



Le Domaine du Vieux Couvent offers splendid views of the Gulf of St. Lawrence from high atop a bluff. It is the only four-star hotel on Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

LE DOMAINE DU VIEUX COUVENT

# High drama at Îles-de-la-Madeleine

SMALL FOUR-STAR HOTEL HAS LOCAL SEAFOOD, 10 fine rooms, dazzling views and plenty to do



ROCHELLE LASH

COUNTRY ROADS

The good life thrives in a 100-year-old convent on Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Le Domaine du Vieux Couvent is a 10-room hotel with a dramatic location, high on a sandstone cliff overlooking the Gulf of St. Lawrence. With fine food, splendid panoramas and warm people, Le Domaine brings together the best elements of these special islands, a remote and unique part of Quebec, 135 kilometres north of Prince Edward Island.

Le Domaine's restaurant, La Moulière, serves freshly caught seafood, beautifully presented and so perfectly cooked that you will feel this is your first experience tasting scallops or cod. Acadian fiddle music dances in the background. Patrons always have requested tables with a view of the sunset and the sparkling water, so Le Domaine accommodated, open-

ing two additions last month: a stunning sunroom for dining and a deck for drinks.

The tender loving care of four owners over the past 28 years has made Le Domaine a treasure of Les Îles de la Madeleine. And now the foursome — Évangéline Gaudet and Réginald Poirier, and Francine Leroux and Henri-Paul Bénard — have joined with new executive chef Denis Landry and his chef du cuisine, Serge Carbonneau.

“It started as a lark more than 25 years ago,” said Poirier. “We wanted a friendly bar; then we added food and eventually guest rooms. Then we did a huge renovation to modernize.”

**The rooms: a view and more**

Le Domaine du Vieux Couvent is the only four-star hotel on Les Îles de la Madeleine, and its success is based partly on the distinguished 1914 building. It's all stone and hardwood floors, with high ceilings and large windows, and it is so substantial that it is naturally soundproof throughout.

But ultimately, the irresist-

ible feature at Le Domaine is the splendid view. Each of the 10 guest rooms overlooks the water.

When I arrived on a brilliantly sunny day a few weeks ago, my windows were all wide open, with the curtains drawn back and the sounds and sights of the sea flooding in. I didn't even ask about a television, although the inn will provide one on request.

The rooms are attractive and comfortable with good bedside lights, armoires, antique desks and club chairs (those are the loge seats for the performance of nature outside).

The beds are smothered in goose down duvets, and there are heaps of thick white bath sheets. The new showers are large glass walk-in numbers with rain faucets, spray arms and little benches. I tried the shower seat and, indeed, it was positioned so that I could gaze through a window at a lagoon.

As in a larger hotel, guests have bathrobes, extra blankets and down pillows, and a leather-bound manual with tourist suggestions.

And there is Internet and a CD player with a library of music. Le Domaine supplies locally crafted toiletries from La Fille de la Mer, whose products are rich with jojoba oil, goats' milk, honey and vanilla.

**What to eat**

I lucked into meeting the next generation of Le Domaine's family: Raphaël Poirier, who mans the front desk in summer, and Charlélie Bénard, a keen sommelier and restaurateur.

La Moulière is a gourmet bistro offering a feast of seafood from the Gulf of St. Lawrence: cod cheeks with mango coulis, mussels marinière, lobster risotto, a warm salad with scallops and a rich seafood pie. The exceptional house chowder is brimming with seafood in a light, floral coconut milk broth. I didn't expect meat, but from local farms there are super-sized portions of beef ribs, braised lamb shank and the new burger, made of lamb, crab and the islands' pride, Tomme des Demoiselles cheese.

Charlélie Bénard has cre-

ated an admirable wine list with French bubbly, wines by the glass for creative pairings and a reserve section. He talks of tension, complexity and tannic structure, and nudges clients toward his favourite vintages from the Loire, Burgundy and Washington state, as well as a vidal blanc from Domaine des Salamandres in Hemmingford.

**So much to do**

For an excursion on land, Raphaël Poirier called the outdoor outfitter Le Pédalier and the company delivered top-notch rental bicycles. We toured for three hours along country roads, over hills, down to beaches and past clusters of the brightly coloured cottages that are a trademark of the islands. To connect to other islands, you can follow Route 199, which is part of La Route Verte, with bike lanes on a shared road.

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

Rochelle@rochellelash.com  
Twitter: rochellelash

**IF YOU GO**

**Le Domaine du Vieux Couvent**

Five kilometres from the P.E.I. ferry dock on Île du Cap-aux-Meules and five kilometres from the airport on Île du Havre-aux-Maisons. Pickup is available.

Le Domaine du Vieux Couvent: 418-969-2233, domaineduvieuxcouvent.com; 292 Route 199, Île du Havre-aux-Maisons, Îles-de-la-Madeleine. Closed January to April.

Price: including breakfast, Wi-Fi, until Aug. 30, \$200-\$275, for two; Sept. 1 to 14, \$175-\$250; from Sept. 15, \$175-\$199. Packages available with Champagne, chocolates, massage at Spa La Brume de Mer.

La Moulière: open nightly until the end of September.

Îles-de-la-Madeleine: 877-624-4437, tourismiles-delamadeleine.com.

## WHERE TO STAY

ALSO FIND US ON [montrealgazette.com/wheretostay](http://montrealgazette.com/wheretostay)

TO ADVERTISE please call 514-987-2350

**1000 ISLANDS**

**GLEN HOUSE RESORT – SMUGGLERS GLEN GOLF COURSE**

In the Heart of the 1000 Islands and choose from one of our many Stay and Play or Romance Packages, starting at \$136 per night based on double occupancy. Enjoy our 18 hole championship golf course, onsite spa, casual fine dining, local Theatre, Boat Cruises and Casino. Visit [www.glenhouseressort.com](http://www.glenhouseressort.com) or Call **1-800-268-4536** for details.

**NEW YORK**

**RIVERSIDE TOWER HOTEL – NEW YORK CITY**

Singles USD \$134. Doubles USD \$139. Suites USD \$149-\$169. Lincoln Center area. Hudson River views, 18 floors, kitchenette, 5 minutes to midtown. Safe, quiet luxury area. Riverside Drive & 80<sup>th</sup> Street. For more info, call **800-724-3136** or visit [www.riversidetowerhotel.com](http://www.riversidetowerhotel.com)

**AMERICA'S BEST VALUE INN**

In wonderful Plattsburgh, NY. Only \$140 for 2 nights. Canadian cash. Up to 2 people, additional pers. add \$10 more per night. Free continental breakfast. Located conveniently off exit 37 on I-87. Some holidays, wknds & spec. events do not apply. Up to 70% occ. daily. Based on availability. Call 518.563.0222 or toll free 1.800.358.2137

**NEW HAMPSHIRE**

**WHITE MOUNTAINS • NORTH CONWAY**

Enjoy the comforts of our historic “country elegant” boutique hotel with panoramic mountain views, cozy Martini Library Lounge, renowned international dining. Some guest rooms with fireplaces and/or Jacuzzi. Golf, hiking & tax-free outlet shopping nearby. From \$78ppdo(US) includes Full Breakfast & Dinner (off regular full menu). Photos, amenities & menu online. **603-421-6146**

[www.StonehurstManor.com](http://www.StonehurstManor.com)

**MAINE**

**OCEAN WOODS RESORT**

**Goose Rocks Beach Kennebunkport**

RELAX, peaceful, affordable lodging near sandy beach. Spacious rooms include full bath, cable TV, wireless, AC, mini-fridge, coffeemakers, hairdryers and FREE breakfast. Outdoor pool, hot tub, shuffleboard. Complimentary beach towels, chairs & umbrellas. 10% discount for 5 or more nights. Call Kathleen Spang @ **207-967-1928. [www.oceanwoodsresort.com](http://www.oceanwoodsresort.com)**

**VERMONT**

**SMART SUITES**

Summer Special. Come and enjoy our hospitality in either a studio efficiency at US \$92.95 or a more spacious one bedroom suite at US \$102.95/night, including a deluxe continental breakfast and free WIFI. Call toll free **877.862.6800** and mention the Gazette special. Not valid with other discounts and subject to availability. Effective 05/02/14. 1700 Shelburne Rd., So. Burlington, Vt. Take Exit 13 off I-89, left on rt. 7 for 1.5 miles, same entrance as Holiday Inn Express.

**NEW JERSEY**

**DIAMOND CREST MOTEL Across The Street From The Beach Book Now And Save**

All rooms have pool/ocean view. Includes daily maid service, BBQ facilities, sun decks. August specials and Labour Day packages available. Kitchenettes and rooms starting from 5 nights for \$795. All rates based on 4 people, additional person per night \$10. For more details please visit our website. Diamond Crest Motel, 7011 Atlantic ave, Wildwood Crest, NJ 08260 **(609) 522 1700** [www.Diamondcrestmotel.Com](http://www.Diamondcrestmotel.Com)