

Professional sports is a theme at Toronto's Le Germain Hotel Maple Leaf Square, which faces the Air Canada Centre. *LE GERMAIN HOTELS*

Toronto's Le Germain is a minimalist's dream

Hotel offers cutting-edge contemporary design, lounge dining



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

Québec sait faire.

A recent visit to Le Germain Hotel Maple Leaf Square in Toronto was my first to the brand outside of Quebec, and I can't think of a better hospitality ambassador to show off our province's savoir faire.

Le Germain has cutting-edge contemporary design, lounge dining and a sexy, hip ambience.

Quebec-based Lemay-Michaud Architecture & Design created a minimalist's dream of industrial chic with slate, glass and steel and natural honey-coloured wood.

I am mad for modern, and the contrast of feminine white linen curtains against masculine charcoal stone gave me frissons. The serene look also is a soothing respite from the bustle outdoors — Le Germain is two blocks from Union Station and across the street from Air Canada Centre.

The hotel is moderately priced for its pivotal location, luxe interiors and attentive service. The sleek rooms start at \$269 and suites at about \$400, which includes lots of perks, including a gourmet continental breakfast, Lacoste sports gear on loan for the fitness room, freshly baked cookies after lunch and Sleep-In Sundays, which is a late-check-out, if available.

Toronto is the fourth largest city in North America in population after Mexico City, New York and Los Angeles, and a larger five-star international chain

hotel might run \$400-\$700 for a room and \$700-\$1,000 for a suite.

I received a pre-arrival email from Le Germain asking for my preferences, so I requested — and received — decaf pods for my Nespresso machine, a down pillow and a reservation for supper at Play.

FOOD AND DRINK

Play is the hotel's dining and drinking lounge, decked out in smart black and white with low-backed leather bar stools and high-topped tables. Most of the lounging travellers — 90 per cent men on my visit — are fixated on their laptops or the flat-screen TVs.

The bar has good wines by the glass and local Steam Whistle beer on tap and the boutique menu features bison sliders, crab cakes, peppers stuffed with quinoa and black bean purée, chicken and andouille sausage gumbo, and, a nod to Quebec, poutine.

The concert and game nights at Air Canada are crazy, but so

much fun at Play, before and after the action. Madonna was on stage a few weeks ago, Paul McCartney plays Oct. 17, The Who on Oct. 19, NBA's Raptors on the Oct. 18 and 28, and the Toronto Maple Leafs on the Oct. 26 and 31.

Inspired by pro sports, the hotel's event spaces are named the Offensive Zone, the Defensive Zone and the new All-Star Room, an ultra-modern venue for weddings or meetings.

Breakfast is served in the MVP room, a bright mezzanine lounge. A large European-style buffet of cold treats is included for all guests: fruit, yogurt, charcuterie, cheese, breads, jams, with tea and cappuccino. You can also order such hot dishes (\$7 to \$11) as Germain's pain perdu dipped in custard, smoked salmon on a brioche or a spinach and cheese omelette.

THE GUEST ROOMS

The 167 rooms and suites are spacious and sleek, with clean lines and large windows. The flat-screen TV is tucked into a wall niche and the mini-bar and tech outlets are hidden in the long modular desk, so the lean look is unmarred.

The one point of drama is the artwork. Each room is graced by one mural-sized, black and white image by Toronto photographer Matthew Plexman. The images are close-ups of real-life NHL and NBA players in training — artistically detailing the ripped abs and bulging biceps of the elite

IF YOU GO

■ Via Rail (514-989-2626, 888-842-7245, viarail.ca) operates up to nine daily departures between Montreal and Toronto, with travel times from four-and-half to seven hours (via Ottawa). Look online on Tuesdays or sign up to receive the Discount Tuesday weekly offer.

Depending on which train and when you book, regular economy costs \$39-\$155 one way or \$78-\$310 round trip. Business class costs \$89-\$248 one way, or \$178-\$496 round trip, and includes meals, wine and beverages, lounges in each city and priority boarding. Some tickets are flexible.

Le Germain Hotel Maple Leaf Square: 888-940-7575, 416-649-7575, legermainhotels.com; 75 Bremner Blvd., Toronto, Ont. Pet-friendly.

Price: rates start at \$269 for two, per night, including Wi-Fi, deluxe continental breakfast, movies on HDTV, fitness room, newspapers, coffee corner, car charging stations.

Packages: Dinner Is Served, from \$557 for two, adds a half-bottle of Champagne and a \$200 credit at Elleven restaurant. The Family Package, about \$100 per person, for two adults, two children, adds parking, a 2 p.m. checkout and Ripley's Aquarium. The Spa Retreat starts at \$990 for two, per night, with a visit to Elmwood Spa, a 50-minute couple's aromatherapy massage in a fireplace suite, facials for two, lunch and a gift of Elmwood bathrobes.

Play Lounge: 416-649-7575; Mon.-Fri. 11:30 a.m.-1 a.m.; Sat.-Sun. & holidays, 4 p.m.-1 a.m.

Toronto: 416-987-1739, www.seetorontonow.com; Ontario Tourism, live chats at: ontariotravel.net.

athletes, with evocative lighting and composition.

On the practical side, the guest rooms have user-friendly, bedside lighting control panels and the bathrooms have over-sized sinks, bath-showers and large vanities with posh Molton Brown toiletries. The WCs are private, with extra phones. The beds are so comforting that Le Germain sells all of its bedding, right down to the mattresses. I was smothered in a goose down duvet, with Egyptian cotton sheets by Frette and a dark blanket folded at the end of the bed — a subtle addition by Montreal designer Marie Saint Pierre.

The room key card activates the lighting system, part of the hotel's eco-plan that includes thermal windows, air and water filtration, filtration, heat and hot water recovery and dual flush toilets.

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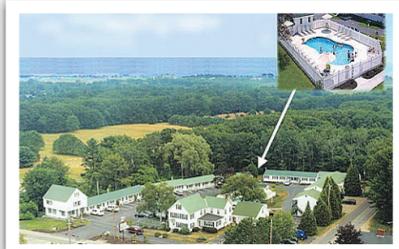
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