

QUEBEC WINTER FUN

Le Westin an oasis in heart of Mont-Tremblant

Getaway voted one of 25 best ski towns



ROCHELLE LASH
CHECKING IN

Today's Travel section showcases some of Quebec's most dramatic winter wonders, north, south, east and west. Let's not overlook Mont-Tremblant, the mountain resort that launched Canada's first chairlift during the season of 1938-1939.

Redeveloped during the past 20 years by Intrawest, Tremblant just happens to be on National Geographic's list of the world's best 25 ski towns, in the very good company of Aspen, Vail, Zermatt and Chamonix, and in the Northeast U.S., North Conway, N.H., and Stowe, Vt.

The news chez Intrawest is the \$5-million renovation of the Le Westin Resort and Spa.

Le Westin is an oasis of contemporary cool in the heart of Tremblant's slope-side community. Fast-moving bellmen greet arriving guests, whisk away their skis to a private locker room, park their car underground and then deliver their luggage upstairs. Restaurant Yamada serves modern Japanese cuisine and the Yamada Lounge does cocktails. The outdoor heated pool and hot tub are tucked into a beautifully landscaped courtyard of snow-laden evergreens. And the Amerispa features a two-hour Serenity massage, possibly the ultimate in après-ski. Yup, better than a beer.

Le Westin is one of Mont Tremblant's go-to hotels for visiting movie stars, pro athletes and anyone else accustomed to sharp service, good food and attractive, convenient lodgings. Lucky for them. How does everyone else score a sweet suite here?

You should think ahead if you want a best-price deal for overnight visits and even for lift tickets. That's the wisdom of Serge Dufresne, my guru for the labyrinth of lodgings at Mont-Tremblant. Dufresne is the general manager of Le Westin as well as Intrawest's other condo-hotels collect-



Le Westin Resort and Spa, at the centre of Mont-Tremblant's slope-side village, recently renovated its 122 suites.



A newly renovated junior suite at Le Westin has a very urban look. The makeover cost the owners \$5 million.

ively called Les Suites Tremblant.

"The best deal is the advance-purchase offer," Dufresne says. "If you browse tremblant.ca or contact the toll-free call centre and pay in advance of your visit, you'll get the optimum price. It will be a savings of 25 to 30 per cent. There also are a lot of 'flash' last-minute sales that feature discounted lodging and lifts and new 'warehouse' tickets for lifts.

"Rates at large hotels fluctuate according to availability, so planning ahead of the pack is the way to go because

you'll be booking before the establishment gets full. Also, in a sense, we are rewarding guests who make a commitment to stay with us and stick to it."

And every day is different. Search for daily deals and you might nail free parking, lift tickets, a \$25 gift card or a late checkout, particularly on Sundays. Starwood Preferred Guests loyalty members, affiliated with Westin, might be offered perks such as a welcome drink, a room upgrade or bonus points.

Views from Le Westin's balconies are of the magnifi-

cent Laurentian landscape of lakes, mountains and forests, but the updated look of the hotel's suites is urban: sleek and minimalist furnishings in compact spaces.

"Our clients are mostly young city dwellers," Dufresne says. "They escape to the countryside to ski and party, but they don't want to lose their trendy connection."

To that end, Le Westin's re-do of its guest accommodations has a more contemporary look and a neutral palette. The 122 suites now sport linen-textured walls the colour of golden wheat,

with cream canvas curtains, chrome-based lamps and dark-wood furniture. The updated bathrooms have fancy faucets and the kitchenettes were rebuilt with caramel-hued armoires. The Westin also sports stylish black and white landscapes by Montreal photographer Steven Graetz to complete the designed-in-the-2000s look.

One of the signature items of the 185-hotel Westin brand is the exclusive Simmons pillow-top mattress called the Heavenly Bed. Feel free to bring the entire family. Le Westin offers a Heavenly Crib, a Heavenly Dog Bed and a pull-out sofa that I sampled briefly.

Not awful, but maybe not heavenly.

Tremblant will celebrate its 75th season with the Legends Classic, a dual slalom race on Feb. 9, open to competitive and recreational skiers. Dust off your grandparents' stretch pants, bear-trap bindings and wooden skis because there will be prizes for the best vintage ski ensembles.

Always evolving, Tremblant has created an alpine touring program with designated areas on the Algonquin, Beauchemin and Nansen trails as well as several glades. Guides and equipment (skis, "heel-up" bindings and boots, climbing skins and telescopic poles) are available.

IF YOU GO

Mont Tremblant Resort-88-Tremblant / 888-736-2526, www.tremblant.ca.

Le Westin Resort & Spa Tremblant: 888-738-1777, 819-681-8000, www.tremblant.ca; Starwood's Preferred Guest loyalty program includes Westin, W hotels, Sheraton, St. Regis and other brands. Le Westin Tremblant is pet-friendly, \$35 a day.

Prices fluctuate: Junior suites and one-bedroom suites, approximately \$239-\$609 per night, Fri.-Sat., for two to four people, or \$199-\$499, Sun.-Thurs. Two-bedroom suites, for four to six, are available; all incl. Internet, heated pool, hot tub, game arcade, fitness room, snow tubing, bonfires, skating, First Tracks skiing and mountain tours. Extras: lift tickets, valet parking, meals, Amerispa, in-room movies, babysitting, Kids' Club, Mother Nature Day Camp, Alpine Touring and Activity Centre (dog sledding, ice-climbing, helicopter rides, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, sleigh rides).

Restaurant Yamada: Open daily; 819-681-4141, www.yamadatremblant.com; breakfast until 11 a.m.; Japanese cuisine and sushi bar from 5:30 p.m.

Amerispa: 819-681-7080, www.amerispa.ca; 30 services include an express mani-pedi, \$88; therapeutic massage, \$140; men's facial, \$130; algae body wrap, \$110; two-hour Serenity massage, \$195.

You don't have to go all the way, but the climb to the summit of the Laurentians' highest peak is four to six kilometres — and then you ski down.

It's so much fun and such a terrific challenge, I wonder why they ever bothered with lifts.

The writer was a guest of Le Westin, which did not review or approve the story.

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VERMONT

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