

Ancient long house an addition to chic hotel

Blankets, bearskins and firepits provide rustic warmth



ROCHELLE LASH
CHECKING IN

The chic, contemporary hotel on the Huron-Wendat territory outside of Quebec City has gone back to its roots.

The Hôtel-Musée Premières Nations in Wendake has opened an annex, a long house that is a replica of the traditional dwelling used by First Nations for 1,000 years.

Premières Nations is a successful tourism complex that incorporates several elements: the deluxe 55-room hotel; the gourmet dining room La Traite; the Nation Spa and outdoor whirlpool; a boutique of intricate First Nations crafts featuring beading, stone, feathers and bone; and the fascinating Huron-Wendat Museum, whose artifacts include a canoe, artwork and a fine headdress of turkey feathers worn by grand chiefs.

The long house is the newest addition, encircled by a sturdy stockade of towering, sharply pointed poles and with a short maze at the entrance.

On the inside, the long house is warm and comfortable. It is 20 metres long and divided into 12 bunk-style platforms on two levels. Each sleeping area, about the size of a king-sized bed, accommodates two, although back in the day, a family of four or five might have snuggled in. Long-house living is toasty even in winter, because the “beds” are layered with sleeping bags and bearskins. Firepits provide heat, with the smoke channelled up through the roof. You’ll sleep well. A fire-keeper tends the flames all night and watches over your dreams.

A longhouse visit starts with a tour at 3 p.m., followed by a snack of bannock and Labrador tea, dinner at 7 p.m. in the hotel, and traditional Huron storytelling at the fire-side at 9 p.m.

For visitors who aren’t keen on the longhouse camping style, every booking also



PHOTOS: HÔTEL-MUSÉE PREMIÈRES NATIONS

The Hôtel-Musée Premières Nations is a stunning contemporary hotel and museum complex on Huron-Wendat territory near Quebec City.

comes with a Premières Nations hotel room, so if you have an overwhelming need to take a shower, catch the Habs on television or sleep in a real bed, convenience is a short dash away. The long house does have its own up-to-date loo.

The actual hotel is a ravishing reflection of nature, a blend of wilderness warmth and modern minimalism. It incorporates the outdoors with glass walls and terraces overlooking a thicket of maple, birch and ash trees,

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KONRAD SIOUI

and the rushing waters of the St. Charles River (Akiawenrahk in the Huron language).

Most striking is the contrast between the contemporary lines and rustic textures. The lobby is an enchanting space with birchbark pillars, slate floors and tables of rough-hewn timber. Thick coyote pelts are draped over leather sofas and chairs, and the white walls are an informal gallery of modern aboriginal art. In the guest rooms, such modern trappings as flat-screen televisions and fancy bathtubs



The new long house at Hôtel-Musée Premières Nations offers wilderness warmth and modern minimalism. The long house has its own up-to-date toilet.

complement the country look of log furniture, Hudson’s Bay blankets and beaver-fur pillows. Some suites also have bearskin rugs and fireplaces.

Cuisine is a highlight at Premières Nations. La

Traite embodies the same dramatic synthesis of modern and traditional. Antler chandeliers and stuffed owls coexist with pristine white tablecloths and dark chairs, and while the food is from the

IF YOU GO

Wendake is a 2½-hour drive from Montreal, and 15 minutes north of Quebec City via Route 73.

Hôtel-Musée Premières Nations: 866-551-9222, tourismewendake.ca; 5 Place de la Rencontre (Ekionki-estha), Wendake. Long-house package: \$299 per person, double occupancy, including breakfast, dinner, a museum tour, storytelling, refreshments and a hotel room with Internet. Hotel: rooms, \$159-\$189 for two; suites, \$229-\$259; children 18 and under stay for free. Extras: spa treatments, hot tub (\$25), Huron-Wendat Traditional Site tour.

La Traite: Breakfast, lunch and dinner daily; multi-course dinners \$40-\$75 per person; Sunday brunch \$25.95, or \$13 for ages 6-12.

Wendake Tourism: 418-847-1835, tourismewendake.com. Quebec City region: 877-783-1608, quebecregion.com.

La Traite’s specialties include walleye, wapiti, hickory-smoked salmon, braised rabbit and roasted buffalo, all so flavourful. Some of the adventurous new delicacies are smoked eel, sturgeon caviar and sautéed seal meat. (Rich in iron, seal tastes a little like liver, but oilier.) There’s also bannock and hearty sagamité, the Three Sisters soup of corn, beans and squash.

I had a VIP encounter while lunching at La Traite. At the next table was Konrad Sioui, two-term elected grand chief of the Huron-Wendat Nation, which accounts for most of Wendake’s 3,500 residents. He also is a constitutional expert who has won cases involving rights issues before the Supreme Court of Canada, and is a former representative in Geneva of the Assembly of First Nations. This is a man with a lot to say.

So we said “kwe” (hello), and dished about this fabulous tourism complex.

“We wanted to build something that would show our progress, talent and self-sufficiency, not our victimization,” said Sioui. “The hotel, the long house and the museum reflect pride and dignity.”

“Our community is a ‘carrefour’ for Huron, Algonquin and Innu people. Ten years ago, our people were leaving for the West, and now there is a wait-list for housing in Wendake.”

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