

PARADISE

home and away

Take a journey—if not in body, then in mind—to unique spas both here and abroad

BY MARGARET SWAINE



Away

Aquapetra Resort & Spa, Italy

The ruins of a neglected mid-19th century village have been masterfully restored to create this resort and spa in the countryside of Campania, in southern Italy. If you're heading into Naples and farther south to drive the amazing Amalfi Coast, this is a great spot to relax for a night (or several!) beforehand. Nearby are wineries open to the public for a sampling of Falanghina and Aglianico wines as well as other products local to Benevento, the nearest large town. The resort feels like a small village, with rooms in former cottages, most with a balcony or terrace. Every one of the 42 guest rooms has been individually styled to give a unique interior. Mine, perched at attic level, had a separate living room and a view of the pool area.

At the heart of the resort is the Aqua Spa, which combines water, stone, glass and light for a relaxing atmosphere in beautiful surroundings. The 600-square-



TRAVEL PLANS

Montreal Fly to Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport (Air Canada, aircanada.com; WestJet, westjet.com; or Porter, flyporter.com), and drive from there to Le Baluchon, about one hour and 40 minutes from the airport. Le Baluchon is part of a lovely group of 33 Quebec countryside properties called Hôtellerie Champêtre. Enrol at quebecfinestins.com and earn points for every dollar you spend, which you can use to purchase member products and services.

Naples Fly Lufthansa via Frankfurt to Naples (an Air Canada co-share route) (lufthansa.com). Or fly with Alitalia via Rome to Naples (alitalia.com). From Naples airport, the spa is about 45 minutes by car. It's a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World: Enrol at slh.com/club and get access to the best rates, a complimentary room upgrade and other benefits.

** Descriptions of treatments and accommodations are the author's observations. Services and conditions (and flight information) may change.*

metre wellness area includes a swimming pool with hydro-massage jets that bubble from the bottom and sides (just press a button and they activate for about five minutes or so), a sauna with sandalwood, lavender and rose aromas, a hammam with eucalyptus in the steam and a hot/cold Kneipp walking course. The outdoor swimming pool, which is embarked by rocks, is surrounded by olive groves.

I swam a few laps in the pool to work off some calories—I knew I'd be eating pasta that night. After some time enjoying the wellness area, I went for a couples massage with my husband; we wanted to get our circulation going after our overnight flight. Our massage therapists gave a good massage with pressure that was stimulating but also relaxing—enough so that I'm certain I heard some snores coming from my mate on the table beside me. Feeling restored but not in the mood for more travel, we ate that night in the La Locando del Borgo restaurant on the property. The candlelit room was romantic and elegantly stylish, the service was attentive and the food wonderfully fresh, pure Italian. It was an ideal start to our trip through southern Italy. (aquapetra.com)

Home

Le Baluchon, Quebec

Auberge Le Baluchon, in Saint-Paulin, sits about 40 minutes north of Trois Rivières on about 2,600 hectares of private land—and it has something for everyone to enjoy. Its property includes an archipelago of eight islands, plus waterfalls, forests and a river.

The 88 rooms are divided into four different lodges; the Island Lodge is one specifically for spa guests. There are multiple activities year-round and 22 kilometres of trails. Winter activities include horse-drawn sleigh rides, ice skating, cross-country skiing, snow tubing, and snowshoeing.

I stayed in one of the renovated spa lodge rooms (not all are) and loved the charming combo of rustic-styled chic with a log and bark motif, and modern amenities such as gas fireplace, rain shower, glass sink and flat-screen TV. I also had a view of the forest. The spa lodge has a pool, relaxation area and multiple treatment rooms. I chose to have a signature treatment called the Archipelago Isles Massage. The massage therapist used wide movements with her forearms to create the sensation of waves. The gentle yet deep-pressure massage was geared to relax my muscles and mind, and used stretching movements to further release physical and emotional tension. I didn't want her to stop, which to me is the sign of a perfect massage.

The spa offers a hot/cold Nordic circuit on the banks of the magnificent Rivière du Loup. After my massage, I enjoyed the Nordic circuit starting with the dry sauna. Then I immersed myself quickly in the cold plunge pool outside, which I found bracing but invigorating.

After that I stayed outdoors for 10 minutes, wrapped in a robe and blanket in an armchair close to the fireplace, before heading for the outdoor heated whirlpool.

By then I was ready for a good meal. Luckily I'd brought my appetite, as the food in the Baluchon's main restaurant is delicious.



BRING HOME THE SPA

Upper Canada Soap Company Golden Maple Sugar Bubble Bath contains sugar maple extract to help condition skin. Sweet! (\$13, 250 g)

For where to buy, see page 118.

Chef Yan Gabriel Gauthier sources locally for his "ecologically aware" gastronomy; four courses cost \$50. The menu changes seasonally; I enjoyed marinated Saint-Alexis-des-Monts trout and rack of pork from Ferme de Nordest in Mont-Laurier, as well as local cheeses from Fromagerie Bédouin and Charlevoix. Only in Quebec does a health regimen include such gastronomy. (baluchon.com) □

