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The Luxe Long Weekend

by Rochelle Lash

The life of the country gentry is alluring, but elusive. One needs an estate with water and woods, and a manor house with good bones and perfectly aged interiors. Also essential is attentive, skilled staff — housekeepers, cooks, servers, bellmen and managers, all working in harmony. This languid life revolves around meals, so a capable, innovative chef is a must. It's not easy, but there is a way.

At any of the luxurious, independent hotels in the Relais & Châteaux group, you will enjoy exceptional cuisine, accommodations and service, and an experience steeped in local culture, architecture, food and nature. Nothing is perfect, but these unique establishments come close.

Montrealers have a special bond with Relais & Châteaux. We have more R&C in our long-weekend radius than any city except Paris and New York. Of course, we adore Quebec's vedettes, Manoir Hovey, La Pinsonnière and Auberge Saint-Antoine; and the R&C restaurants, Toqué! and Europea in Montreal and l'Initiale in the capital.

But what puts us near the top are 20 or so worthy neighbours in New England and New York state. Here are three exceptional getaways that originally were the glorious escapes of country gentry. Now, it's your turn.

Camden Harbour Inn

At the newest R&C member, Camden Harbour Inn in coastal Maine, days are rich with lobster, lighthouses and excursions on the Atlantic Ocean.

Dutch couple Raymond Brunyanszki and Oscar Verest have created a sumptuous guest



The top-drawer inn overlooks the Maine coast. (Photo courtesy of Camden Harbour Inn)

reality of hiking through picturesque Acadia National Park or sailing on Penobscot Bay. To integrate the rhythms of mind and body, the spa offers Zero Balancing, an East-West massage technique.

Camden Harbour Inn is an avantgarde fusion of styles. The 1874 Victorian hillside hotel contrasts a vintage exterior of porches and gables with striking modern interiors of sleek furniture, modern art and such conveniences as espresso machines and iPads.

Natalie’s, a dining room with the lively red decor of a Parisian bistro, features harvest-fresh ingredients and artful presentations.

My idea of heaven includes Atlantic lobster, every which way. You can catch your own crustacean on a dawn fishing run and then revel in Camden’s signature dish — butter-poached lobster with grilled mushrooms and parsnip ragout, paired with chardonnay.

The neighbourhood: Summer theatre at the beautifully preserved, ornate Camden Opera House includes August: Osage County. The repertoire goes global in autumn with the Camden International Film Festival of documentaries and the innovative Pop! Tech Conference.

Bedford Post Inn

Surely, the fact that Hollywood leading man Richard Gere is a co-owner is one of the Bedford Post Inn’s marquee attractions. He’s often spotted reading scripts in the garden; but we’re also swooning over Bedford’s deluxe rustic style and the country-inspired American cuisine.



Photo courtesy of Bedford Post Inn

The Bedford Post Inn is at the heart of a wooded estate in posh Westchester County, about one hour north of New York City. Charm made manifest, it has eight guest quarters with antique furniture and ceiling beams, fine dining in the Farmhouse and casual fare in The Barn. It’s best to plan ahead, because there often is no room at this tiny treasure.



Photo courtesy of Bedford Post Inn

Still, one can hope for a chance to delight in delicacies from the larder of executive chef Jeremy McMillan, which might include porcini ravioli, barbecued porchetta, smoked rib-eye and carefully crafted crudo.

Gere is a Buddhist and a devotee of the Dalai Lama, so there is a whiff of the East at this historic Yankee estate. Guests can meditate at a reflecting pool, stroll through a Zen garden and take workshops in Bedford’s Yoga Loft. In contrast, the charter of secular pursuits provides for afternoon wine tastings, and cocktails and canapés at the bar.

The neighbourhood: Horse country Westchester County is home to livery stables and inviting equestrian trails. The Katonah Museum of Art will present diverse exhibitions: Jasper Johns, Icelandic art and Samurai weapons.

Windham Hill Inn

Windham Hill Inn is a secret place of romance and relaxation high on a bluff in mid-Vermont.

Here, in the Green Mountains, the great outdoors gently calls. Windham Hill is surrounded by rugged forests, and guests are caressed by the

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bouquet and blooms of gardens of lilacs, magnolias and weeping willows. If you like structure, Windham has a heated swimming pool, a small spa and a tennis court.

Windham Hill is a classic Vermontstyle villa, white clapboard



Photo courtesy of Windham Hill Inn



Photos courtesy of Windham Hill Inn

with shutters and porches. The interiors are warmed by antiques, chintz-covered wing chairs and so many fireplaces. The 21 guest rooms have views of a pastoral valley below, and many have skylights, window seats and private decks as vantage points.

Windham Hill is a passionate proponent of the farm-and-sea-to-table ethos. Evenings start with maple martinis and wind up with Vermont ice cider. Divine dinners are built on fine regional foods: Hudson Valley foie gras, Maine Family Farms filet mignon, ravioli with Vermont blue cheese, and Atlantic oysters and scallops.



Photo courtesy of Windham Hill Inn

The neighbourhood: Kayakers can tackle the Connecticut River. The Weston Theatre Playhouse Company will stage A Chorus Line, and the prestigious Marlboro Music Festival will showcase master musicians.

More Information

Relais & Châteaux, www.relaischateaux.com

Camden Harbour Inn, Camden, Maine: www.camdenharbourinn.com

Bedford Post Inn, Bedford, N.Y.: www.bedfordpostinn.com

Windham Hill Inn: West Townshend, Vt.: www.windhamhill.com

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