

Niagara-on-the-Lake getaway is a world removed from the Falls



ROCHELLE LASH
Hotel Intel

The recently transformed 124 on Queen Hotel and Spa, in the enchanting town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., can be a vacation getaway on its own or a jumping-off point for the area's singular attractions.

If you want to simply chill in one of Canada's most romantic and historic destinations, the new owners of 124 on Queen, David Jones and Nick Capasso, have rebuilt an existing establishment into a deluxe, year-round hotel.

This triumphant second debut includes the luxurious, expanded Spa at Q and its Nordic-style hydrotherapy circuit; updated gastronomy at Treadwell Cuisine, including a wine cellar inspired by Niagara's 50 vineyards; the Gate House Bistro; a party pavilion; and underground parking (free for guests).

The pièce de résistance is the new Signature Collection at Q, a posh wing of 30 elegant rooms and suites.

"We have created a place for memories — of weddings and honeymoons, or holidays with family, friends or lovers," said Jones, who is a local.

What to do: Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake are 25 kilometres apart, but are quite different worlds. Niagara Falls is charged with unique, awe-inspiring experiences, such as the WildPlay Zipline over the Niagara River, and the new Tunnel, which involves riding a glass

elevator down to get a close-up view from a riverside platform at the base of the thundering Falls.

In contrast, Niagara-on-the-Lake is leisurely, although summer can be busy here, too. To get in the mellow mood, I would start with a promenade along Lake Ontario and then explore Old Town, known for its ornate Victorian manors, cute shops and a riot of flower baskets.

The town has vintage charm and a diverse history. You'll find exhibits on Indigenous life, the War of 1812 and the Underground Railroad of the mid-1800s, by which enslaved African-Americans escaped from the U.S. to freedom.

The cycling is exceptional, and you can't beat the scenic Niagara River Recreation Trail for an easygoing outing. There are biking tours of wineries, but to avoid cycling under the influence, consider driving with Grape Escape or Crush on Niagara Wine Tours.

Culture abounds. The renowned Shaw Festival is staging such favourites as The Doctor's Dilemma by George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest.

The hotel: The 124 on Queen operates in adjoining heritage buildings.

Each of the 70 rooms and suites is different, but they all are done up in a classic colour scheme — delicate tones of dove grey and cloud white, with splashy blue rugs that remind me of the waves of Lake Ontario. Most accommodations have wet bars and some have full kitchens.

Guests in the Signature Collection wing are spoiled with larger rooms, as well as mattresses by Stearns and Foster, in-room Nespresso and Nunshen tea, bathrobes, fine linens and cedar closets.



The revamped 124 on Queen Hotel and Spa in Niagara-on-the-Lake is a luxurious 70-room establishment with a charming, vintage brick exterior. PHOTOS: 124 ON QUEEN HOTEL AND SPA



The hotel includes a posh new wing of larger rooms and suites.

Treadwell: Executive chef Jason Williams, chef-founder Stephen Treadwell and his son, sommelier James Treadwell, harness the region's artisanal agriculture and prolific wine production. Patrons enjoy succulent, contemporary cuisine and a 900-bottle cellar, and can dine indoors, on the patio or — my preferred perch — at the chef's bar facing the open kitchen.

Breakfast standouts are French toast brioche with blackberries, crème fraîche and maple syrup; and the heavenly lobster Benedict.

Lunch is an elegant repast featuring bouillabaisse of Atlantic seafood with saffron cream, duck confit, braised short ribs, or the irresistible lobster club on duck-

fat-fried sourdough, with bacon and whipped goat cheese.

The dinner tasting menu (four courses, \$95, plus \$70 wine pairing) includes options such as a first course of foie gras or cured tuna with cilantro, followed by seared scallops or ricotta gnocchi, and mains such as sliced rib-eye or honey-roasted duck. Favourite desserts include pannacotta with rhubarb or a pistachio tart with ice cream.

Spa: The well-equipped spa is a major draw. The extensive hydrotherapy circuit includes pools of various temperatures, showers with aromatherapy or light therapy, a eucalyptus steam, a sauna, and even a space with a light snowfall to regulate

IF YOU GO

Niagara-on-the-Lake is about a two-hour drive from Toronto. Other options include GO Transit, Megabus, FlixBus, Niagara Airbus, FlyGTA Airlines (from Toronto's Billy Bishop downtown airport).

124 on Queen Hotel and Spa: 855-988-4552, 905-468-4552, 124queen.com; 124 Queen St.; Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont. Accessible. Vegan cuisine available. **Price:** Rooms from \$324, suites from \$439; Signature rooms from \$449 and suites from \$549. Extra: spa treatments; hydrotherapy, \$90, or \$30 with treatment. Prices lower after Thanksgiving. **Tourism:** Niagara-on-the-Lake: 905-468-1950, niagaraontheLake.com. Niagara Falls: 800-563-2557, niagarafallstourism.com. Shaw Festival: 800-511-7429, shawfest.com. Ontario: destinationontario.com.

your body temperature. For beauty and body, the Spa at Q has a mani-pedi salon, a relaxation lounge and a variety of massages to ease muscle tension with anti-inflammatory oils, herbs, florals or warm stones. rochelle@rochellelash.com



Niagara Falls

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