

HOTEL INTEL

# Auberge marks 25th year in Montreal's Old Port



ROCHELLE LASH

Staycations will be here forever, so I played tourist in Montreal's Old Port, my hometown's quintessential sightseeing nerve centre and the site where Jacques Cartier landed nearly 500 years ago.

I chose Auberge du Vieux-Port because rue de la Commune so purely embodies summer, especially for its constant stream of strollers, cyclists, sightseers and café habitués along the tree-lined promenade that parallels the St. Lawrence River.

I have biked this route countless times, but I usually cruise past the bistros, tourist attractions, souvenir shops and venerable stone buildings. Not this time. I would be one of the chosen on a bustling patio, celebrating summer, Montreal style. **Dining:** Old Montreal is zealous about dining and drinking, and Auberge du Vieux-Port does both with passion, not to mention music and jaw-dropping views.

My first stop was the rooftop Terrasse sur l'Auberge, which has a wide-angle view of the waterfront's amazing sights including La Grande Roue ferris wheel, the tents of Cirque du Soleil, Marché Bonsecours and the stellar fireworks of L'International des Feux Loto-Québec.

While that show goes on, waiters dash around the open-air lounge with huge platters of oysters, shrimp, tartares, salads and burgers, plus pink sangria and signature drinks like the Montreal Old-Fashioned, with maple syrup and Kentucky bourbon. The hotel's most visible dining spot is the street-level pub, Taverne Gaspar, which has a hearty, meaty menu including lamb



Many rooms at Auberge du Vieux-Port have views of the waterfront. AUBERGE DU VIEUX-PORT

shank, cassoulet of duck and sausage, pork belly and braised beef cheek, as well as veggie choices and a divine cavatelli with truffle purée and mushrooms. Wednesdays are great fun, when the band The Other Side of Cool makes the scene.

Vieux-Port's third eatery is the Pincette Lobster Bar, decked out in the rustic style of a sea shanty but with an upscale menu of seafood. Pincette has a raw bar and a choice that includes fish 'n' chips, shrimp risotto and an homage to lobster, served whole, or with pasta, poutine, mac 'n' cheese and in a guédille, the Quebec version of a lobster roll.

Timing is everything. With about 6 million people visit-

ing the Old Port annually and Auberge du Vieux-Port a top pick on TripAdvisor, life can be a mad crush. Reservations are recommended at Pincette and Gaspar, brunch on Saturdays and Sunday is a hit, and 5 à 7 are the magic hours, on certain days.

**Hotel:** Auberge du Vieux-Port, previously part of Le Groupe Antonopoulos, the longtime leader in Old Montreal hospitality, now is part of the Gray Collection, which includes several restaurants as well as Hôtel William Gray and Le Petit Hôtel in Montreal and the Metcalfe Hotel in Ottawa.

"We focus on fashionable destinations with fine Quebec cuisine in historic locales," said Gray

Collection president Dimitri Antonopoulos. "And we're proud that Auberge du Vieux-Port is a successful landmark after 25 years on this dynamic scene."

The structure is rooted in Montreal in many ways, with its singular waterfront location and the architectural influence of 200-year-old brick and stone warehouse walls, wrought-iron trim and casement windows.

The interiors are a mixed bag of vintage styles, from Victorian lamps to reproduction armoires, and the upstairs corridors are a bit dim, but the place is well-kept and professionally run. The lobby, a popular gathering place at cocktail hour, has a massive stone fireplace, curved velvet

IF YOU GO

**Auberge du Vieux-Port:** 514-876-0081, 888-660-7678, aubergeduvieuxport.com, 97 rue de la Commune E., Old Montreal. **Price:** from \$404 in summer on weekdays. Weekends/holidays can be higher. Including Wi-Fi, guest computer. Guests have 15 per cent off at Spa William Gray (spawilliamgray.com). Discounts of 10 to 20 per cent on one to three nights until April 30, 2023. Valet parking \$38 overnight, or \$20 for meals. **Dining:** Taverne Gaspar: 514-392-1649, tavernegaspar.com; dinner nightly from 5 p.m. Brunch on Sat.-Sun. 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Happy hour on wine and beer, 5 p.m. – 7 p.m. Pincette Lobster Bar: 514-876-4261, pincettemtl.com; daily 8 a.m.-10 p.m. Terrasse sur l'Auberge: daily from 3 p.m. (no reservations). **Info:** Tourisme Montréal: 514-844-5400, 877-bonjour (877-266-5687), mtl.org; Old Montreal: 514-732-8685, vieuxmontreal.ca; Old Port: 514-496-port (514-496-7678) or 800-971-port (800-971-7678), oldportofmontreal.com. **Rue de la Commune:** Pointe-à-Callière Montreal Archaeology and History Complex marks 30 years with 30 events, including Musical Middays on Thursdays/Family Sundays (July- Aug.); Cirque du Soleil, until Aug. 14; L'International des Feux Loto-Québec, until Aug. 6.

sofas and antiques including a lacquered chess table, books and bibelots. Keeping the Old Quebec character, most of the guest rooms have raw timber ceiling beams and wood-slat floors, and a choice of facing the Old Port or historic rue St-Paul (believed to be Montreal's first formal street in the 1600s, now a pedestrian walkway). The upshot is that I know a hotel has my best interests at heart when it has good beds, bathrobes and linens, as well as Nespresso and fine toiletries, in this case, by Le Labo. Upgraded rooms have jet showers, whirlpool baths and electric fireplaces.

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