

TRAVEL BRIEFS

**British flight lands just ahead of ban deadline**

A flight from the Middle East to London beat a “red list” travel ban by two minutes when it landed at Heathrow Airport. The “last flight out of Dubai” was tracked by social media users after British transport minister Grant Shapps added the United Arab Emirates to a list of banned countries as the U.K. fights a more virulent strain of COVID-19. The British Airways flight became the last passenger service from the UAE until further notice, the Evening Standard said. British newspapers have been convulsed in the past few weeks by images of wealthy social media influencers leaving Britain to work amid the sunshine, beaches and relatively lax restrictions of Dubai. In July, it became one of the first travel destinations to open to visitors, but its government was later blamed for a spike in coronavirus cases overseas after allowing in New Year’s revellers. A spokesman for the kingdom said: “After a year of managing the pandemic, we can confidently say the current situation is under control and we have our plans to surge any capacity in the health-care system should a need arise.”

**Japanese restaurants promote silent eating**

Japanese restaurants are putting a fresh accent on the advice, “Don’t talk with your mouth full,” with a pandemic-inspired silent dining scheme. In an effort to blunt the spread of the coronavirus, restaurateurs in Tokyo are offering free food to patrons who agree to savour their steaks, sushi and sake in silence. It comes after government requests that diners wear masks when talking during meals to reduce risk of infection, the Yomiuri Shimbun reported. A curry restaurant in Fukuoka said it backed the concept because it did not want to be blamed for worsening the crisis. “We don’t want restaurants to be thought of as bad guys,” the owner tweeted. At hamburger bar Harakara, in Tokyo’s Sangenjaya district, manager Hirotsugu Hagiwara reported customers have been following the rules without complaint. He said: “We should make sure that our customers enjoy their meals as our top priority, but we are now living in a time when self-restraint is important.” A steak house in Fuchu, Tokyo, has been offering a free beef or pork entree worth \$13 for customers who keep their lips buttoned. “If talking while eating is a risk, having our customers enjoy their meals in silence is for the best,” said Tomokazu Nakamura, the restaurant’s manager.

**Half of the world’s pilots grounded**

More than half of the world’s pilots are grounded — just 12 months after airlines were courting them amid an industry-wide hiring boom. The first global survey of the profession since the health crisis began more than a year ago reveals 30 per cent of airline pilots are jobless and a further 17 per cent are furloughed. Six per cent of respondents are in aviation but in a non-flying role, while four per cent are working in a different industry. The Pilot Survey of almost 2,600 flight crew was carried out by FlightGlobal, an aviation publisher, and Goose, a pilot recruitment agency. Just more than a year ago, a similar survey found pilots — though stressed by the rigours of the job — were enjoying a strong global demand for their services. Researchers questioned pilots flying in every region of the world for the latest data, and found a “community devastated economically and psychologically by the pandemic.” More than eight in 10 told the pollsters they would happily take a pay cut to get back in the cockpit. Katine Mann, a recruitment manager for FlightGlobal, said the results lay bare the brutal impact of COVID-19. “It is simply a shocking reality of the state of the aviation industry that more than half of the world’s pilots are not employed as pilots and flying as they have been trained to do so,” she said.

Andre Ramshaw  
For Postmedia News



Ritz-Carlton Montréal offers staycations starting at \$499, with lavish accommodations and food and beverage credits. RITZ-CARLTON MONTRÉAL

# RITZ-CARLTON’S HAUTE HOSPITALITY EVEN EXTENDS TO STAYCATIONS



ROCHELLE LASH  
Hotel Intel

Just pack pyjamas. Ritz-Carlton Montréal will take care of the rest.

The city’s most illustrious and enduring hotel is offering staycations that start at \$499 for two, per night, which includes an enchanting brush with history and the indelible memory of a dream getaway for those in the mood for a splurge. (A Valentine’s package is also available.)

You’ll also have a delectable breakfast for two; a bottle of sparkling wine; a \$50 credit for any food and beverage, including afternoon tea or dinner (either Ritz-Carlton’s menu or Maison Boulud’s); and a 30 per cent discount at Spa St. James (massages are currently permitted) or a voucher valid later. It’s all pandemic-proof, of course. **Ritz origins:** We must thank César Ritz, the “king of hoteliers,” who was the first to insist on private bathrooms in each guest room, plus meticulous hygiene and gastronomy worthy of royalty.

Ritz was born a peasant in the Swiss Alps. He worked his way up as a floor sweeper, waiter, sommelier and maître d’ throughout Europe in the late 1800s and eventually established Hôtel Ritz Paris, the Ritz London, the Savoy and the Carlton Hotel.

When Montreal’s carriage trade needed an elite hangout, Ritz’s world-class Carlton Hotel was an obvious template.

The Ritz-Carlton opened in the Golden Square Mile with a heady celebration on Dec. 31, 1912, introducing a new era of haute hospitality. Debutantes danced, ladies lunched and merchant princes shaped modern Canada over cigars and cognac. Afternoon tea, including dainty sandwiches, petits fours and scones with Devonshire cream, was a civilized ritual that transcended the hubbub of the hoi polloi.

In normal times, Ritz-Carlton Montréal is still a lot like that, although it has been thoroughly rebuilt, and we no longer see



The opulent Palm Court is among the Ritz-Carlton’s most splendid public spaces. RITZ-CARLTON MONTRÉAL

\$3-a-night rooms and smoky lounges. Here’s a glimpse of the aristocratic hotel today.

**The Ritz in 2021:** The Ritz has a reputation for grandeur, and it doesn’t disappoint. It has accrued a string of accolades, including CAA/AAA’s Five-Diamond Award, and is consistently listed among the top hotels in Condé Nast Traveler and the Robb Report.

How do you size up luxury? The breathtaking 96 rooms and 33 suites are curated with contemporary-classic furnishings and serene, fawn-coloured decor. Guests luxuriate in cotton sheets so fine they feel like silk, and recline on downy pillows embroidered with a regal gold crest. There are automatic controls for temperature preferences, electronic bedside touch panels for drapes and lighting, on-demand movies and USB ports. Each marble bathroom has a television, a phone, heated floors, towel warmers, a double vanity and a wondrous loo-bidet with multi-functional controls. Upgrade and you might have a steam shower, a walk-in closet and a private living room.

Here’s hoping guests can soon experience the hotel’s splendid public spaces (currently closed): the rooftop saltwater pool with panoramic views of Montreal, Spa St. James, the Oval ball-

room and the Dom Pérignon Champagne Bar in the opulent Palm Court. The legendary Ritz Garden is an exclusive alfresco dining spot surrounded by lush landscaping and a pond.

Thank goodness some things never change. Afternoon tea (takeout or in-room) is still served on Wedgwood bone china (Wild Strawberry pattern). And yes, the famous ducklings will be back at some point.

**Maison Boulud:** Ritz-Carlton Montréal’s affiliation with Michelin-starred celebrity chef Daniel Boulud offers an epicurean experience based on Quebec’s bountiful produce, artfully prepared with French techniques. “Daniel’s cuisine is elevated,” said Simon Schmidt, director of Maison Boulud. “His dishes are built around the finest ingredients, including truffles and foie gras.”

Boulud’s menu (for in-room dining, pickup or delivery) features starters of smoked salmon with blinis, foie gras or ceviche, followed by main courses of braised beef short ribs, pasta with lamb, fish or roasted quail. There is even a Boulud-class burger, enriched with pork belly, cheese, arugula, tomato and chutney. Desserts are spun with cream, lime, tapioca and chocolate and laced with hazelnuts, pecans or chestnuts.

IF YOU GO

**Ritz-Carlton Montréal:** 800-363-0366, 514-842-4212, ritzcarlton.com/montreal; 1228 Sherbrooke St. W. Marriott Bonvoy points apply. Staycation: Until Dec. 31, starts at \$499 for two, depending on room or suite. Valentine’s package, until Feb. 21, starts at \$513 for two, plus romantic perks. Spa open Thurs.-Sun., or on call. Dining (vegan and gluten-free available; kosher in advance) Mon.-Sun.: breakfast, lunch, drinks, dinner, afternoon tea (takeout or in-room), children’s menu.

**Maison Boulud Chez Vous:** maisonbouludmenu.com, Wed.-Sat., 514-905-0787, bouludchezvous@ritzmontreal.com.