



The Signature log cabin rooms, refurbished in July, offer vintage-chic hideaways at Mont Gabriel Resort & Spa. MONT GABRIEL RESORT & SPA

# Laurentian landmark gets chic makeover



ROCHELLE LASH

What makes a legend? In the case of Mont Gabriel Resort & Spa, it is 80 years of fine hospitality, superlative sports, hearty cuisine and great value. This Laurentian landmark still is hot. It is full on weekdays with blue-chip clients visiting for university retreats, charity golf tournaments and business conferences. And it is jumping on weekends with families and couples who want to be outdoors, but with such weatherproof options as the indoor pool and Spa Relaxia. Mont Gabriel's guest register is loaded with decades of VIP names, including Jean Drapeau, Robert Bourassa, Pierre Elliott Trudeau and a Kennedy or two. Even Justin Trudeau and Sophie Grégoire Trudeau popped in after he won the federal election. Ordinary folks count, too. Among my dinner companions were Sue Knight and her father, Ed Knight, who drove over from nearby Ste-Anne-des-Lacs. When bar manager Janet Richards spotted Ed Knight, a former

lunch club habitué, she came straight over and hugged him. **What's new?:** Almost everything. The indoor pool sparkles with new tiling and deck chairs. The guest rooms have all been redone and the dining room is just about to have a new country look. The St. Moritz Bar has been renovated from scratch and now sports flat-screens, stylish lounge areas, high-top tables and a sleek new bar. **Rooms:** All three wings — a total of 135 guest rooms — have been overhauled and all guests have bathrobes, new TVs, mini-fridges, coffee machines, updated bathrooms and beds with pristine white bedding. The superior Tyrol section has kitchenettes and balconies or patios overlooking the valley. The Marquise wing, also renovated, offers two adjoining rooms at a special rate for two adults and two children. The 16 rustic Signature log cabin rooms are Mont Gabriel's pride and joy. Renovated right down to the wall studs in June (except for the precious original timber), the vintage-chic hideaways are equipped with new beds, furniture and eco-friendly gas fireplaces. **Food:** The wildly popular buffets still are a mainstay for breakfast, lunch and especially brunch, which is a good buy at \$16.95, and you can tack on the fancy

section, \$8.95, for roast beef and other goodies. New executive chef Daniel Lapierre and chef de cuisine Samuel Larochelle have added smoked duck and enoki mushroom tarts to the dinner menu, plus main courses of braised lamb with tamari, rib steaks and grilled salmon. It's all an upgrade, to go with the new decor, coming in the next few weeks. **Setting:** Virtually none better. A 35-minute drive north of Montreal's Décarie Circle, Mont Gabriel commands a mountaintop plateau at an elevation of about 300 metres, with grand views of the St-Sauveur Valley. Built around a courtyard shaded by maples, birches, pines and apple trees, Mont Gabriel is a resort in the truest sense, meaning there is recreation for everyone. I perused the scene from a patio perch: women playing tennis doubles, boys leaping at beach volleyball, girls tanning at the outdoor pool (heated to 26C), toddlers scrambling up a playhouse and golfers coming off the links to the Terrace BBQ. The is more fun nearby at the Les Sommets Water Park in St-Sauveur and Village du Père Noël in Val-David. **Tradition:** Generations of Montrealers, Ottawans and visitors from the U.S. have learned to ski at Mont Gabriel. And generations of families have marked

celebrations here. The resort holds about 65 weddings a year, as well as anniversaries, birthdays and bar mitzvahs, complete with a kosher kitchen. There even is a golf cart "limousine" that takes bridal parties to the resort's best photo locations. **Sports:** Gabriel's six clay tennis courts have been host to many tournaments sanctioned by the Fédération québécoise de tennis. And the hotel is the first one in Canada to have a beach tennis court — think beach volleyball, with a tennis racket. Mont Gabriel Golf, which has greens and fairways of "bent grass," plays host to more than 50 golf tournaments a year. This par-71 course of 6,061 yards is prized for its 360-degree views from the mountain's summit. The club also has a pro shop and a ninth-hole snack bar. Ski Mont Gabriel, now part of Les Sommets, is less than 25 metres from the hotel's front door. Small and feisty, it has classic trails, glades and some of the toughest moguls in Quebec, which have challenged the Dufour-Lapointe sisters, Alexandre Bilodeau, Mikael Kingsbury and Jean-Luc Brassard. Sommet Gabriel has held the FIS Freestyle World Cup frequently during the past 30 years. Rochelle@rochellelash.com Twitter: rochellelash

## IF YOU GO

**Mont Gabriel Resort & Spa:** 800-668-5253, 450-229-3547, montgabriel.com; 1699 Chemin Mont Gabriel, Ste-Adèle. **Price:** Rates fluctuate and are approximate. In high season (mid-May to mid-October), rooms start at \$134, including Wi-Fi, in-room coffee, indoor/outdoor swimming pools, hot tub, sauna, fitness room, six clay tennis courts, golf practice net and putting green, winter skating. Suites start at \$224 in high season, two- and three-bedroom condos start at \$350, and two chalets are available. Guests 60 and over get a 10-per-cent discount. Fifteen per cent off or free golf on visits of two nights or more. Children 16 and under stay for free. Kids six to 12 pay half price for meals; under six eat for free. **Extra:** 18-hole championship golf, treatments at Spa Relaxia, winter skiing, winter "crazy carpet" sliding, in-room dining, aqua fitness classes. **Laurentians info:** 800-561-NORD (6673), laurentides.com

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