

Châteauguay convent transformed into resort



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

Le Manoir D’Youville in Châteauguay is crystal-clear proof that the clergy in Quebec historically has scored magnificent locations for their countryside monasteries and convents.

One of those splendid properties has been transformed into a low-budget resort with few-frills lodging and food, but terrific options for the outdoors.

Kayakers, paddleboarders and kite surfers can set off from the Châteauguay Nautical Centre on the riverfront beach. Cyclists arrive after conquering trails around Châteauguay that link with the extensive network through Montérégie. Bird watchers and other nature lovers can explore the Marguerite-D’Youville Wildlife Refuge. The most laid-back option is settling into an Adirondack chair on the lawn, and gazing at the far-off views of Montreal skyline.

Le Manoir D’Youville is a modest but picturesque resort that operates in what once was a retreat owned by the Grey Nuns, and named for Sainte Marguerite d’Youville, the founder of their order, formally known as the Order of Sisters of Charity of Montreal. (Spelling has evolved, though. Mère Marguerite used d’Youville and the Châteauguay installations write D’Youville.)

The hotel is part of Île Saint-Bernard, a 400-hectare spread about the size of Stanley Park in Vancouver or about twice the size of Mount Royal Park in Montreal. The town of Châteauguay owns this idyllic island that is surrounded by the St. Lawrence River where it meets the Châteauguay River and Lake St. Louis.

Le Manoir D’Youville is a two-star hotel out of a possible five on Tourism Quebec’s rating system. The nuns’ “cells” have been renovated into simple rooms with austere decor and single or double beds, with some rooms sharing bathrooms. There are TVs lounges on every floor, but not in the guest rooms. And the meals that are included are basic buffets — breakfasts of bacon, eggs and cereal; and lunches and dinners with salads bars, soups, vegetarian choices and



Le Manoir D’Youville, has two types of accommodations — traditional and contemporary, shown above. PHOTOS: LE MANOIR D’YOUVILLE



The two-star resort on Île Saint-Bernard in Châteauguay is a paradise for both cyclists and lovers of water sports.

main courses, plus a variety of desserts. The hotel is open year-round, hosting mostly school groups, choirs and sports organizations during winter, and lots of individual travellers in summer. It is operated by Compagnon, a non-profit organization whose main mission is to create a hotel accessible to people with modest budgets, such as seniors or families with challenged children. However, Le Manoir is open to everyone who wants to take advantage of its charms.

Besides Le Manoir D’Youville, Île Saint-Bernard also is home to other features and lots of indoor and outdoor events.

La Traite Bistro serves casual fare in indoor and outdoor sec-

tions at the edge of an orchard, where the original apple trees were planted during the 1700s by Mère Marguerite and her colleagues.

Here the specialty is Quebec terroir, so there are micro-brews from around the province, local wines and ciders, and a menu that includes duck burgers, sausages, beef tartare, salads, smoked salmon and pasta.

The Marguerite-D’Youville Wildlife Refuge is a big draw. Hotel guests and the public can join nature walks or simply wander through the trails. Archaeological discovery tours focus on artifacts from pre-European Iroquois settlements of the 1500s.

Animals lovers should pick up

the guidebook to the sanctuary that has a checklist of 227 birds, 22 mammals, and 12 reptiles and amphibians that call the island home, so there are sightings of deer, groundhogs, turtles, river otters, porcupines, fox and beaver; and feathered friends such as wrens, gulls, sandpipers, owls, cranes, swallows, flycatchers, warblers and hawks.

The Eco-Marché de l’Île, Aug. 22 and 23, will bring together more than 70 food producers and artisans. Organic orchards flourish on the island and the pick-your-own apple season starts in mid-September, with five varieties available. The Marché Pommes et Saveurs, around the third week of September, will focus on apple products — jams, pies and ciders. A guided hike on Oct. 4 will focus on mycology, the study of mushrooms, and it will be followed by dinner at Café de l’Île. The Pavillon de l’Île, a French-language summer theatre, will showcase La vieille demoiselle, a comedy written by the late Quebec author and broadcaster Albert Martin, until Aug. 29.

Finally, getting to Île Saint-Bernard can be a big part of the fun. You can park your car at the Lachine Marina and take a one-hour ferry from the Montreal mainland to the island. Or you can cycle from Montreal to Lachine and board the ferry with your bike at no extra charge.

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IF YOU GO

Île Saint-Bernard is about a 30-minute drive from downtown Montreal, via the Champlain Bridge, and Highway 30 to Exit 38, or the Mercier Bridge to Châteauguay.

Manoir d’Youville: 450-692-8291, manoiryouville.com; Île Saint-Bernard, Châteauguay.

Île Saint-Bernard & Marguerite-D’Youville Wildlife Refuge: 450-698-3133, www.ilesaintbernard.com.

Price: some rooms have shared bathrooms; \$90-\$108 per night for two people including breakfast, or \$117-\$133 for two with three buffet-style meals. Single rates: \$62-\$99 including breakfast, or \$73-\$107 with three meals. All rates include outdoor heated pool, use of kayaks and canoes; Wi-Fi in the lobby, television lounges, access to the wildlife refuge Marguerite D’Youville. Extra: massages, gift shop.

Navark Maritime Shuttle, from Lachine Marina, near 6th Ave.: 514-871-8356, navark.ca; \$9 for adults, \$5 for children 6-12; \$23 for families (cash only); operates weekends and holidays; bicycles permitted.

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