



The four-star Hôtel Valcartier opened recently at the heart of an elaborate family playground. The dazzling new Bora Parc, right, part of Village Vacances Valcartier, is six times the size of an NHL hockey rink and is designed for all tastes, from laid-back lounging to wave adventures for the more daring. PHOTOS: VILLAGE VACANCES VALCARTIER

CHECKING IN

Family fun factor ramped up at Village Vacances Valcartier



ROCHELLE LASH

“All adults must be accompanied by a child.”

It's not a hard and fast rule, but it is the slogan and spirit of Village Vacances Valcartier, a resort with exceptional indoor and outdoor playgrounds for families. Actually it's more than a resort. It is a phenomenon.

A 30-minute drive north of Quebec City, Valcartier has operated for several years with an elaborate summertime water park and an astounding, big-league mountain of fun, the Winter Playground, arguably the largest installation of its kind in North America.

Recently, the vacation village added two outstanding elements. First, the swish Hôtel Valcartier completes the resort scenario with four-star lodging, several restaurants, an arcade, a gift shop and Spa Valcartier, a welcome grown-up option.

Second, the new Bora Parc, the largest indoor water park in

Quebec. It's a balmy 30 C at the Polynesian-style park, which has space for up to 1,500 revellers at one time.

Bora Parc was designed for all tastes. Water lovers can choose laid-back lounging in the lazy river and the 24-person hot tub, or frolicking in kids' play areas or mastering daring feats on the double surf wave.

NEW HOTEL

Flexibility is the key here. Opened three months ago, Hôtel Valcartier has 153 accommodations, mostly suites with king or queen beds, and some deluxe models with individual whirlpools on private balconies. All the units have extra Murphy beds (or two beds), so even the regular rooms can handle two adults and two children.

The look is contemporary, with neutral colours and uncluttered spaces. Perks include flat-screen TVs (two in some of the suites), desks, mini-fridges, coffee machines and very pleasant heated bathroom floors.

The room rates are relatively moderate, but meals and most activities are extra and the accommodations don't have kitchens for “cooking in,” so it's restaurant food all the way.

The new hotel rounds out Valcartier's family appeal to multiple generations. Kids have the unparalleled indoor and outdoor playgrounds, plus a new arcade. And for adults, the Aroma Spa is a blissful world with hot and cold baths, massages and body treatments. For a moment of togetherness, the spa offers a parent-child massage.

FOOD

The expanded resort is home to so many eateries, you can have a bite or a family meal almost everywhere, almost any time.

The Resto Polynésie, in the new Bora Parc, is a poolside cafeteria for burgers, hotdogs, fries and slushies. Bar Tahiti is on the second floor, so you can watch the action while sipping a daiquiri. Le Chalet Sportif is a sports hangout with 14 televisions, breakfasts of baked goods and suppers of wings, paninis and charcuterie. The Marina is a hit for its Saturday night buffet.

Other options throughout the resort include Le Refuge, Café Etcetera and Resto Safari, for sandwiches, salads and pizza.

The O Grill is the most sophisticated of the dining spots. It has an ambitious menu of delicacies, including starters of tuna tataki,

IF YOU GO

Valcartier is about 270 kilometres from Montreal via Highway 40, and 30 kilometres north of Quebec City.

Hôtel Valcartier

888-384-5524, 418-844-2200, valcartier.com; 1860 Valcartier Blvd., Valcartier. (Valcartier is affiliated with Calypso, near Ottawa).

Price: Sun.-Thurs., \$119-\$239 per night (or \$169-499 Fri.-Sat.), for four people (two-bedroom suites can handle six), including in-room coffee, Wi-Fi, game arcade, skating. Rates are lower March 21 to June 19.

Activities: Hotel guests get a 10-per-cent discount on activities. Children three and under do not pay. Winter Playground (tubing, skating, until March 26):

\$10.95-\$29.95, depending on age. Extra: skate rentals, \$4.95; shuttle from Quebec City, visit to Hôtel de Glace, clothes dryer. Access to Aroma Spa thermal baths, \$20-\$30, depending on day/time (steam room, sauna, outdoor and indoor hot tubs, cold baths, fireplace lounge). Dorm rooms are available for school groups. Camping is seasonal.

Bora Parc

Reservations required for non-hotel guests. \$36.95, if your height is 1.32 metres or more, with discounts for smaller children and seniors. Ages two and under don't pay. Evening rates are lower. Locker, \$10.

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sautéed scallops, beef or salmon tartare and crab cakes; plus such main courses as maple-braised wild boar bacon, Cornish hen, roasted cod, duck breast, osso bucco and steaks.

WINTER PLAYGROUND

You can hear the shrieks of delight across the resort from the Winter Playground. Valcartier's amazing mountain of fun features 17 mechanical uphill lifts and more than 35 thrilling downhill tubing and rafting trails with names like Avalanche, Tornado and Everest.

The views of the Vallée de la Jacques-Cartier are impressive — but with some adventurers reaching speeds of up to 60 km/h, you might not have time to look.

On the tamer side, even the littlest guests can try the skating rink and the playground, which has an ice castle and a maze. There is never a dull moment. On March 17-19, Valcartier will host dog sledding races.

SUMMER

Adventures include rafting challenging excursions in Class R-III to R-IV rapids, white-water swimming, treetop climbing and ziplining, plus the rollicking Hydro-Speed, similar to a motorized surfboard. A visit to the patio bar and a hot tub can cap your day. The outdoor water park features a huge wave pool, 35 water slides, a family pool and toys and games.

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