

Delta Ottawa hotel's contemporary design is fresh

Dazzling décor is result of two-year, \$35-million plan



ROCHELLE LASH
CHECKING IN

The new Delta Ottawa City Centre is in the vanguard of the Canadian hotel group's exciting, progressive vibe.

To me, Delta hotels used to be humdrum, functional places where you could hang your suit after a gruelling business day of meetings and travel. But on a recent visit to our country's capital, I found the Delta Ottawa City Centre hip, stylish and fresh, part of a gradual transformation of all 39 Delta resorts and hotels across the country.

The Toronto office of HOK, the design company uses uppercase for emphasis, thoroughly made over a standard hotel of another brand and created the contemporary, innovative new Delta Ottawa. The dazzling design is the result of a \$35-million, two-year plan of action. We could call it cool Zen with warm touches.

Just walking in the front door is impressive. The Delta has an open-plan lobby with white marble floors and three-storey walls of glass. The check-in counters are small and off to one side, which made me feel that I was getting a very personal welcome. Then I took the time to look around. The lobby's centrepiece is a glass, steel and wood staircase to the mezzanine, where the Delta shows off its very "today" side. With an airy, open business centre and the Lift lounge and restaurant, the mezzanine is a modern microcosm of lifestyle.

"I worked here when it was the Crowne Plaza," said Agron Ahmeti, one of the managers at Lift. "The difference is night and day."

Delta's new accommodations are its trademarked ModeRooms; Delta uses bold to emphasize its modernized style. The guest-room formula is a bright, spare footprint with white beds, dark wood furniture and attractive pillows in the colours of the Canadian forest: rust, moss and bark. The bathrooms are stocked with amenities by philosophy — this time it's a lowercase logo for a minimalist, avant-garde look.

There are four levels of rooms, with the ModeClub and ModeSuites offering such extras as evening turndown and access to a private lounge where guests can help themselves to a deluxe continental breakfast and afternoon hors d'oeuvres.

Technology is a major feature. Each room has a "SmartDesk." That's another

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trademarked name for a work and play station that is meant to make the most of the large flat-screen television. It has a connectivity dock for VGA graphics, audio and HDMI video interface, ideal for heavy downloads, gaming and easy access to YouTube, Netflix and TV streaming.

To make all of this happen, Delta's Internet service is 100 mbp (megabytes per second), among the highest of any hotel in Canada and is music to the ears of teenagers.

The Delta Ottawa still is business-oriented, but now it's a place where the pressures of the day will disappear. Daylight filters through to a variety of work spaces: computer stations, a boardroom table, lounges and a TV area. You can work solo or socially, but either way, it's definitely not humdrum. You can recharge your iPad, post to LinkedIn or call the boss on Skype in comfort and



The Delta Ottawa City Centre is one of the chain's newly renovated contemporary design hotels. The lobby's centrepiece is a glass, steel and wood staircase.

style. Best of all, the computers and printers are free for all guests. The perk of high-speed Internet is also significant for business travellers who want to create webcasts or online video meetings.

By cocktail hour, you'll be at the Lift lounge sipping Kichesippi, a micro-brew from Ottawa, or a Whipped Green Tea Martini. This après-work Lift space is another interior design success. It has Deco-ish armchairs and a long "harvest table" where patrons can gather and plug in mobile devices. And on a light touch, the striking

white bookshelves have whimsical touches of Canadiana, including a Mountie statue and a carving of "Eh?"

Lift, the restaurant, is another fine feature of this Delta. It's popular for breakfast and lunch buffets, as well as noontime à la carte dishes prepared with local ingredients from producers around Ottawa and Gatineau, such as a beet salad with goat cheese, a platter of charcuterie or roast chicken wrapped in prosciutto with grainy mustard.

Next week, executive chef Cameron Bryce will introduce his What's Your Beef?

fest with a choice of four cuts of Ontario beef paired with inventive sides, such as bourbon-marinated cherry tomatoes, roasted cauliflower in chili oil, lobster mac 'n' cheese or wild mushroom risotto.

The Delta is steps from the Sparks Street Mall, a 15-minute walk from Parliament Hill and about 20 from Byward Market. It's a four-star hotel with 410 totally transformed rooms and suites, more than 10 conference rooms, a gift shop and a fitness centre with an indoor pool, sauna and sun deck. So far, that's mainstream.

IF YOU GO

Ottawa is a two-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 40 west and Route 417 west in Ontario, and Exit 119.

Delta Ottawa City Centre: 888-890-3222, 613-237-3600, www.deltahotels.com/destinations/Ottawa-hotels; 101 Lyon St. N., Ottawa. Pet-friendly, \$35 for five-night stay. Self-parking, \$20; valet parking, \$25 per day.

Life restaurant: 613-688-6802, www.liftrestaurant.ca, breakfast, lunch and dinner, Mon.-Sun.

Price: Approx. \$169-\$369, incl. indoor pool, sauna, fitness room, coffee corner, business centre. Club floor, approx. \$209-\$319. Children 17 and under stay for free; children 6 and under eat for free from kids' menu.

Packages: We Pay the Taxes package starts at \$199 for two, incl. \$25 food credit and self-parking; Family package, from \$185, includes one night, breakfast buffet, self-parking and family pass to the agriculture museum.

Ottawa Tourism: 800-363-4465, www.ottawatourism.ca; National Capital Commission: 800-465-1867, www.canadascapital.gc.ca.

But I think the Delta goes the extra mile in service. It still manages to be personal. When I checked in, I went straight to lunch at Lift and restaurant manager Ahmeti noticed that I had a bad cold. Later that day, he arranged for room service to deliver herbal tea — a restorative pick-me-up — and there was no charge, which was even better. And, yes, the team told me they would have done it for any guest.

The writer was a guest of the hotel. The hotel did not approve or review the story.

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