



The pretty Brass Lantern Inn operates in a brick farmhouse dating from 1835. Co-owner Mary Anne Lewis calls it “an inn where you can take your shoes off and sit by the fire.” PHOTOS: COURTESY OF BRASS LANTERN INN.

HOTEL INTEL

STORYBOOK COUPLE SHINE AT STOWE’S BRASS LANTERN INN

Gorgeous nine-room B&B in Vermont offers discounts to Canadians over three nights



ROCHELLE LASH

The U.S. will open its land borders to fully vaccinated international travellers Nov. 8. Stowe Mountain Resort has mask and vaccine mandates for some indoor activities (see stowe.com or accd.vermont.gov). George and Mary Anne Lewis, owners of the Brass Lantern Inn in Stowe, Vermont, are a storybook couple. He is an architect from Ohio and she is an occupational therapist from Pennsylvania. They met on a bike tour in Stowe, married in 1984 and eventually turned to innkeeping. They are just now finishing an immensely successful fall foliage season and are gearing up for winter. The inn is a few miles from Stowe Mountain Resort, the ski-ride downhill area that encompasses Mount Mansfield, Vermont’s highest peak (1,340 metres), as well as adjacent Spruce Peak, whose base is a walkable village of shops, restaurants and entertainment. **The inn:** The Lewises are so warm and welcoming that I hoped

they would adopt me so I could cosy up forever in their charming, historic home and feast on strawberry crepes and almond cake every morning. Not going to happen. The Lewises already have three grown children, Patrick, Dustin and Deseray. The Brass Lantern came highly recommended by Sharon Harper, marketing manager of the Stowe Visitor Information Center on Main St. “When my family stays there, I sneak in for breakfast because the food is outstanding.” Another solid endorsement came from TripAdvisor. Brass Lantern was a 2019 Travelers’ Choice and, based on 1,000 reviews, one of the top 25 small inns in the United States. Canadians enjoy a 15-per-cent discount on stays of three nights or more on select Sundays to Thursdays. The B&B offers packages with Stowe Village Massage, Laughing Moon Chocolates, Café on Main and wintertime sleigh rides. **Logging:** The B&B is a half-kilometre north of Stowe’s white-steeped church, the centrepiece of Main St., where roots go back to the 1700s. The pretty-as-a-Vermont-picture Brass Lantern Inn operates in a brick farmhouse dating from 1835. The social hub is the living room and guests also can use a hot tub and a game room with



Afternoon tea and homemade cookies are served around the fireplace.



The beautiful Spruce Peak room is one of nine at the Brass Lantern Inn.

Scrabble and chess. “We wanted a place that is warm and comfortable,” George Lewis said. “An inn where you can take your shoes off and sit by the fire.” The nine guest rooms are country comfortable with colourful quilts, original ceiling beams and wide-planked floors. Most have gas fireplaces and flat-screen TVs and some have whirlpool tubs and sofa-beds. They range from the budget-conscious Round-top Mountain room to the Mt. Mansfield, a beauty that is big enough for four people, with a kitchenette. **The food:** “Cooking is my passion,” said George Lewis, sporting his white chef’s jacket. “And I do share my recipes.” His Brass Lantern breakfast is

a three-course affair that starts with juice, fruit or a yogurt parfait, followed by a baked treat like pumpkin muffins or almond cake. Some of his favourite main courses are eggs Benedict or a frittata with crispy prosciutto. Mary Anne Lewis is a cookie wizard, so guests might sip afternoon tea with her daily inspiration of chocolate-chip or oatmeal-raisin treats. Son Patrick operates Purely Patrick, a line of homemade foods including soup and cookie mixes. Great for gifts, they cost about \$5 to \$12 at the B&B, at farmers’ markets and online (purelypatrick.com). **The mountain:** There are savings this year. Vail Resorts, which owns Stowe Mountain Resort, has launched a new version of its

IF YOU GO

Brass Lantern Inn: 800-729-2980, 802-253-2229, brasslanterninn.com; 717 Maple St., Stowe, Vt. **Price:** US\$145-\$325 per night; ask about 15-per-cent Canadian discount. Two-night minimum on most weekends; three nights on some holidays. Extra guest, US\$25. Includes full breakfast, afternoon tea/cookies, outdoor hot tub, Wi-Fi, bedside chocolates, game room, guest pantry with coffee and refrigerator. **Stowe Mountain Resort (part of Vail Resorts):** 888-253-4849, stowe.com, epicpass.com. **Stowe Visitor Information Center:** 800-GO-STOWE (800-467-8693), 802-253-7321, gostowe.com, 51 Main St., Stowe, Vt.

Epic Day Pass for US\$91 per day. Mountain Epic Rewards offers all Epic Pass holders 20 per cent off dining, group ski-or-ride lessons and rentals. The full Epic Pass, an all-season ticket, is US\$819 (down from US\$979), and is valid at an astounding amount of terrain — unlimited access to 34 North American resorts including Whistler Blackcomb, Stowe and Vail, plus seven total days at the Resorts of the Canadian Rockies, including Mont-St Anne. Even resorts in the European Alps, Japan and Australia are included. Stowe’s Adventure Zones have expanded with more glades, this time off Mount Mansfield’s intermediate cruising trails. You can track the terrain with the Epic Mix app. Spruce Peak has new dining experiences, as well as Dedalus, a wine bar and shop with wine, cheese and charcuterie. rochelle@rochellelash.com

Boning up on history

The Paris Catacombs offer up a unique chance for bone lovers, **Rick Steves** writes.

Deep under the streets of Paris, I was all alone, surrounded by literally millions of bones — tibiae, fibulae, pelvises, and skulls, all stacked along miles of tunnels. I was in the Paris Catacombs. I jumped at the opportunity to pick up what, once upon a time, was a human head. As what seemed like two centuries of dust tumbled off the skull, I looked at it, Hamlet-style. Just holding it was a thrill. I tried to get comfortable with it to get to know it, in a way. I struggled with the temptation to stick it into my day bag. Imagine taking home a head dating back to Napoleonic times. What an incredible souvenir. But I just couldn’t do it. The next year, I returned to those same catacombs, pumped up and determined this time to steal me a skull. It was a different scene. Skulls within easy reach of visitors were now wired together and signs warned that bags would be checked at the exit. The Paris Catacombs show off the anonymous bones of six million permanent residents. In 1786, the French government decided to relieve congestion and improve sanitary conditions by emptying the city cemeteries, which had traditionally surrounded churches. They estab-

lished an official ossuary in an abandoned limestone quarry. With miles of underground tunnels, it was the perfect location. For decades, the priests of Paris led ceremonial processions of black-veiled, bone-laden carts into the quarries, where the bones were stacked into piles five feet high and up to 80 feet deep, behind neat walls of skull-studded tibiae. Each transfer was completed with the placement of a plaque indicating the church and district from which that stack of bones came and the date they arrived. Today, you can descend a long spiral staircase into this bony underworld (ignoring the sign that announces: “Halt, this is the empire of the dead”) and follow a one-mile subterranean public walk. Along the way, plaques encourage you to reflect upon your destiny: “Happy is he who is forever faced with the hour of his death and prepares himself for the end every day.” Emerging far from where you entered, with white limestone-covered toes, is a dead giveaway you’ve been underground, gawking at bones. While I eventually outgrew my desire to steal a skull, in later years, as a tour guide, I’ve discovered I’m not the only one intrigued by human bones. If



In the Capuchin Crypt in Rome, the bones of 4,000 monks can be discovered by wide-eyed visitors. Europe is the place to be if you like gawking at old bones, says Rick Steves. RICK STEVES

bones are on your bucket list, you’ve got plenty of options. Throughout Europe, Capuchin monks offer different bone-ventures. The Capuchins made a habit of hanging their dead brothers up to dry and then opening their skeleton-filled crypts to the public. Their mission: to remind us that in a relatively short period of time, we’ll be dead, too — so give some thought to mortality and how we might be spending eternity. In the Capuchin Crypt in Rome, the bones of 4,000 monks who died between 1528 and 1870 are lined up for the delight — or disgust — of always wide-eyed visitors. A plaque shares their monastic message: “We were what you are ... you will become

what we are now.” The Capuchins of Palermo, Sicily, offer an experience skull and shoulders above the rest. Their crypt is a subterranean gallery filled with 8,000 “bodies without souls,” howling silently at their mortality. For centuries, people would thoughtfully choose their niche before they died, and even linger there, getting to know their macabre neighbourhood. After death, dressed in their Sunday best, their body (sans soul) would be hung up to dry. In Kutná Hora, in the Czech Republic, monks took bone decor to an unrivalled extreme. Their ossuary is decorated with the bones of 40,000 people, many of them plague victims. The monks who stacked these bones

400 years ago wanted viewers to remember that the earthly church is a community of both the living and the dead. Later bone-stackers were more into design than theology — creating, for instance, a chandelier made with every bone in the human body. In Europe, seekers of the macabre can get their fill of human skeletons. And in doing so, they learn that many of these bones — even long after death — still have something to say. Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. You can email Rick at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook For Postmedia News