeff Williams of Chatham, Ont., who has been visiting Owl's Head for nearly 40 years with his wife, Susan, and daughter, April.

Long known for its dramatic setting overlooking Lake Memphremagog, Owl's Head is picturesque and pastoral, surrounded by dairy farms and country estates. This area has been low-key, even a little clubby, but that's about to change.

The news: A consortium of Montreal businesspeople who are passionate weekend habitués have bought Owl's Head and plan to expand the year-round destination with a 50-room hotel, condos and houses that will be both slopeside and lakefront.

An initial \$18-million investment, supplemented by \$26 million from the Quebec government, has resulted in improvements on and off the mountain.

The base chalet, now called MTN Haus, has been redecorated and modernized, with a renewed cafeteria, bistro-bar, boutique/rental shop, ventilated lockers and the Little Owls daycare centre. Now everything is fresh and open, with marvellous views of the trails and contemporary country decor.

The company's new president, Pierre Bourdage, an expert in ski and golf management, visits all the chairlift operators every morning to make certain everything is running smoothly. And resort development manager Yannick Beaupertuis has



The ski-in-ski-out lodging on the second floor of MTN Haus has been completely overhauled and features 10 suites, which are modern, compact and functional. PHOTOS: EMILIE HÉBERT-LARUE



Owl's Head-sur-le-Lac's 10 modern suites sport whitewashed walls, tree-trunk tables and white-tiled bathrooms.

his eye on real estate and resort services.

There still is lots of original charm in the old stone fireplaces and wooden lunch tables carved with generations of names. And there are lots of familiar faces, such as food and beverage supervisor Diane Blanchard, ski instructor Patrick Baillie and bartender Shannon Wilkin.

New suites: The ski-in-ski-out lodging on the second floor of MTN Haus has been totally overhauled. The 10 modern suites, compact and functional, sport whitewashed walls, tree-trunk tables, nubby fabrics and pure white-tiled bathrooms.

You can choose between a mezzanine suite for up to six people, or a king lounge for four. All have

coffee machines, mini-fridges and microwaves, and the king lounge configurations each have two balconies.

New cuisine: The cuisine scene also has changed dramatically under restaurant director Jean-Luc de la Bruère, who supervised the gourmet temple Bistro à Champlain at Esterel in the Laurentians. The kitchen

IF YOU GO

Owl's Head sur-le-Lac & Hôtel MTN Haus: 800-363-3342, 450-292-3342, owlshead.com; 40 Mont Owl's Head Rd., Mansonville.
Lodging prices: Tues.-Wed., \$144 p.p., double occupancy, with breakfast, a three-course dinner and lifts. Room only, for two people, \$160 on Sun.-Thurs.; or \$240 on Fri.-Sat.; additional adults, \$25; children 13 and under stay free. Packages available with lift tickets and Le Spa des Chutes de Bolton, a Nordic spa with massages (spabolton.com).
Eastern Townships tourism: 800-355-5755, easterntownships.org.

has been rebuilt and the trendy new après-ski bar has eight TV screens, fireplace lounges and dining tables.

Classy pub fare includes truffle potato chips, tuna tartare with micro-cilantro, Cornish hen, seared salmon and beef on the grill, plus upgraded burgers, pasta, poutine, nachos, wings and ribs. The onion soup is spiked with beer from Shawinigan and the fondue cheese comes from Fromagerie Abbaye St-Benoît.

"We're bringing ski-chalet food and beverage into 2019," said de la Bruère, who stocked the bar with artisan spirits such as Romeo's Gin from Montreal, Farnham beer and privately imported wines.

In the cafeteria, burgers, hot-dogs, poutine and chili still rule, but check out the new Swiss cappuccino machine, the vegetarian specials, gluten-free foods and on weekends, the sharing platters of roast chicken or pork loin. There are unusual beverages, too, like hibiscus kombucha from Fous de l'Île of Montreal, and Bull's Head ginger-spruce beer from Richmond.

On mountain: Some trails have been reconfigured, some lifts have been refurbished and grooming and snow-making are significantly improved.

Owl's Head boasts both beauty and moderate prices. Echo day tickets are reloadable online with a 10-per-cent discount, coming to between \$31 and \$52, depending on your age. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, adults pay \$25, with discounts for juniors and seniors. Children five and under ski free.

The Carte Blanche also offers a deal with Mont Sutton. Rochelle@rochellelash.com

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