



The new room decor at Novotel on de la Montagne St. is fresh and neutral with woody accents. PHOTOS: NOVOTEL MONTREAL CENTRE

IF YOU GO

Novotel Montréal Centre: 514-861-6000; novotelmontreal.com; 1180 de la Montagne St., Montreal. Le Club AccorHotels loyalty program applies, and soon that will expand to points plans for Fairmont, Raffles and Swissôtel.
Price: Rates are approximate and fluctuate. High season (May-Oct.) \$199-\$299; low season (Jan.-April, Nov.-Dec.) \$139-\$169, including Wi-Fi, in-room coffee, 24-hour fitness centre, guest computers and printer. Extra: mini-bar, indoor parking (\$30 per night for guests or \$20 for less than 10 hours).
Restaurant l'Ô: breakfast (buffet, \$16.50 or \$19.50 or à la carte), lunch, dinner daily from 6:30 a.m. – 10:30 p.m. Room service available. Gluten-free, vegetarian choices. Free breakfast for children under 16, if sharing their parents' room.

Updated Novotel is hot ticket to Bell Centre

Renovation keeps it a strong contender in the downtown hospitality game



ROCHELLE LASH

Novotel Montreal Centre is not resting on its pivotal location and accessible rates. No way. The hotel recently unveiled a \$6-million renovation that keeps it a strong contender in the booming downtown hospitality game. True, the Novotel brand is popular for its prices, which could mean a family of four would pay approximately \$199 to \$299, depending on the season. And, Novotel is known for its core downtown space on de la Montagne St. between Ste-Catherine St. W. and René Lévesque Blvd., steps from the nightlife of Crescent St. and from Holt Renfrew's upcoming new store. Most interesting, if you are heading to the Bell Centre from Ottawa, the West Island, Laval, the South Shore, the Laurentians or the Eastern Townships, the Novotel is also an accessible front-row room to the big stage,



The new lobby at Novotel Montreal Centre in downtown Montreal pops with colour after a major renovation.

350 metres down the street. The Bell Centre fall calendar includes Roger Waters Oct. 16, 17, 19; Imagine Dragons Oct. 27; Montreal Canadiens against the Chicago Blackhawks Oct. 10, and against the Toronto Maple Leafs Oct. 14. The Nov. 6 Tower of Song tribute to Leonard Cohen will include performances by his son Adam Cohen, Sting, Elvis Costello, Feist, k.d. lang, Damien Rice and Patrick Watson, among others. Hotel location and price are two valuable criteria, but with a half-dozen international brands operating within a few blocks, Novotel has upped its game. "It is as if we are brand new," general manager Thomas Deegan said about the update. "Our lobby is cheerful and trendy, the meeting spaces have

been upgraded with multimedia facilities and our guest rooms are well equipped and modern. "And Novotel is smaller than the towering hotels around us, so our service is more personal." **New rooms:** Novotel's four-star rating sparkles after this year's update. The hotel spent \$30,000 each on 200 of its 227 guest rooms. The sharp new accommodations have up-to-the minute decor and lean, modern lines. They are comfortable escapes from the frantic street scenes below, with blackout drapes for calm nights, floor-to-ceiling windows for bright days, large flat-screen TVs, work desks and bedside lighting control panels. I especially like the clever inset LED lighting that guests can

adjust for ambience and mood. For family flexibility, many rooms have two doubles or one king bed plus a double pull-out sofa to accommodate four. The hotel also offers choices of feather or foam pillows and wood floors or carpeting. The bathrooms are all new, all white and glass, with handsome Grohe chrome rain showers. As well, the Novotel brand boasts fair-trade soap and shampoo made from sugar cane in South America. Some of the new designs are refreshing and fun, with murals of birch trees, avant-garde lamps, wood panelling and natural pastels like sand, sky blue and pearl. Others are a little more polished and serene, bathed in soft beiges and greys. The hotel also has what it calls

Executive Rooms for singles or couples (that is, no sofa beds for kids). Renovated seven years ago, these rooms have extra amenities: bathrobes and slippers, bottled water, Nespresso coffee machines, free local calls and late checkout until 4 p.m., when available. **New dining:** The Novotel's Restaurant l'Ô was a surprise — a hotel restaurant that isn't humdrum. It's fresh and creative, from the privately imported wines to fancy coffees with mignardises. The Novotel also recently renovated Restaurant l'Ô and created a lounge and a sidewalk terrace for warm-weather drinks and bites. With a DJ and a new cocktail menu, this was a hot spot during the 2017 Grand Prix week. I didn't expect much beyond basic hotel food, but Restaurant l'Ô has a handy buffet breakfast and easy lunches and dinners for parents with children, business people on the go or sports fans who want to fuel up before the game. Most important, the food is good. My dinner table went with best-sellers: starters of salmon gravlax with dill-spiked sour cream, beef carpaccio and goat cheese salad with crushed pistachios; and for main courses seared Norwegian cod with edamame, Portuguese-spiced Cornish hen and veal chops with mashed root veggies. The menu also features pasta, platters of smoked fish, charcuterie or cheese, plus bistro faves like club sandwiches, duck poutine and designer burgers. For dessert, we all shared a chocolate fondant with ginger and vanilla ice cream. Couldn't have been better. rochelle@rochellelash.com Twitter: rochellelash

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