

CHECKING IN

# GEESE AND TRANQUILLITY ABOUND AT UNIQUE B&B

Free of TV and Wi-Fi, Au Gîte des Oies offers guest an idyllic farm retreat



ROCHELLE LASH

My goose was cooked. But in a very good way. I visited the unusual Au Gîte des Oies, a B&B near Granby that multi-tasks as a farm specializing in waterfowl, particularly geese and ducks.

Linda Lazure and Louis-Paul Quérel decided that their second and third careers would be as farmers. They had travelled the world and worked at other métiers, but they both eventually trained to be cooks at Pearson School in LaSalle. She graduated as a pastry chef and he as a butcher. Once they had an empty nest, they decided on the farm, the birds and the B&B.

**The scene:** They fell in love with an idyllic property in a picturesque farming region between Granby and St-Hyacinthe. It's no wonder. Gîte des Oies is a splendid spread with meadows, a wild blueberry patch, walking trails and four ponds, all cosseted by a forest of pine, birch, maples and spruce.

This tiny B&B is made for peace and tranquillity. The only sound you will hear is a gaggle of geese heralding your arrival — and then the occasional honk, cackle or quack.

Gîte des Oies doesn't have any TVs or Wi-Fi, although if your phone has a personal hot spot, you can connect.

"There is so much to do outside, even if it is simply sitting by the pond," said Lazure. "People don't want to spend time indoors, they come here to rejuvenate in the countryside."

**The B&B:** Surely one of the most intimate B&Bs I have experienced, Au Gîte des Oies operates its compact guest quarters on the main floor.

It has two rooms, one medium-size, white and pretty, and one is smaller, blue and more homespun. But everything is new and meticulously maintained, which is no small feat on a farm. The rooms share a sparkling, white porcelain bathroom with a glass shower and each

IF YOU GO

Roxton Falls is about a 90-minute drive from Montreal, via Highway 20 and Exit 147 for Upton/Acton Vale; or via Highway 10 and Exit 68, past Granby/Roxton Pond/Roxton Sud.

**Au Gîte des Oies:** 450-210-1122, augitedesoies.business.site, 508 rue Charlebois, Roxton Falls; \$100 for two, shared bathroom, including continental breakfast, coffee/tea corner, fruit, snacks. Dinner, \$50 per person, bring-your-own-wine.

**Montréalégie Tourism:** 450-466-4666, tourisme-monteregie.qc.ca

room has one double bed. "We like cuddling here," says Lazure.

And, if you like the rustic side of life, the B&B also has a small guest cabin next to the house, with a double-sized bunk bed, a table and an outhouse.

**The farm:** Lazure and Quérel are on the job at 5:30 a.m. — to feed, clean and water the animals and to mend fences. They raise nearly 1,000 free-range birds each season: about 500 geese of various species, 400 ducks, a flock of heritage hens like Plymouth Rocks and handful of turkeys. They're all fed organic grains.

Petting is not encouraged, although I did get my chance because Lazure has nurtured them to be friendly. The biggest geese — the Emden — grow to between three and six kilos, and when you hold them, their feathers are sleek and smooth and their bellies are plump and soft.

A few are pets, including the swans named Romeo and Juliette, the wild turkeys Tristan and Isolde, and Coco, the gander, who was bullied in the general population when he was young and now lives with the goslings, playing dad and mentoring. **Food:** For dinner (optional),



Linda Lazure cuddles Coco at Au Gîte des Oies, a goose farm and B&B near Granby. PHOTOS: AU GÎTE DES OIES

Lazure prepares a three-course homemade feast that might start with salad greens and tomatoes from her garden, topped with goose giblets. A main course could be a huge goose leg confit, with fresh vegetables and whipped potatoes. Then she would serve one of her signature desserts, like chocolate fondant with ice cream.

Almost all the guests opt to dine outside at a picnic table, weather permitting, because the surroundings are beautiful and the salon is tiny.

Lazure also sells her own pâtés and rillettes, available at Atwater and Jean Talon markets under the label Gîte des Oies. She also usually stocks whole geese, breasts for broiling and confit.

Lazure prepares breakfast before she heads out to the barn in the morning. The Columbian Rock chickens roost in a henhouse not 10 metres away, so the boiled eggs are farm-fresh. The copious continental spread includes fruit, cheese, goose pâté, homemade blueberry jam and bread, and coffee or tea. **What to do:** If you're inclined to take it easy, Au Gîte des Oies



Au Gîte des Oies has two guest rooms with a shared bathroom.

has walking trails and sun chairs around the ponds.

Cyclists, especially those from Europe, are crazy about this B&B because it is one kilometre from La Campagnarde bike path. That's a car-free former railway segment of La Route Verte that links with the Eastern Townships' l'Estriade and La Montréalégie.

Golfers can tee off at Club de Golf Acton Vale and sightseers

can enjoy Roxton Falls and the Granby Zoo.

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