

CHECKING IN

RESORT GETAWAY AWAITS IN THE CITY

Hôtel Bonaventure's rooftop heated pool, scenic outdoor spaces attract guests



ROCHELLE LASH

One of my top choices for a staycation is Hôtel Bonaventure Montréal, which has an escapist resort feel, a rare quality at the heart of downtown.

The Bonaventure was ahead of its time when it opened for Expo 67 with extensive gardens, streams and ponds, clean design lines and Canada's first rooftop swimming pool. The pool, still a beauty after 50 years, is outdoors and heated year-round, which makes it a local sensation.

Modern and low-rise, the hotel spreads out broadly over the top two floors of Place Bonaventure, the huge convention and exhibition hall. The penthouse perch protects guests from noisy streets and the general urban fray.

The architecture, by a team led by architect Raymond Affleck, is both fascinating and user-friendly. The structure's massive, ribbed concrete walls and geometric shapes are blocky and massive, typical of the mid-century Brutalist style. But, the large windows yield views to exceptional outdoor green spaces, and there are so many patios, you never feel locked in a downtown box.

In summer, the Bonaventure's lobby and restaurants open onto terraces that overlook streams, waterfalls, watery habitats for koi fish and ducks and foliage of peonies, sunflowers, pine, oak and birch trees.

In winter, the scene changes to snowy evergreens, equally pretty.

The remarkable aspect of the Bonaventure is that it is so outdoorsy and so scenic that it feels like a resort getaway, yet it's only an elevator ride away from Via Rail's Central Station, Montreal's métro and the Underground City.

For recent renovations, the design firm Lemay-Michaud went back to the 1960s and '70s

to update the lobby and restaurants. Guests can relax on orange and chocolate leather benches or egg-shaped rattan chairs.

The restaurants were renovated as well, and to keep the openness going, they have see-through partitions rather than walls. So, when you're having dinner and guests are walking through the lobby, it feels like you are in a sidewalk café, albeit an indoor one.

The hotel plans to redo its 397 rooms and suites in 2018-2019. For now, everything is contemporary and well maintained, and all accommodations have ergonomic work areas and mini-fridges.

The view is a big deal, and guests have choices: the pool, a fave for that resort ambience; the garden and stream for serenity; downtown skyscrapers to feel Montreal's office growth; or the sweeping vista toward the St. Lawrence River. This point of view heading south yields an aerial view of the burgeoning International Quarter, the CN tracks and the new Bonaventure Expressway into the city with its large-scale sculptures.

Le Kube is a single stop for all-day, all-evening dining in a modern, open space.

The menu features such comfort food as onion soup, clam chowder, pizza, burgers and poutine, and fancier fare like sweetbreads, lobster salad, grilled octopus and salmon tartare. There are large salads with arugula and shrimp, and bistro basics like mussels with fries and calf's liver, as well as steaks, fish and pasta.

Kube's breakfast buffet is a large, delectable spread, but the hotel has an optional offering in the VIP lounge, a little smaller and a little less expensive, with the added perk of a cappuccino/espresso machine. In summer, both spaces open onto beautiful terraces.

With the hotel connected to the vast exhibition halls of Place Bonaventure and within blocks of every major office tower, the Bonaventure hops with business guests and conventioners.



The Hôtel Bonaventure's heated outdoor pool operates year-round. PHOTOS: HOTEL BONAVENTURE

It has 34 meeting rooms that total among the largest conference spaces in Montreal, as well as one of the largest ballrooms. Office services include video conferencing, audio-visual gear and computers.

Kids simply adore the pool, and it's all-season, all-weather and swimming surrounded by snow banks is a treat. The hotel's Family Package includes board games, free valet parking and skating with rentals at the indoor rink across the street at Atrium le 1000. That's another year-round pleasure.

If you buy tickets for some of Montreal's top attractions at the hotel concierge, you'll get a discount, and you won't have to wait in line at the gate. There is a \$15 savings for La Ronde and \$2 off at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and L'espace pour la vie (incorporating the Insectarium, the Planetarium, the Biodôme and the Botanical Garden).

IF YOU GO

Hôtel Bonaventure Montréal: 800-267-2575, 514-878-2332, hotelbonaventure.com; 900 de la Gauchetière St. W.

Price: Rooms cost \$169-\$250 (suites cost more) including outdoor heated pool/hot tub; fitness, in-room coffee, guest computers, Wi-Fi, concierge, baby gear. Discount for CAA and also for patrons of Bell Centre and Place Bonaventure. Parking is included



The property redesigned its lobby and restaurants.

in Family Package, which applies to two adults and two children.

Extra: Valet parking, \$39; self-parking, \$24; plaza parking (front-driveway), \$49; room food-service until 11 p.m. Executive Lounge breakfast, \$16 or \$8 for children under 12, and

access all day, with soft drinks. Full breakfast buffet at Bisco Restaurant, \$24; \$16 for kids, or à la carte menu. MIA Spa offers in-room facial treatments or massage.

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