



Estérel Resort's guests have access to swimming pools, the Lac Dupuis beachfront and the Lido Thermal spa. STÉPHANE GROLEAU/ESTÉREL RESORT

ESTÉREL RESORT OFFERS LUXURY STAYCATIONS



ROCHELLE LASH

To go or not to go? If you are ready to travel, factor in that the establishments featured in Hotel Intel have instituted physical distancing and sanitation protocols.

Estérel Resort, a posh getaway in the lower Laurentians, has nimbly adapted to the times throughout its history. For the summer of 2020, it offers new staycations tailored to globe-trotters who may have cancelled extravagant trips to Europe.

Estérel presents fine food, wines and spirits, as well as spa life, all with a backdrop of breathtaking lakes, forests and mountains. Its 200 suites come in various sizes and price ranges, but all have king-size beds, balconies and kitchenettes.

“Our beachfront suites — the Gold Suites — are perfect for a top-flight clientele who would normally be heading overseas,” said owner Shawn Zarbatany. “They have great options at Estérel, which is as attractive as many resorts in the south of France.

“And you don’t have to pay in euros or take a flight to get here.”

It’s true: many of the resort’s experiences are elite. Its new Gold package costs upward of \$1,000 a night, for two people,

and it’s loaded with goodies.

Estérel’s fine cuisine would pass muster almost anywhere. There’s heady Quebec terroir at Bistro à Champlain, the renowned restaurant now located at the resort. The wine cellar’s collection recently won the Award of Excellence from Wine Spectator magazine, and the whiskies from Japan and the Scottish Highlands are special.

Guests can chill at Lido Thermal spa or have massages and mani-pedis at a branch of Amerispa. The focus in summer is twofold: the resort’s two heated swimming pools and an interconnected trio of lakes — Lac Dupuis, Lac Masson and Lac du Nord — for paddling or boating.

Golden life: Estérel has discounts for multiple-day visits and packages with meals and massages, but it’s the Gold package that promises the high life.

You’ll be ensconced in a deluxe beachfront suite with a closed bedroom, a glass-fronted terrace and a panoramic view of the lake. The Gold deal includes an activity passport for each guest (a \$40 value), so you can borrow a bike and cycle along country roads or take a pontoon boat ride.

Gold guests have breakfast, a poolside lunch and an afternoon snack daily, but they’re on their own to choose from Estérel’s three restaurants for dinner.

Here’s a big bonus: each Gold Suite has a fully stocked open bar. You’ll be supplied with bottles of made-in-Quebec mixes

and spirits — Pur Vodka (375 mL), Ungava Gin (375 mL) and Chic Choc Rum (750 mL). Santé.

Cuisine: Another new venture is the Lido Bar, a poolside, beachfront charcoal grill and smoker, where lunch might be burrata and roasted tomatoes, charcoal-grilled steaks, Buddha bowls and yakitori skewers of shrimp, beef or chicken.

The Bistro à Champlain, a top destination in the Laurentians, has a new six-course menu at \$100 per person, plus wine pairings. The intriguing angle is that dinner is a surprise. There is no menu. It’s all market-fresh ingredients, with dishes such as maîtake mushroom tempura, foie gras, duck carpaccio or black cod, sometimes delicacies such as wapiti, plus desserts of chocolate, lemon and almond.

Chais58 serves casual fare: Cobb salads, sea bass, beef tartare or linguine with mussels and spicy sausage. Rok, an engaging alternative to the more formal Bistro à Champlain, dishes up platters of seafood and Angus beef that you cook at the table on hot stones.

Another new culinary product is the takeout gourmet service crafted by the resort’s executive chef, Jean-François Bélair.

“If our guests enjoyed the cuisine, they can recreate it at home,” said Bélair, whose creations include ready-to-cook platters of shrimp, tuna, tomahawk steaks and filet mignon. Yum.

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Estérel’s Gold package is built around deluxe beachfront suites, plus an open bar and a lake cruise. ESTÉREL RESORT

IF YOU GO

Estérel Resort: 888-ESTEREL (888-378-3735), 450-228-2571, esterel.com; 39 Fridolin-Simard Rd., Estérel. Best rate guaranteed. Daily housekeeping is temporarily suspended. **Price:** Visits include Lido Thermal spa, swimming pools (some facilities limited). Suites start at \$249 for two, with online discounts of 25 to 75 per cent for stays of two to four nights. Stays of five nights include a sixth night free. **Gold package:** minimum two nights, starts at \$499 p.p. in August, including in-room open bar, activity passport, breakfast, poolside lunch daily, pontoon cruise. **All-inclusive package:** starts

at \$269 p.p. in August, including breakfast, lunch, six-course dinner at Bistro à Champlain. Prices are lower after Labour Day. **Activity passport:** \$40 p.p. (included in some packages) for your entire stay, covers paddleboarding, pedal boats, canoes, kayaks, bicycles. **Dining: Bistro à Champlain:** Mon.-Sun., \$100, six courses. Reservations (maximum 26 people). Children’s menu, \$17 three courses (ages six to 12); children five and under eat for free. **Wine cellar:** reservations for two at a time; from 4:30 p.m. daily; tastings start at \$19. **Lido Bar:** daily, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Chais58: lunch/dinner daily. **Rok:** dinner nightly.

IN BRIEF

‘We’re not missing — we’re married’

A German couple travelling in Australia sparked panic among friends and relatives after disappearing for two weeks in harsh outback terrain.

But a frantic hunt was called off after the pair phoned police to say: “We’re safe — and officially now man and wife.”

Nathalie, 26, and Benjamin Kress, 29, were pictured in a Facebook post at an elopement ceremony in remote Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, under the caption: “Today could not have been any more gorgeous for this young German couple tying the knot in Australia.”

Family members noticed the picture but had not heard from the couple, who were travelling across the vast state, for two weeks.

“Everyone is so, so worried,” wrote pal Don Gungey, who filed a missing persons photo to Instagram, urging followers to share the image.

It sparked a nationwide search that ended when the Kresses spotted the photo and confirmed to detectives they were well and would check in at the nearest police station, NCA NewsWire said.

The newlyweds said they had “lost themselves” in the bush and blamed patchy phone reception for not being in touch earlier.

‘Wine window’ makes a COVID comeback

An Italian custom popular in times of earlier plagues has made a comeback during the pandemic of 2020.

The “wine window” — a type of centuries-old self-service hatch — is being revived as drinkers look for their daily tittle or java jolt while keeping their distance. Known in Italy as buchette del vino, the windows have been used by wine merchants since the 1600s and have survived the bubonic plague and other health emergencies.

In Florence, the restored wine windows have been especially popular.

The president of the Wine Window Association told Travel Insider magazine that the niches have proved an unexpected boon as Italy emerges from one of the world’s worst outbreaks of COVID-19. “During this time, some enterprising Florentine wine window owners have turned back the clock and are using their wine windows to dispense glasses of wine, cups of coffee, drinks, sandwiches and ice cream — all germ-free and contactless,” Matteo Faglia said.

More than 150 of the simple wooden hatches can be found throughout Tuscany, he noted.

“We want to put a plaque by all the wine windows,” he said, “as people tend to respect them more when they understand what they are and their history.”

Partiers cause havoc, raise health concerns

Locked-down louts in Scotland are being accused of treating a tranquil beauty spot like a boozy Spanish beach resort.

The Scotsman reports young people denied foreign holidays due to the pandemic are turning up in droves at the Tibbie Shiels Inn in Selkirk, which was once a popular watering hole for William Wordsworth, Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Walter Scott.

“Visitors more at home in Magaluf have turned up armed with crates of lager and tents and partied until 5 a.m. non-stop,” the paper said.

Police have repeatedly broken up parties at nearby picnic greens. Alistair Moody, who owns the historic pub, fears the gatherings could spark a second wave of the coronavirus. “People are coming from all over Britain here, with no social distancing. It is a public health disaster. Hundreds of bikers came up from England the other week. It’s carnage.”

Moody and his wife are reluctant to reopen the hostelry in the Borders region south of Edinburgh.

“It’s a beautiful part of the world but we have no idea when this will end,” he said. “We haven’t left our house unattended for three months because we will come back and find people parked all over our land or picnicking.”

Andre Ramshaw

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