

## HOTEL INTEL

FAIRMONT QUEEN E:  
COMFORTABLE EVEN  
IN THE COVID AGE

Landmark downtown hotel offering  
30 per cent discount for Quebec residents



ROCHELLE LASH

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

The task of maintaining Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth, Montreal's largest hotel, would be daunting at the best of times. The COVID-19 pandemic has raised the bar exponentially.

Connected indoors to Central Station, Place Ville Marie and the Eaton Centre, the Queen E always has been Montreal's downtown pulse of hospitality — a crossroads of power lunches, society weddings and influential business meetings in Montreal's second-largest convention space, after the Palais des congrès.

I visited recently to experience how this landmark is adapting to the new normal — how it has modified its spectacular spaces and its 950 guest rooms, normally buzzing with the energy of international guests. Currently, it's quiet. It's a difficult year, but one perk during 2020 is that Quebec residents are offered a 30 per cent discount on rooms.

Regardless of your next destination, the Fairmont is an evocative blueprint for how your urban hotel visit might unfold, with modified food service and facilities opening on a staggered schedule.

The Queen E's pool is open on weekends; a time limit will be imposed if it gets crowded, but so far that has not happened. Moment Spa and the Wellness Centre gym are open daily. Thinking outdoors, guests can borrow BMW bicycles or order picnic baskets for city sojourns. The

## IF YOU GO

**Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth Hotel:** 800-257-7544, 514-861-3511, fairmont.com/queen-elizabeth-montreal; 900 René-Lévesque Blvd. W. Accor, Fairmont, Raffles, and Swissôtel rewards apply. ALL (Accor Live Limitless) loyalty program is free, for benefits such as upgrades (all.accor.com).

**Price (approximate):** Best rate guaranteed; rooms from \$209, suites from \$319. Quebec residents get 30 per cent discount, plus guaranteed check-in between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. and, if available, late checkout. Pet-friendly.

sophisticated Nacarat Terrace bar, a cocktailers' paradise, is operating outdoors on weekends; reservations are suggested.

The Fairmont Gold lounge is not open, but Gold guests are invited to breakfast at the Marché Artisans, a colourful gourmet food hall, which is operating daily. Most people take out, but there are tables available and the Marché has been extended into the lobby, so that adds a sociable air.

**New measures:** The Queen E's sanitation and distancing measures have been instituted worldwide, across more than 70 Fairmonts and 5,000 hotels of Accor, its parent company. The hotel group partnered with experts to develop the ALLSAFE label (allsafeandwell.com), which represents stringent cleaning standards and operational procedures. Even before a government edict, the Queen E had all employees wearing masks, including the new general manager, David Connor. The hotel also is taking an extra step in screening guests with health questions and a temperature check upon arrival.

The housekeepers change

their personal protective equipment as they move from room to room. Everyone practises physical distancing, and there are Plexiglas partitions at reception. For now, there are no bellhops, but if you ask, you'll get help.

The hotel provides wellness kits, which include masks, gloves, sanitizer and wipes. The magazines and writing paper are gone, although in the era of email and e-zines, I cannot imagine they will be missed.

The mini-bar is still available and in-room dining carries on, though with no deliveries. Guests can review menus on their television, order by phone and pick up at the Marché. **Hotel life:** I talked with the Queen E's director of rooms, Yann Turcotte, about how COVID-19 has changed hotel life. Coincidentally, he used to be a microbiologist, so he's putting multiple talents to use. We chatted — with masks on — in the lobby, then we went on to a light lunch and a tour. I wasn't apprehensive, health-wise, for even a minute.

"Regaining people's trust and keeping guests and employees safe are our priorities," Turcotte said.

**Q What has been the most difficult new protocol?**

**A** We have had to reinvent five-star hospitality, deliver excellent service and make guests comfortable while we are masked and practising physical distancing. And the key is our new training program. We also have new signage, enhanced cleaning products and a 48-hour resting period when rooms stay empty between guests.

**Q Daily housekeeping and valet parking are coveted perks of hotel life, but they have been cut back. Is this forever?**

**A** As a five-star hotel, we always

will fulfil the guest's needs. For now, housekeeping is every third day.

Our strict standards of hygiene mean adjustments. But if someone needs fresh towels or clean glassware, we will accommodate.

**Q What about food and drinks?**

**A** Even with limitations, you can eat quite well and enjoy wine, beer and spirits. We serve fancy coffees, breakfast, lunch and

drinks (7 a.m. to 8 p.m.). Breakfast is a cooked-to-order treat and lunch highlights include fish, meat and vegetarian pasta, plus poke bowls, crepes, pizza and sushi platters. The Marché also showcases a new line of gourmet goodies created by the Queen E's chefs, including bison terrine, duck confit, orange-laced chocolate bars and dreamy ice creams and sorbets.

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Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth room attendant Doloris Ferdinand follows new cleaning protocols. The Queen E's sanitation and distancing measures have been instituted worldwide. FAIRMONT THE QUEEN ELIZABETH



Lunch client Lissa Gatien peruses the gourmet grab-and-go fare at Marché Artisans in Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth.



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