

LUXURY SPA FINDER

THE SPA LIFESTYLE AT ITS FINEST



THE NEW
Tuscan Spa

Circling Montreal

Sampling Six Spas in the Surrounding
Countryside • By Melisse Gelula

THE FRANCE OF NORTH AMERICA—THAT'S THE SHORTHAND FOR Quebec. This route, a semicircle around Montreal, proves that it's apt. It starts west of the city in Montebello (a two-hour drive on Route 148), dashes north to Mont Tremblant (an hour's drive on Route 327), then turns southeastward and jumps the St. Lawrence to take in two spas in the Eastern Townships (a two-hour drive on Highway 15 and Route 10). There's bucolic scenery throughout, charming villages between Tremblant and Sainte Adele, and a cornucopia of apple orchards, maple farms, *fromageries*, and vineyards on the south side of the St. Lawrence. You can speed the trip by taking the four-lane autoroutes—most of the spas covered here are close to them—but consider the slow lane, like Route 344, which runs to Montebello along the Ottawa River (past more orchards and more *fromageries*). As for the spas, most are on the modest side, instances of *petit-auberge* pampering, a nice amenity in this French getaway in North America. Bon voyage!

• MAP ILLUSTRATION BY ANNE SMITH •



1
**FAIRMONT
LE CHÂTEAU
MONTEBELLO**
819-423-6341
www.fairmont.com



2
HÔTEL QUINTESSENCE
Mont Tremblant
866-425-3400
www.hotel
quintessence.com



3
L'EAU À LA BOUCHE
Sainte Adèle
450-229-2991
www.leauala
bouche.com



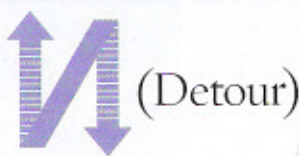
4
SPA EASTMAN
Eastman
800-665-5272
www.spa-
eastman.com



6
**HÔTEL
LE ST-JAMES**
Montreal
866-841-3111
www.hotelstjames.com



5
**AUBERGE
RIPPLECOVE & SPA**
Ayer's Cliff
800-668-4296
www.ripplecove.com



HEADING EAST on Route 10 from Spa Eastman to Auberge Ripplecove, you'll pass three pieces worth a stop. **Abbaye Saint Benoit** (go south on Chemins des Peres) sells cider and cheese made by the monks. In the tiny town of Magog (on Route 10), try the **Owl's Bread** boulangerie (426 Rue Principale Ouest), famous for local duck foie gras sandwiches. Just past Magog, take Route 247 south to **Bleu Lavande**, a lavender farm that makes beauty products and gives tours.



[Spa Road Trip]



Fairmont ▲ Le Château Montebello

My first stop, 90 minutes west of Montreal on Route 148, is a landmark of sorts: the world's largest log hotel. The red-cedar beams are sharpened to pencil points on the exterior corners and rise three stories in the circular lobby. The decor throughout is robust mountain house—wooden Adirondack-style and studded-leather furniture, woody animal prints, and tartans in the lobby and guest rooms. The fitness center has a semi-Olympic-size indoor pool and a substantial spa (eight treatment rooms), which opened in May 2006. It has two amenities that are rare at spas in eastern Canada, an ample relaxation room (above) and a couple's treatment room—this one has a fireplace, *ofuro* tub, and river view. My therapist, Samira Arrad, was trained in both massage and aesthetics, which is doubtlessly why the combination face-and-body treatments I had with her were so solid. The only decor downsides: the approach to the spa, an underground concrete walkway, and the YMCA-style locker rooms that spa-goers share with pool users. **US\$190–\$382**



Hôtel Quintessence ▼

It's an hour's drive on two-lane Route 327 to Mont Tremblant, a *ville du ski* owned by mega timeshare group Intrawest. Quintessence is the sumptuous separatist here, an elegant inn with a staff trained in beck-and-call service and a five-star setting on undeveloped Lake Tremblant. The 30 suites (below)—the smallest is 700 square feet—have porches, wood-burning fireplaces, and heated bathroom floors, which suits them perfectly for their other role: massage room. There's also a spa—the teeny (two rooms) Spa Sans Sabots, where facials and body treatments are given with a very good, hard-to-find Italian beauty line called Ishi. I don't usually find culinary-based spa menus appealing, but Quintessence's is certainly well-done. The truffle facials (the spa director claims they brighten skin), vinotherapy (wine-based) treatments, and chocolate wraps are inspired by the hotel's nouveau-Quebec restaurant. The spa also offers a classic, Carita's refined body scrubs from La Maison de Beauté in Paris. (Arrange to have the scrub removed with hot towels, as the shower is located outside the treatment room.) Like the hotel itself, it's a memorable dash of cosmopolitanism. Nothing else on this route matches it. **US\$402–\$1,560**



L'Eau à la Bouche ▲

The name means "mouthwatering," and it refers to chef Anne Desjardins's 30-year-old French-regional restaurant, which draws customers from Montreal (45 minutes up Route 15) and beyond. (The six-course Discovery menu, including five paired wines, is about US\$151.) The simple inn and spa were added in 1987 and 2006, respectively, to capitalize on the restaurant's success and Desjardins's notoriety. The spa (above) is outdoors (Nordic-style); consists of two pools (one hot, one cold), a sauna, and a fireplace; and is meant for use year-round. (In winter you simply don a hat with your bathing suit.) Inside, I had a terrific B. Kamins maple sugar scrub with Chantal Bazinet, who incorporated massage strokes and reflexology. The spa also offers facials. The property is a Relais & Châteaux hotel, but back when the organization classified members by luxury quotient, L'Eau à la Bouche was two levels below the top, meaning it's more of a simple country hotel or, in this case, a restaurant with rooms. Come with those expectations and you'll be happy. **US\$186–\$226**

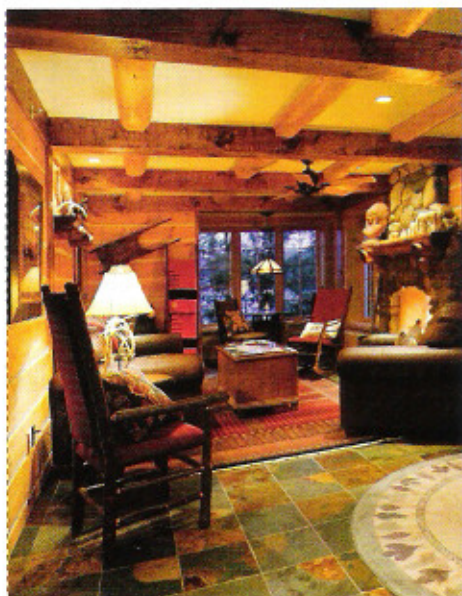


[Spa Road Trip]



Spa Eastman ▼

Jocelyna Dubuc is one of Canada's spa pioneers, having opened this property in 1977 as Canada's first destination spa. (Below, the indoor pool.) A stay here is a return to a simple way of spa-ing—a holistic treatment menu, spa cuisine (with wine) served at set times, and a schedule of unfussy fitness classes—and 1980s prices. It would be a good value even if the staff weren't so well trained, which for Dubuc has always been the priority, "especially when you're not offering bells, whistles, and multimillion-dollar architecture," she says. (Although the region is a draw as it includes the province's Wine Route.) The Mineral Miracle treatment with Michel Leblanc, a massage veteran



Hôtel Le St-James ▼

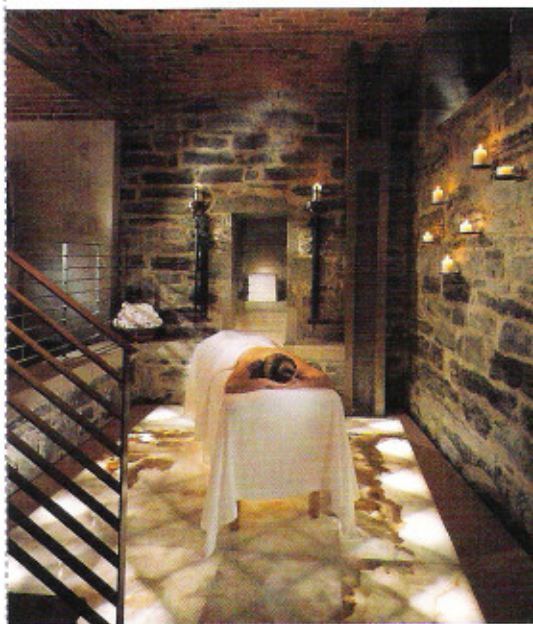
I ended my trip here, Montreal's most opulent hotel and one of the most original spas I've ever been to. It occupies a 19th-century bank vault and, besides reception and a changing area, consists of one nearly-800-square-foot, bi-level treatment room (below). The entrance is the vault door, and once inside, the guest is gold. Despite the brick ceilings and walls and exposed steel beams, the space feels inviting. Votive candles provide light, marbleized Plexiglas floors lend a warm glow, and there's a small flight of stairs to a Vichy shower. Therapist Marie-Noel Cadieux, who learned Swedish and shiatsu at two of Montreal's best massage schools and is completing acupuncture training, gave me a very satisfying custom treatment—a salt scrub followed by a hot stone massage during which she applied a Pevonia Myoxy Caviar face mask



Auberge Ripplecove & Spa ▲

When Route 141 veers southeast from Route 10 toward Ayer's Cliff, it rounds lakes, cuts through woods, and passes country cottages, ending at what looks like a classic New England inn. The Stafford family has owned this 12-acre property on Lake Massawippi since 1945, when it was a summer fishing destination. Now it's a formal country inn, with jackets at dinner and four-poster beds in some of the 35 rooms. (Size varies considerably: Mine was a closet—but had a great lake view.) The three-room spa was added in 2003. It's cozy thanks to the Ralph Lauren-lite decor and fireplace. (Above, the relaxation room.) The only mystery is why guests don't linger here: It's mostly a thoroughfare to an outdoor hot tub. I liked the facial with marine-derived Phytomer products and lots of pleasant facial massage. The Back and Legs massage from spa director Denise Fabi really got to my knots but felt more like an old-school rubdown than a therapeutic massage. I was told that the other therapist, Nicole Boudoin, offers a much more intensive massage.

US\$159-\$315 per person



to boost hydration. The hotel spared no expense on the changing rooms, which have private steam showers with gorgeous telephone-handle-size fixtures and black-and-white tiles, Swiss showers, and dry cedar saunas. US\$390-\$4,873



of 20 years, crossed into the therapeutic realm, thanks to his safecracker's touch. For Aqua-Massage Mouvance I floated in a private, heated indoor pool, while Valerie Arsenault stretched, cradled, and tangoed me through the water. Guest rooms are meant to be restorative (no TVs or radios)—a fireplace and deck with a lake view is as luxe as it gets. But it was exactly that combination of simplicity and seriousness that won me over. (For more on Spa Eastman, see *Luxury SpaFinder*, January-February 2007.) US\$126-\$222