

Boat in Toronto harbour a charming B&B

A unique non-hotel, big-city experience



ROCHELLE LASH

COUNTRY ROADS

Just when I thought hotel life might get humdrum, I discovered the Making Waves Boatel, a B&B operating on a trawler in the Toronto harbour. It's an engaging non-hotel experience steps from downtown Toronto. The boat is on the water; but it remains docked at all times so guests enjoy a slice of nautical life, although not a cruise on the high seas.

If you do a Google map search for Toronto B&Bs, most are spread out north of Dundas St., but Boatel is an isolated red dot well south of downtown. That's the good part. No skyscrapers, no concrete and no cars. Only open sky and the gentle lapping of waves against the hull, with the impressive Toronto skyline as a backdrop.

On the port side of the boat, the B&B yields a yacht-worthy view of the open waters of Lake Ontario and the passing flotilla of sailboats, powerboats, schooners and ocean-going ships.

On the starboard side, Boatel borders the Toronto Music Garden, a waterfront promenade that draws strollers, joggers, dog-walkers and cyclists (there is a Bixi station at the end of the quay). And, only steps from Boatel, Toronto Harbourfront will present live indoor and outdoor shows at various times, many designed for children and many for free.

When you arrive at Queen's Quay West, Captain Ted Greene will meet you and walk you down the pier to Boatel. He's a commercial maritime pilot licensed by Transport Canada, and Diane Greene is his wife, first mate and the breakfast chef.

Staying at Boatel is similar to staying at any B & B, but the surroundings are totally different. Visits usually start with a cup of coffee and an orientation in the salon. Guests can relax here, indoors, with the TV, or settle into a lounge chair on the upper deck. In fine weather, that's the ideal spot at sunset,



PHOTOS: MAKING WAVES BOATEL

The Making Waves Boatel offers a view of the Toronto skyline as well as the open waters of Lake Ontario.

and Boatel has an honour bar for wine and beer, or guests can bring their own.

In the morning, Diane cooks up a storm in the galley with a different dish daily — perhaps blueberry pumpkin pancakes, baked eggs with herbs and avocado, apple lasagna with ricotta and cheddar cheese or her signature breakfast pizza with basil pesto, kale, egg and feta.

Boatel has three staterooms: Veradero and Nassau are both in the bow, so they are cozy and triangular niches, just big enough for two people to sleep on platforms covered with foam mattresses and homespun quilts. They are compact spaces, but once you are snuggled in, they are roomier than they look. These two staterooms share a head (that's nautical talk for bathroom), which encompasses a sink, a shower and a toilet with a pedal-flush, plus a cabinet for toiletries.



Guests get a taste of nautical life with a choice of three staterooms on the Making Waves Boatel.

The Bondi is the larger stateroom, shaped more like a mainland bedroom and equipped with a flat-screen television and an iHome radio with iPod dock. This room has its own private head and more portholes for better daylight and views.

"People come to us for the uniqueness, to have a change from a standard hotel room, or for a light adventure, or

simply because they are curious about the boating lifestyle," said Diane.

Business people, usually stuck in offices where the windows don't open, appreciate the sunlight and fresh air. They can hold meetings in Boatel's breakfast room, which doubles as a boardroom on the aft deck. The boat gently rocks on the water; the ideas flow, the

vibe is positive and clients are charmed.

"It's very calm; it's a great place to have no distractions, especially since it's almost in the middle of bustling Toronto," said Montrealer Charles Quintal, president of Quintal & Co. Financial Services who travels to Toronto frequently for business.

Another Boatel guest, Gérald Brosseau, visited with his wife, Lola Thissault. "We liked the price, and we loved the personal service, much better than a big hotel," said Brosseau.

"Diane and Ted showed us to the subway, suggested restaurants and gave us discount tickets for a lot of attractions ... we were a short walk from the CN Tower ... we didn't use our car at all, just left it parked in the marina."

The Greenes have a special retreat planned in May to raise awareness of and to benefit Childhood Cancer Canada. Girls Night INN will

IF YOU GO

VIA Rail: 514 989-2626, 888-842-7245, www.viarail.ca; operates approximately seven trains daily each way between Montreal and Toronto; economy costs \$39-\$155 one-way, or \$78-\$310 round trip; business class costs \$89-\$248 one way or \$178-\$496 round trip.

By air: Air Canada and Porter Airlines operate frequent flights daily from Montreal's Trudeau Airport to the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport.

Making Waves Boatel: 647-403-2764, www.boatel.ca; 539 Queens Quay W., Toronto; operates May 1-Sept. 30.

Price: \$250 for two people in the Bondi stateroom with private head (bathroom), \$175 for Nassau and Veradero, which share a bathroom; \$525 for all three rooms for up to six people; all including wi-fi, breakfast and free telephone calls throughout North America. Special diets on request.

Tourism Toronto: 800-499-2514, 416-987-1739, www.seetorontonow.com.

be a mini-vacation for girls living with cancer. Three teenagers and their mothers will travel from their home towns to Toronto, courtesy of VIA Rail, and will enjoy a weekend on Boatel, with a City Sightseeing Toronto bus tour, a harbour cruise on Mariposa Cruises and dinner catered by Williams Fresh Café, plus gifts from Toys-R-Us, Million Dollar Smiles (a support organization) and Shoppers Drug Mart.

Boatel is docked about a half-kilometre, in various directions, from the Harbourfront Centre, the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport, Metro Toronto Convention Centre, the CN Tower, the Rogers Centre, where the Blue Jays play, and Ripley's Aquarium, which opened in 2013 with nine vast galleries of marine life. Boatel also is 1.5 kilometres from Union Station. Most guests walk everywhere, hop on the subway or rent a Bixi, just down the quay.

Rochelle@rochellelash.com
Twitter: rochellelash

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