

Quebec's Relais & Châteaux hotels, cuisine rate well internationally

BY ROCHELLE LASH, FREELANCE

Jaume Tàpies, the dynamic international president of Relais & Châteaux, was in Montreal recently for a fundraising dinner to benefit one of its training partners, Institut de tourisme et d'hôtellerie du Québec (ITHQ).

Relais & Châteaux properties accommodate approximately one million visitors annually in nearly 400 unique hotels, some with spas, and 76 gastronomic Grands Chefs restaurants operating on six continents.

Tàpies's own hotel in the Pyrenees, El Castell de Cuitat, was opened by his grandparents in 1945.

He speaks seven languages and has been cross-country ski champion of Spain three times.

I asked Tàpies about the economy and Quebec's Relais & Châteaux.

Q. People think of Relais & Châteaux as expensive and exclusive. How does that play out in a poor economy?

A. R&C has never been ultra-expensive, and usually not as expensive as city hotels where the prices have jumped dramatically. R&C properties are reasonable, on the higher end of the scale, but the best products and service do have a cost.

Relais & Châteaux range in price from \$100 a night, per person, for a quaint country inn with fine cuisine in

Europe, to \$4,000 a night, per person, for a lavish safari lodge in Africa. Here the suites have glass patio doors so guests can see the lions and giraffes strolling by.

Q. How do Quebec's R&C hotels and Grands Chefs restaurants stack up internationally?

A. The quality in Quebec is at the top of any international list. Toqué! certainly is up there, and my guest room at the Auberge St. Antoine in Quebec City was among the best in recent travels - contemporary, yet warm. The rates at Quebec's Relais & Châteaux hotels and R&C Grands Chefs restaurants are among the most affordable in the world.

Q. What is the most special aspect of R&C properties?

A. The uniqueness of each property. Each one has a personality that reflects the local history, design and architecture, cuisine and the talents of the owners.

R&C conjures an image of traditional cuisine and comfort, or even luxury. How have the hotels stayed current?

