



The InterContinental Toronto Centre is attached to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. In addition to its business connections, the hotel is popular with families. PHOTOS: INTERCONTINENTAL TORONTO CENTRE

INTERCONTINENTAL TORONTO AT THE CENTRE OF THE ACTION



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

This is a tale of two InterContinental hotels. On Oct. 22, Checking In looked at the InterContinental Toronto Yorkville, a chic boutique-style getaway on Toronto's stylish Bloor St.

Today, we visit the InterContinental Toronto Centre, a world away in the Queen City's business district, and also at the heart of top tourist attractions.

The concept of a towering, full-service hotel has a lot of competition in the day of boutiques and Airbnb, but the vibrant InterContinental Toronto Centre proves this genre still is alive and thriving.

And heck, why not have it all?

The 25-storey InterContinental Toronto Centre features 584 well-appointed guest rooms and suites known for their



Azure Restaurant & Bar is bathed in sunlight or the glow of nightlights.

sweeping views of either Lake Ontario or the landmarks of downtown.

The hotel features a full-service spa, an indoor pool, an excellent concierge desk, guest computers, a gift shop, drinks and dining, and it is attached to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, right next door. Whew!

Above all, this hotel is a deluxe getaway with accessible prices.

Guest register: U.S. President Barack Obama chose to stay here because of the high-security op-

tions in the underground parking entrance.

Ditto for so many entertainment stars who have popped in over the years at TIFF (the Toronto International Film Festival), including Meryl Streep, Jude Law and Scarlett Johansson.

With its freshly renovated ballroom and state-of-the-art boardrooms, the hotel is a business venue, too, surrounded by skyscrapers with logos such as PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers),

IF YOU GO

The hotel is two blocks from Union Station/Union Pearson Express and three kilometres from Toronto Island Airport.

InterContinental Toronto Centre: 800-422-7969, 416-597-1400, torontocentre.intercontinental.com; 225 Front St. W., Toronto, Ont.

Price: Prices fluctuate. In Oct.-Nov., five categories of rooms start at approximately \$215 (suites cost more), including indoor pool, whirlpool, 24-hour computers, 24-hour fitness centre and when available, kids' weekend playroom and movie nights. Children under 18 stay for free. Packages sometimes available with sport tickets (Toronto Raptors, Maple Leafs, Blue Jays); shopping with a \$50 Yorkdale Gift Card; Ripley's Aquarium and romantic stays with breakfast in bed. Extra: Spa treatments; valet, \$45, or self-parking, \$25; pet-friendly (weight limit), \$50 per visit. It's free to sign up for IHG Business Rewards, and Wi-Fi is included even for on-the-spot members.

Azure Restaurant & Bar: azurerestaurant.ca; breakfast, lunch, dinner, bar menu, cocktails served daily.

Spa InterContinental: 416-597-8142.

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

Telus, RBC and TD.

But what surprised me about the InterContinental Toronto Centre is the hotel's popularity as a family destination. It has free lodging for kids under 18, free buffet breakfast for those five and under and 50 per cent off for ages six to 10.

The irresistible family factor is that Canada's biggest attractions all are within a few blocks: the CN Tower, the Rogers Centre, Air Canada Centre, the Hockey Hall of Fame, Ripley's Aquarium of Canada and Harbourfront with its promenade for cycling and strolling.

Culture vultures are in the zone, too. In November, Roy Thomson Hall, just up the street, will present the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Raffi, Gordon Lightfoot and Itzhak Perlman's Cinema Serenade.

The season's coup will be the Art Gallery of Ontario's Mystical Landscapes: Masterpieces from Monet, van Gogh and more, exhibiting 36 artists including Emily Carr, Paul Gauguin, Wassily Kandinsky and Edvard Munch (Oct. 22 to Jan. 29, 2017).

Hotel life: Art lovers don't even have to go that far. The grand lobby of InterContinental Toronto Centre is a showcase for super-sized acrylic works by Lisabel, an artist from Montreal. The hotel's entrance rotunda of glass, ebony and white makes an ideal gallery for these colourful abstracts.

Elevators glide up to several levels of rooms and suites, each equipped for convenience with a 42-inch television, pod-coffee maker, iHome clock system, ergonomic work desk and bathrobes. The look is classic-contemporary, with understated furniture and neutral tones allow the great views to stand out. The Feature Guestrooms, on floors 18 to 25, are the most recently renovated.

The Club InterContinental accommodations on floors eight and nine take it up a notch with upgraded furnishings, Bose sound systems and on-demand TV movies.

Club Level is not that much more expensive than non-Club, and it is so handy. Surrounded by windows and with views of Lake Ontario, the exclusive Club Lounge is a pleasant retreat with a dedicated concierge, plus a fancy continental breakfast, afternoon refreshments and evening hors d'oeuvres. Club members also have free valet parking, morning car service within five kilometres and a private check-in desk.

If you need a break from work or sightseeing, Spa InterContinental has 10 treatment rooms for massages, body therapy, skin care and esthetic services with high-quality, plant-based Aveda products.

For me, a highlight of this hotel is the 16-metre indoor saline pool — a blessing after any long day in the big city.

Food & Drink: Life centres around Azure Restaurant & Bar, which is a street-level bistro that serves breakfast (buffet or menu), lunch, dinner and bar bites.

Covered by an atrium, the stretch of tables on Front St. is an indoor sidewalk café, bathed in the daytime sun, the glow of the sunset or nightlights.

Power lunches are cool and creative: Ricotta & spinach agnolotti or blackened cod tacos, with a finish of limoncello cherry pie. At the bar there are sharing plates of cheese, charcuterie and bruschetta. Dinner adds beef tenderloin, almond-crusted salmon, pan-seared pickerel or glazed duck breast.

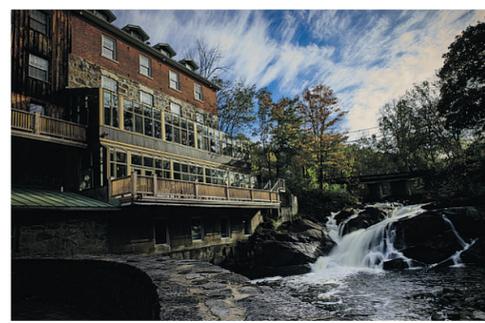
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