

MARINAS CONDOS ADD CHIC TO MAGOG'S MAIN STREET

*Posh condo-hotel
a little bit urban,
a bit country
and all luxury*



ROCHELLE LASH

The new Quartier Des Marinas, Hôtel Expérience, has enhanced Magog's main street with a new level of chic.

Contemporary and upscale, it's the first lodging in the lively downtown core of this Eastern Townships community, and it's also a few steps to Pointe Merry park on the shore of Lake Memphremagog. Quartier Des Marinas is a posh 30-unit condo-hotel with two personalities, urban and country, and substantial year-round drawing power for superlative dining, shopping, culture and outdoor pursuits.

Water activities prevail in summer and the condo-hotel is almost next door to Magog Marine, a summertime hub for boating and fishing, as well as the town's beaches and bike trail. Nearby, the Marais de la Rivière aux Cerises is a tranquil canal and park, ideal for paddling and nature walks.

The equipment emporium Vie de Plein Air rents gear for many sports, including fat-bikes, e-bikes, skates and snowshoes (viedepleinair.com).

In the mountains eight kilometres away, winter is in full swing at Mont-Orford (downhill ski/snowboard and uphill trekking) and Parc national du Mont-Orford (cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, paddling, hiking).

Condo scene: "Quartier Des Marinas is a hybrid," said Yannick Beaupertuis, president of the developer Revmax, who brings experience from some of Quebec's top resorts including Estérel and Estrimont.

"It's supremely convenient, equipped with the amenities of an urban condo, and also a jump-off point to the countryside."

There's no lobby, so the building stays private, but there is receptionist/concierge, as well as public spaces like a gym and an impressive rooftop wellness terrace with a sauna, an outdoor lounge and two hot tubs.



The new Quartier des Marinas in Magog is a deluxe condo-hotel with designer decor and stunning views. QUARTIER DES MARINAS/HOTEL EXPERIENCE

The Comptoir de L'Atelier, on the ground floor, is a darling café and wine bar with pastries, soup and light lunches like quiche and sandwiches.

Lodging: "Excellence was our watchword throughout the planning and construction," Beaupertuis said.

"The infrastructure is solid, the accommodations are top-drawer and the fixtures and appliances are state-of-the-art."

Guests have a choice of studios or one- and two-bedroom suites, as well as sweeping three-bedroom penthouses. They're luxurious, airy spaces with walls of windows, nine-foot ceilings and views of the town, the lake or the mountains. Many have heated balconies.

The units also are fully loaded with euro-kitchens with stainless appliances and quartz counters, Nespresso machines and superior bathrooms with heated floors, washer-dryers, white piqué bathrobes and Occitane toiletries. Quartier des Marinas is new-new and high-tech, so there are remote controls for everything

IF YOU GO

Quartier Des Marinas, Hôtel Expérience: 844-494-2494, hotelqdm.ca, 482 rue Principale O., Magog. Accessible. Pet-friendly.

Price: opening promotion starts at \$279 for a studio, up to \$999 for a three-bedroom penthouse (until June 30). That's approximately 25-per-cent off. Summer, weekends and holidays can be higher. Including Wi-Fi, rooftop, indoor parking for one car (second car at \$25).

Tourism Eastern Townships: easterntownships.com; Mont Orford: montorford.com; Parc national du Mont-Orford: sepaq.com; Magog Marine: magogmarine.ca

that moves: blackout shades, heat/AC, gas fireplaces and smart TVs with Disney and Netflix.

All the units have fashionable neutral decor — snow-white walls as a backdrop to textured sofas and wood accents.

If you loved your visit to Quartier des Marinas, you can buy a condo as an investment or as a second home that is rented out when you are not using it. Studios start at \$621,600.

Dining out: At the top of Magog's dynamic dining is Au Comptoir MarCel, a treasure of elevated Mediterranean cuisine inspired by France, Spain and Portugal, with privately imported wines and market-fresh seafood. It has a rustic dockside dining room with a chef's bar facing the open kitchen and a glorious summertime terrace looking onto the Merry River.

Chef Marco Duarte and sommelier/maître d' Céline Gomez deliver sautéed sardines, boudin noir, zarzuela of seafood, beef, trout lacquered with honey, plus a surf-and-turf of poultry and shrimp with lobster bisque (aucomptoirmarcel.ca; dinner, Wednesday-Saturday; lunch/dinner, Friday-Saturday).

Other Magog favourites include several pubs — Bières des Cantons, Microbrasserie La Memphré, Taverne 1855 and Le

Mam'zelle Pub. Owned by sisters Roxanne and Anick Lemay, Mam'zelle calls itself a pub, but serves bistro fare like salmon or beef tartare, a duck club sandwich, oyster mushrooms with black garlic, calamari, steak-frites and braised beef cheeks.

Mont Orford: Mont Orford has \$2 million of new snow-making equipment, so even in difficult times, coverage is good, often with loose powder over a variable base.

This exceptional family-friendly mountain has snow parks, glades, the Forêt Magique and the 4KM, a long, easygoing trail.

Orford is pumped for spring break, when families can save up to 30 per cent on tickets and also customize family tickets for three, four or more. Some packages — sold only online — will offer the best deals from March 4-15.

Orford will sizzle from March 2-9, with après-ski in the Slalom Pub, a movie night, first tracks, equipment demos and the Golden Crown, a snow park competition.

Communing with nature in Austria's Hallstatt

Welcome to Sound of Music country, a gentle land where lakes and mountains are shuffled together, writes *Rick Steves*.

It's rare that a town's charm will get me out of bed early. The postcard-pretty, lake-cuddling town of Hallstatt, two hours south of Salzburg, is one of those places. First thing in the morning, I head to the high end of town to look at the glassy waters of Lake Hallstatt. With the town's church spire mirrored in the tranquil water, a shuttle boat cuts through its reflection, like a knife putting a swirl in the icing on a big cake. For just a moment, it disturbs this oasis of peace.

Hallstatt is located in Austria's Salzkammergute lake district, a scenic wonder that has enthralled nature lovers for centuries. This is Sound of Music country — idyllic and majestic, but not rugged, a gentle land where lakes and mountains are shuffled together like a game of 52-card pickup.

Before there was Rome, there was Hallstatt. One of Europe's oldest settlements, Hallstatt originated as a salt-mining centre (its name means "place of salt"). If you were to dig under some of its buildings, you'd find Roman and pre-Roman Celtic pavement stones from the ancient and prehistoric salt depot. Archeologists claim that

people have been coming here for salt since 7,000 BC (over the millennia, salt has been precious because it preserved meat).

A funicular runs up the mountain to the town's salt mine, one of many throughout the region that offers tours. At the mine, visitors slip into overalls, meet their guide and hike deep into the mountain to learn about the history of salt. A highlight

of the visit is riding down long banisters, miner-style, from one floor to the next ... praying for no splinters.

When I first discovered Hallstatt, this was a remote community at the far end of a long, dead-end lake. Though tourism has trampled some of its charm, vivid cultural traditions still survive. Traditional green felt hats distinguished by jaunty decorative feathers are big in Austria. On my first trip here, when I was just a teenybopper, my dad and I each bought a hat and had a friendly competition filling it with souvenir pins and fancy feathers. Forty years later, I happened to be in town during the annual feather-in-the-hat party. Local men — many with finely carved pipes and handlebar moustaches — strutted around in lederhosen and their finest Tyrolean-type hats, each with a proud feather sprouting from the rim.

For centuries, the town had no road access, so people came and went by boat. If you visit you'll still see the traditional wide, flat Fuhr boats, designed to carry heavy loads of salt in shallow water. On a recent visit, a local friend took me for a spin in his Fuhr. As he lunged rhythmically on the single oar, he said, "An hour on the lake is like a day of vacation." When I asked about the oar lock, which looked like a skinny dog-chew doughnut, he told me it was "made from the gut of a bull. Not of cow, but a bull."

Facing the lake is Pension Hallberg, with a display of debris from the bottom of Lake Hallstatt. The most fascinating treasure is a trove of Nazi paraphernalia, including piles of war medallions. As I tried to sort this out, their explanation made perfect sense: When it became clear that Germany would lose the Second World War, those

who served the Third Reich wanted to chuck any medals they had won. Lakes were the perfect trash bin.

In this town, when someone is happy to see you, they may say, "Can I cook you a fish?" I still remember the morning fish-selling ritual: A teenage boy rhythmically grabbed trout from the fishermen's pen and killed them one by one with a stern whack to the noggin. Another guy carried them to the tiny fishery, where they were gutted by a guy who used to do the stern whacking. A cat waited outside the door, confident his breakfast would be a good one. Restaurateurs and homemakers alike lined up, waiting to buy fresh trout to feed hungry tourists or special friends.

Restaurant Bräugasthof, lakeside and under a grand chestnut tree, is just the place to try some of Lake Hallstatt's prized fish. Reinanke (whitefish) is caught wild out of Lake Hallstatt and served the same day. Saibling (lake trout) is cheaper and also tasty. While you dine, you can feed the swans, who patrol the lake like it's theirs, and stretch greedily for every bit of bread you toss.

When I think of my favourite small-town places in Europe, they are where nature and culture mix, where each balcony has a lovingly watered, one-of-a-kind flowerbox, and where swans know just the right time to paddle by for scraps from diners at lakeside tables. Places like Hallstatt.

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The steep hillsides of the Dachstein range rise right up over lake shores in Hallstatt, located in Austria's Salzkammergut lake district. RICK STEVES