

A new name, but same family-friendly focus

TORONTO'S EATON CHELSEA changes the décor, but doesn't diminish the hotel's appeal for children



ROCHELLE LASH

CHECKING IN

Canada's largest hotel, the Eaton Chelsea, opened this year in Toronto, and the news that rocks me is that it is no relation to the fabled Canadian family that owned department stores across the country for more than 100 years. The Eaton Chelsea actually is owned by the Langham Hospitality Group of Hong Kong, and is the first Eaton to open in Canada.

The brand's dual aims are good value, which this hotel offers in spades, and contemporary styling, which is a work in progress. The Eaton Chelsea has taken over the former Delta Chelsea, and is gradually upgrading and modernizing.

What truly sets this hotel apart is its setup for children, plus an adults-only pool on the penthouse floor. The Eaton Chelsea is huge, so there are a lot of features and dining options. I also like that most of the rooms have balconies.

"We're well on our way to becoming a four-star hotel," says Tracy Ford, the director of public relations. "We have done major renovations and already have transformed the lobby, the T|Bar lounge, the Espresso Bar and the Market Garden restaurant. And nearly 300 guest rooms were renovated last year."

The largest hotel in the country can accommodate about 3,000 people at full capacity, making it considerably larger than many countryside villages. It's big and busy, with entrances and exits around most of a city block.

The Eaton has a sweeping new reception area, with 10 check-in counters for its guests, who mostly fall into four categories: regular folk, children, airline crews and members of 1865, the reward club for guests of Langham's affiliated hotels. The recent overhaul has resulted in an inviting, contemporary lobby with marble floors and attractive grey benches.

With so many guests, and so many types of guests, there is a cornucopia of food and drink. The lobby fans out into four eateries:



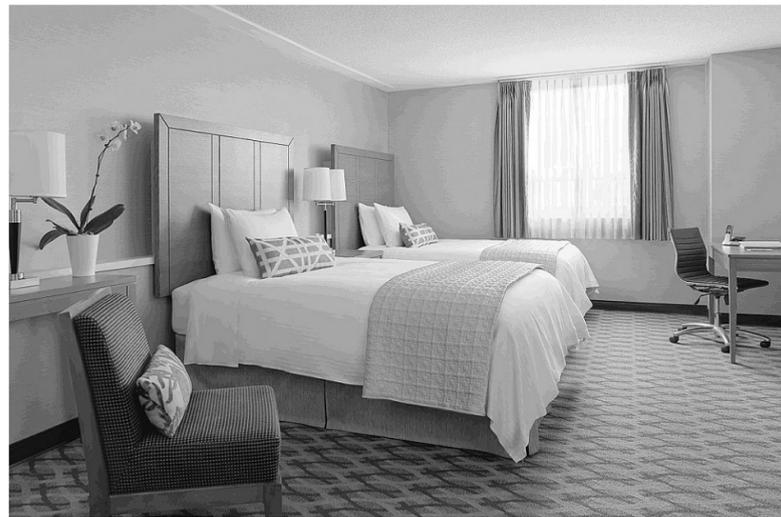
The Eaton Chelsea's check-in desk for members of 1865, the reward club for the Langham Hospitality Group, which operates the Eaton Chelsea.

PHOTOS: EATON CHELSEA, TORONTO

The Market Garden is a bright, open-concept, serve-yourself eatery. It's airy and fresh, with a great variety. You can go healthy with a salad bar, or hearty with pizza, burgers and the signature grilled cheese sandwiches, plus hot dishes of the day.

The intimate T|Bar closed down during summer for renovations, reopening with a modern look and comfy beige and brown décor. Here, the Eaton brand's signature drink is the Bloody Caesar, made with homemade clamato juice and available in five varieties. The 4-7 p.m. slot — when the Caesars cost \$9.50 instead of \$11 — is an ideal time to sample the wares. The menu features appetizers like sausages and suppers of Thai cashew chicken and N.Y. steak.

The Bb33 Bistro & Brasserie has a new wine list on iPads and dishes made with locally sourced pork, beef, Cornish hen, veal and lamb. This month's culinary theme is The Holidays, featuring a lunch buffet weekdays until Dec. 20, and deluxe meals for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, with turkey and all the trimmings, mince tarts and plum pudding. The Bb33 will join Toronto's Winterli-



The Eaton Chelsea is the first of its brand in Canada, and is the country's largest hotel, with 1,590 rooms and suites, some of which have been renovated recently.

icious resto fest, Jan. 31 to Feb. 13, offering discounted prix fixe lunches and dinners.

The Monarchs Pub has a hot thing going with live music — soft rock, indie, jazz and blues — Tuesdays through Saturdays. It opens at 5 p.m. and features such gourmet comfort food as mac 'n' cheese (made with Ontario cheddar), duck confit shepherd's

pie, pulled pork poutine and white corn nachos with chili. In true sports-bar tradition, there are large-screen televisions — an astounding total of 11 screens — tuned to the biggest games.

But let's get back to kids. During its previous incarnation as a Delta, the hotel had been named Toronto's best family getaway multiple

times by City Parent magazine. Its kid-friendly features are still going strong. The Eaton Chelsea has one- and two-bedroom family suites, each with a small kitchen, plus many other rooms with kitchenettes. The front desk hands out toys to children when they check in, and the hotel has menus for youngsters.

IF YOU GO

Porter operates nearly 20 flights daily from Montreal's Trudeau airport to the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport.

Eaton Chelsea, Toronto: 800-CHELSEA/800-243-5732, 416-595-1975, eatonchelsea.com; 33 Gerrard St. W.

Price: Rates fluctuate; rooms approximately \$139-\$399, suites \$239-\$499 for up to four people, until Dec. 30; all including Wi-Fi, Family Fun Zone, two swimming pools, fitness centre (ask about opening hours). There is a fee for guest computers. Club Rooms have access to the E-Club Lounge, with continental breakfast and all-day refreshments.

Children: Under 17 stay for free, when accompanied; children 6 and under eat for free from the children's menu; ages 7 to 12 have a children's menu. Cots and cribs are free; stroller rentals and daycare for ages 3 to 12 are available.

Show Your Key and Save Program: Eaton Chelsea offers discount coupons for attractions including the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Bata Shoe Museum, the Elmwood Spa, Second City Comedy, the Ontario Science Centre, the Royal Ontario Museum and others.

Toronto tourism: 800-499-2514, seetorontonow.com.

But it's the indoor Family Fun Zone that is the children's paradise, and a saviour for harried parents. This area on the second floor makes the Eaton Chelsea a compact, indoor urban resort. Club 33, a teen lounge and arcade, has video games, flat-screen TVs and Xbox 360s.

The Kid Centre is the place for games and crafts. And the highlight is the junior-sized indoor pool, with a water slide. Guaranteed parent relief.

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

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