



Parc Omega's new wolf cabins back onto the wolf enclosure and are located about 90 minutes by car from Montreal near Montebello. *PARC OMEGA*

PARC OMEGA INVITES YOU TO SLEEP NEXT TO WOLVES

Montebello wildlife park offers new chalets with up-close views of canine predators



ROCHELLE LASH
Hotel Intel

To go or not to go? We yearn for fresh air and a change of scenery, but we have reservations. If you are considering travel, factor in that the establishments featured in Hotel Intel have instituted physical distancing and sanitation protocols. Some facilities might be closed temporarily or limited.

You might know of Parc Omega, on the outskirts of Montebello, Que. It's a delightful wildlife park and a centre for Canadian history and nature explorations.

There is a lot to take in, so guests can stay overnight in several types of rustic accommodations — teepees, glamping tents, cabins or even a house on stilts.

But the marquee attractions among Parc Omega's overnight options are the wolf accommodations, six deluxe new log lodgings with everything you need for comfy country life.

There is only one catch: the neighbours are a bit scary.

You see, each of these lodgings has a glass facade that overlooks Parc Omega's habitat for timber wolves, so the fierce-looking canines nuzzle right up to the windows to see what's cooking inside. Guests can observe the interaction among the wolves up close.

It's fun, fascinating and believed to be unique in North America.

"Wolves are rarely seen by humans," said Charles de Reinach, Parc Omega's animal care manager and a wildlife expert. "They favour heavily forested areas where they can hunt in packs and protect their territory."

"They have a fierce reputation, but the wolf is a legendary species that deserves to be discovered, and Parc Omega's new

lodging section provides a great opportunity to study them."

Park experiences: Omega is a full experience built around Canadiana, so guests can stay overnight and enjoy nature walks, animal demonstrations, and historical recreations such as the First Nations Trail, the Old Farm and the Pioneer Village.

(Those outdoor installations are open, but the Trading Post, a mini-museum, is currently closed.)

Parc Omega's best-known offering is the 15-kilometre car safari through several northern ecosystems — meadows, lakes, mountains and forests — observing herds of Canada's wild animals in simulations of their natural habitats.

Wolves, coyotes, foxes and bears are all behind fences, but large, gentle creatures such as elk, deer and Alpine ibex roam freely and often wait patiently at various crossroads for visitors to offer carrots through car windows. It's a delightful experience, and it's a privileged contact with animal life.

"Many of the animals were lonely when we closed for three months," said marketing manag-

er Billie-Prisca Giroux. "The elk and deer stood by the front gates, waiting for our guests to arrive."

Parc Omega is one of approximately 30 members of Canada's Accredited Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA), which issues strict guidelines for animals' care.

Wolf lodging: The new wolf lodgings are a cluster of cabins that back onto Parc Omega's wolf enclosure, so guests and animals share space — separated by walls of glass. The cabins are ideal for family getaways, with lots of space, large windows and cathedral ceilings. The knotty pine walls and sturdy log furniture create a cosy air, and patio setups are perfect for outdoor living. The bathrooms are modern, and the kitchens are equipped with niceties like Nespresso machines.

These special accommodations are available in three sizes. The two wolf cabins are studio-style, with kitchenettes and two beds for up to four people, all in one space. The two wolf chalets and the two larger wolf lodges can each handle up to six and have full kitchens.

Guests bring their own food and beverages. Parc Omega has restaurants, but this summer only a snack bar will be open.

Château Montebello: If you're not in the mood to cook in, Parc Omega is about four kilometres from another distinctive experience — dining at Château Montebello. The grand log hotel at the heart of a spectacular

IF YOU GO

Montebello is a 90-minute drive from Montreal.

Parc Omega: 819-423-5487; parcomega.ca; 399 Route 323 N., Montebello. Open year-round. Tickets must be purchased online.

Price: Car safari/activities, \$30 for adults; \$21 for children age six to 15; \$12 for children age two to five. Safari included with wolf lodging. Guests in other accommodations get discounts.

Wolf accommodations:

Chalets and lodges, approximately \$749-\$849 per night for six in a mezzanine with two queen beds, plus a bunk bedroom. Cabins (studios): one queen bed, one double, for four people, \$549-\$649 per night.

Château Montebello: 800-257-7544, 819-423-6341; fairmont.com/Montebello; 392 Notre-Dame St., Montebello.

country resort recently reopened the clubby Aux Chantignoles steak house (lunch Fri.-Sat., bar and dinner nightly), the picturesque Le Rivarain Terrace (bar and lunch daily) and the famous weekend barbecue feast (Fri.-Sat. evenings).

The silver lining of staycations

**VIVIAN NEREIM,
RICHARD WEISS
AND ANNA ANDRIANOVA**

When the pandemic hobbled Saudi Arabia's plans to become a global tourism hub just months after opening its borders for the first time, officials looked for the bright side.

There won't be any foreign vacationers sunning on the kingdom's beaches this summer. But there's a new market to woo: Saudis trapped at home. Along with countries around the world that are trying to recoup some of their tourism losses through domestic travel, the government leaned into the disruption, stoking patriotic sentiment with calls for a "Saudi summer."

"The amount of constraint that people are feeling, the suffocation — this is a chance," Fahd Hamidaddin, chief executive of the Saudi Tourism Authority, said during a video conference to announce the summer strategy.

The coronavirus has hurt tourism, putting a giant dent into the 10th of global economic output that the industry accounts for. International tourist arrivals fell 97 per cent in April and the World Travel & Tourism Council foresees about 100 million job losses — in a best-case scenario — as border clo-

sures, health fears, bankrupt hotels and airlines, and income constraints keep travellers at home.

But tourism hot spots won't be hit equally and some larger economies — such as Saudi Arabia, Russia, the U.K. and Germany — are hopeful they can reduce the pain by capturing domestic spending that normally goes abroad.

"There is a clear opportunity for some countries to soften the blow of lost inbound demand by encouraging residents to holiday at home," said David Goodger, Europe and Middle East managing director at Tourism Economics, a unit of Oxford Economics.

"Countries with large outbound travel markets and which typically run a tourism deficit are best placed to benefit from this trend," he said, though he cautioned that any advantage will be relative. Take Russia, whose citizens typically spend about \$20 billion more abroad each year than Russia earns from incoming travel. In the Krasnodar region, on the Black Sea coast, hotel reservations are flooding in, according to Delfin, one of the biggest tour operators there.

"June was almost a total disaster, but July will be even better than last year," said Delfin's head, Sergei Romashkin.

Moscow office worker Anastasiya Kulagina planned to spend

her summer holiday in Tuscany, dropping about \$6,000 for a three-week stay. Instead the 36-year-old is considering Yalta in the Crimea, which Russian President Vladimir Putin annexed from Ukraine in 2014. Despite a freshwater shortage there and the fact that the Black Sea city's hospitality infrastructure dates largely to the Cold War era, Kulagina was disappointed to see prices were about the same as Tuscany. But she has few other options.

In Australia, sealed borders are enabling some regional operators to tap a wealthy and previously unattainable market.

"It's just been incredible," said Steve Hinks, who directs Taronga Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo, a five-hour drive from Sydney. He reckoned that the zoo, which provides luxury camping among animals from around the globe, has never fielded so many inquiries in such a short space of time.

"If we seize this opportunity and 'wow' these visitors then we have the chance to keep them again into the future," he said.

For much of the world though, tourists staying closer to home will create a loss of revenue that domestic travellers couldn't possibly make up — especially in places dependent on foreign-exchange income that have limited



Although destinations such as the Louvre are slowly reopening, the pandemic continues to slow international travel. *CYRIL MARCILHACY/BLOOMBERG*

domestic spending power. Countries such as the Maldives, where tourism accounts for more than half of gross domestic product, or island nations in the Caribbean, where beaches have gone empty, will suffer.

In Turkey, it could take as long as three years for the industry to recover, according to Emre Narin, chief executive of Marti Hotels & Marinas, which is listed on the Istanbul stock exchange and operates six hotels and a marina.

About eight million Turks travelled within the country last year, compared with 50 million foreign visitors the country was expecting this year. "Domestic tourism cannot possibly replace that kind of a market," Narin said.

Destinations that rely more on domestic and short-haul tourism — such as Japan, China and

Mexico — will be more resilient to the downturn, Goodger said. As to countries that have a new "domestic opportunity," the U.K. tops his list.

But overall, COVID-19 means that global tourism spending — both domestic and international — will be significantly lower in 2020, and he doesn't expect it to recover to 2019 levels until 2023. As government support and job retention schemes come to an end, the world may see further spikes in job losses, he said.

Gloria Guevara Manzo, president of the World Travel & Tourism Council, said she sees no real winners.

"The reality is you don't spend the same amount travelling in your country as you do abroad," she said.

Bloomberg