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## Central Canada charms: At this Quebec spa, the medium is the massage

Margaret Swaine, Weekend Post



Tyst Tradgard

*Spring! It's spring! At last! Which means our thoughts have swerved a full 180-degrees to images of love - and not only love, but lust, too, of the wandering kind. Last week we contacted Weekend Post's regular roster of travel mavens for their counsel on where we should go for a three-or four-day getaway. This week we present a variety of trips to Ontario and Quebec. In the weeks that follow we'll feature brief interludes from other Canadian destinations.*

**Day 1** It's April 1, the beginning of my rub, knead and scrub tour of Quebec spas. I'm visiting six spas, over four nights, then back home to Toronto. Is there such a thing as too many massages? I'll find out. It's an hour's flight on Porter to Montreal, then a half-hour in a rental car to the hip W Hotel, in the heart of the downtown district straddling Old Montreal. My 70-minute Nutritional Organic Body Mask treatment at W's Away Spa features Jihan, an exotic brunette, scrubbing me with a fruity peel of grapefruit, papaya, apricot, peach and kiwi. I shower this off, then she slathers me with a vegetable mask that includes spinach, tomato, artichoke and basil, massaging my scalp as I rest in a hot wrap. Another shower, and I'm finally anointed with sweet almond and jojoba oils.

I smell like Loblaws fresh produce section.

**Day 2** Just 10 minutes to Strom Spa Nordique on Nun's Island, yet it feels like I'm in the country. Overlooking Lac des Battures, it has outdoor hot whirlpools, thermal waterfalls and cold Nordic plunge baths. Inside are Finnish saunas, steambaths, relaxation areas and treatment rooms. My one hour signature Strom massage with Jonathan is a mix of Swedish, Hawaiian, Californian and other techniques, starting with an Eminence brand blueberry face moisturizer and ending with a hot shell rubbed along my back. The massage bed's soft and heated while Jonathan's strokes are long and languid. It's the most sensual massage I've had by a non-partner.

It's hard to leave but I have to get to Balnea Spa in Bromont by early afternoon. An hour later I'm driving along a rural dirt road past farms and the fields where the Olympic Horse jumping took place in 1976 to a private 400-acre nature preserve that's Balnea. Sitting on the shores of Lac Gale, it has hot tubs by the beach and long wooden docks floating on the waters. On the hillside above are Finnish saunas, Turkish baths, solariums, whirlpool tubs and cold plunge pools, complete with panoramic

views. My Pulp Fiction treatment in the upper lodge begins with a glass of Chianti and fresh grapes. Vanessa, a pretty blond, then scrubs me all over with lavender honey and Chianti grape must from the Italian Ishi "The Elements" line, including (with my OK) breasts and stomach. Then I go to Sylvain for my chocolate oil massage. He uses what he calls "very caring strokes," long, deep and therapeutic enough to loosen tight muscle knots but still sensuous. My mind drifts to former lovers and baby oil. The spa recommends this massage for "experienced receivers" only. I dine that night at the spa on surprisingly good salads and ravioli then overnight in a luxurious suite at Le St-Martin Bromont Hotel.

**Day 3** A 90-minute drive north takes me to a private island resort, the Oasis de L'Ile in St-Eustache. I'm definitely seeing a pattern to Quebec spas. Here too are outdoor hot tubs and cold pools, these ones with a view to the river as well as a sauna, steamroom and relaxation areas. Valerie gives me an hour long Guinot facial that includes a hand massage while a moisturizing mask is on my face. Johanne lays hot stones on my body and rubs every part of me (except my privates) for 90 minutes. At night I'm hungry enough to order beef tartar and osso buco of wild boar with a bottle of Chianti in the resort's dining room. I overnight in a tranquil room at the Oasis.

**Day 4** I arrive at Station touristique Duchesnay near Quebec City (where in winter they have an Ice Hotel) in less than three hours. There I munch on shrimp salad in the cheerful relaxation lounge at Tyst Trädgård Jardin de Detente overlooking Lac Saint-Joseph. My one-hour hydrotherapy session here has a difference. My outdoor hot whirlpool and cold plunge are private, for me alone. Half an hour in one station and then I'm moved to the next, which features a sauna and ice-cold tunnel waterfall. The setting is gorgeous woods and lake. Massages are available in private themed pavilions, but it's time to head off.

I've reserved a room in the gorgeous historic Auberge Saint-Antoine in Old Town Quebec, one of my favourite hotels in Canada. There I have booked a massage followed by a Yonka Optimizer Facial in their tiny but attractive spa. At this point I confess to slight spa overload. However, "Le Diplomat," which was my sleek room with a balcony view of Chateau Frontenac and a superb dinner of Charlevoix gourganes soup, sweetbreads and arctic char at intimate, elegant Panache in the hotel capped my over-the-top four day indulgence beautifully.

Heaven on Earth is alive and well in Quebec.

*Margaret Swaine was a guest of Tourism Quebec.*

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