

Oka's monks welcome visitors to their new abbey

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The Abbaye Val Notre Dame has continued a tradition of having a shop that sells local products, this time from Lanaudière, Quebec

Photograph by: Handout photo, Abbaye Val Notre Dame

There is no room at this inn, but it's worth planning ahead to arrange a stay at the new Abbaye Val Notre Dame.

The Trappist monks of Oka, well-known for their busy food shop near the Lake of Two Mountains, have relocated to a heavenly, mountainous region of Lanaudière, northeast of Montreal.

Their new digs are simple, in keeping with their ascetic lifestyle, but also striking, outdoorsy and beautiful, reflecting the group's doctrine of experiencing spiritual joy in nature and light. The abbey's estate is separated into a few sections - a food and craft shop, a church, lodging and a study hall for the monks, and a guest house that opened in the autumn to welcome visitors on retreats. The first available dates are in early February.

Twenty-three monks eat, sleep, pray and work at the abbey, their numbers down from 170 men during the 1950s and 75 during the 1980s. They are perpetuating a Catholic tradition of silence, contemplation and manual work that dates to the rules of St. Benedict, formulated around AD 500, and modified when the Cistercian order was founded in AD 1,098. The Trappists, a branch of the Cistercian order, are

