



Huron cultural guide Diane Andicha-Picard leads a workshop in crafting Indigenous jewelry at Hotel-Musée Premières Nations. PHOTOS: HOTEL-MUSÉE PREMIÈRES NATIONS

HOTEL INTEL

STAY AT INDIGENOUS-OWNED HOTEL CAN BE A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE



ROCHELLE LASH

Hotel-Musée Premières Nations, the pride of Huron hospitality in Quebec, gets better and better.

This captivating four-star property is a contemporary, nature-chic resort with a difference.

Like many resorts, it has an indoor pool, fine dining and beautiful grounds on the banks of a river.

What sets it apart is its Indigenous spirit that reflects thousands of years of heritage, including the fascinating Ekionkiestha' National Long House, the Musée Huron-Wendat and a gift shop selling books and crafts made of beads, feathers, pottery and stone.

The hotel incorporates First Nations' design, cuisine and customs in a contemporary style. Glass walls and balconies look out onto a forest of ash, birch and maple trees, as well as the rushing waters of the St-Charles River (Akiawenrahk in the Huron language).

The complex 20 minutes north of Quebec City is owned by the Huron Aboriginal Nation of Wendake and other First Nations. A stay here can be a cultural experience.

Premières Nations also has evolved into a superior culinary destination.

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Executive chef Marc de Passorio, who has had an illustrious career throughout France, took over the kitchen at La Traite in 2022.



Hotel-Musée Premières Nations, left, and the Ekionkiestha' National Long House are on Huron-Wendat territory, north of Quebec City.

2022, and that's a true triumph. The maestro has earned a string of accolades including "three chef hats" from Gault&Millau and one Michelin star, both awards garnered at his own restaurant, L'Esprit de la Violette par Marc de Passorio in Aix-en-Provence. The next big news is a \$13-million update in the spring, with new decor by Camdi Design of Montreal throughout the existing 55 rooms and public spaces and an additional wing of 24 rooms and suites.

"The hotel is expanding and becoming quite sophisticated," said general manager Alain

Dufour. "But it is strongly connected to its Indigenous roots. Our staff represents nine First Nations."

Holiday spirit: The hotel is planning festivities in December with special dinners and activities. De Passorio's holiday menus, Dec. 23 to Jan. 7, feature original cuisine that will incorporate Nordic-inspired ingredients and Indigenous cooking techniques.

Feasts will feature privately imported wines and some of La Traite's specialties, including such fish and game as seal tataki, bison, boar, salmon and vegetables including foraged mushrooms, sunflower terrine, and rhubarb chutney, all accented with herbs from the boreal forest.

New Year's Eve takes it up a notch with canapés, champagne, a five-course menu and Indigenous entertainers. There will be a morning-after gourmet brunch on Jan. 1 with treats like boar bacon, wild game sausage, smoked salmon and sides of bannock, berries and birch syrup.

Indigenous immersion: You can customize your visit with gastronomic meals, craft workshops and other activities. For families, I recommend the Kwe Package (kwe means welcome), a two-night immersion with some meals (not all) and First Nations-themed activities.

The two-hour Esk8entesa Discovery includes a guided visit to the Musée Huron-Wendat, focusing on artifacts and history. Myths and Legends is led by an Indigenous storyteller while visitors huddle around fireplaces, sip Labrador tea (or hot chocolate) and learn about the beginnings of Mother Earth and the cluster of stars called the Pleiades.

The Ekionkiestha' National Long House is the usually biggest attraction, especially for children. Besides the tour, you can overnight at the Long House, which is a thrill, especially for kids. There are 12 bunk-style sleeping platforms, each layered with sleeping bags and bearskins.

A fire-keeper tends the flames of a firepit all night.

In case you need modern comforts, Long House guests have breakfast and dinner at La Traite, and a hotel room is included with your sleepover.

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IF YOU GO

Wendake is an approximately two-hour, 45-minute drive from Montreal. It's 20 minutes north of Quebec City via Route 73.

Hotel-Musée Premières Nations: 866-551-9222, hotelpremieresnations.ca; 15 Place de la Rencontre (Ekionkiestha), Wendake. Pet-friendly. Limited accessible facilities.

Price: Includes parking, indoor pool, fitness area, Wi-Fi, mini-fridge, in-room coffee/tea, smart TV. Connecting rooms available. Some have balconies and/or bathtubs.

Hotel (room only): starts at \$104.50 per person, per night, double occupancy; children 18 and under stay free. **Extra:** Huron-Wendat Traditional Site tours and workshops (reservations required).

Kwe Package, with some meals/activities: two nights from \$854 for two, double occ. (\$214 p.p., per night), or from \$1,029, two nights, for four (two adults and two children, ages six-12). One-night packages available. Long House overnight, from \$412 p.p., per night, double occ. (\$824 for two). Package for four, \$1,150.

La Traite: Breakfast, lunch, vegetarian and children's menus available. Closed for two weeks in February (dates to be announced).

Wendake Tourism: 418-847-1835, tourismewendake.com.

Quebec City region: 877-783-1608, quebecregion.com.

TRAVEL BRIEFS

'Radiation risk' at Australian islands

As if the threat of sharks wasn't enough, tourists visiting beaches in Australia are now being warned of significant "radiation risk" from nuclear tests conducted in the 1950s. A study by marine scientists of the Montebello Islands, about 80 kilometres off the coast of Western Australia state, has shown that nuclear fallout from the experiments

still poses a threat. Seventy years ago The Montes, as the islands are called, were the site of three nuclear bomb tests by the British. Its white-sand beaches form part of a conservation area, but research done over four years by Edith Cowan University has laid bare the invisible after-effects that remain "a radiation risk to marine life and tourists." The scientists said hundreds of beach samples and sediment collected during the study have proven

to still be highly radioactive. As a result, tourists are advised to restrict their visits to less than an hour a day. Despite the warnings, visitors have long been drawn to a concrete bollard marking the location of hydrogen bomb testing in 1956. Described as part landmark, part advisory, it declares: "Warning: Hazardous radiation levels." Australian newspapers report the sign is a popular photo-op for visitors.

\$50K for a highball as jet's bar is sold

It's not the agenda-setting aircraft it once was, but it appears the world's largest passenger jet still has plenty of deep-pocketed fans after an inflight bar sold for more than US\$50,000 at auction. The cocktail lounge was one of some 500 lots from a decommissioned Airbus A380 sold off by Emirates airline. Though held in Toulouse, the online event attracted avia-

tion enthusiasts from around the world, the New Zealand Herald said. Parts of the cockpit, as well as seats and life jackets, were also auctioned off, with proceeds going to charity. A drinks trolley was snapped up as the bar smashed its sales estimate — having been expected to fetch closer to \$30,000. The double-decker A380 was one of 88 in the Emirates fleet and was retired at the beginning of the pandemic.

Andre Ramshaw, for Postmedia News