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The Monastère des Augustines review | holistic hideaway, Quebec, Canada

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A ONE-OF-A-KIND HOLISTIC WELLNESS HOTEL IN A MONASTERY

The Quick Read: The Monastère des Augustines is a wellness hotel in a monastery in Quebec City. Originally founded by the Augustinian Sisters – healers and nurses – in 1639, it's now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This is neither a spa nor an immersive retreat (religious or otherwise) and is open to people of all cultures and faiths, seeking gentle rest and relaxation breaks. You can book a package, stay anywhere from a night to a week in restored rooms and dip into classes in meditation, yoga, relaxation, enjoy complimentary therapies offered by excellent practitioners and dine in the restaurant. You also have free time to explore. It's really rather super.

Budget: ££



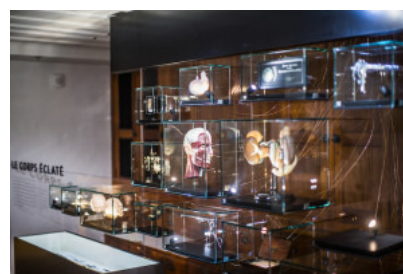
Yoga classes are gentle, inclusive and dogma-free

be yoga bunny to enjoy them. The treatments aim to relax and rejuvenate: they're not about 'vanity' pampering. This is a great choice if you're feeling tired, exhausted, going through a crisis or bereavement and in need of soothing and rest and want to go at your own pace.

What you can do: A stay at the monastery revolves around a package focusing on vitality, sleep, relaxation, renewal, self-discovery or balance. All include accommodation in either a restored 'cell' or a contemporary room, three healthy meals a day – made with local or organic foods – in the restaurant. Depending on your package and length of stay you may also get a holistic health consultation, access to

any of the daily scheduled activities which feature meditation, various types of yoga, Qi Gong, relaxation, and even creative sessions, treatments, currently reflexology and massage (essential oils, intuitive and neuro-energy) and a visit to the great on-site museum focusing on the healing and social history of the Augustinian Sisters, as well as any special workshops. Guests are also welcome to attend the morning Mass with the Sisters but this is very much up to the individual.

Look out for Heather Mah, a meditation and relaxation teacher as well as professional dance teacher from Montreal who comes every other week and teaches sessions which



Learn more about the Augustinian Sisters at the on-site museum

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Join a 'soul dance' class with Heather Mah

are open to all guests, regardless of ability (as is the case with all the classes here). She has an inclusive and gentle manner, integrates spiritually uplifting music into the sessions and varies her sessions – one may be a sitting meditation, another may include what she calls 'soul dance', a combination of yoga and dance and meditation. These are held in restored monastery rooms, which are peaceful and calming. She also leads mindful walks in the neighbourhood. She, like all the teachers here teaches in both French and English. The therapies are led by caring and experienced practitioners, including a reflexologist who also treats cancer patients at the adjoining Hotel Dieu, the oldest hospital in North America, one of many founded by the Augustinian Sisters.

Where you stay: One of the loveliest reasons for staying at the monastery is the peaceful atmosphere. It doesn't matter how stressed you may be feeling when you arrive, you can't fail to exhale amidst the unique calm here. The monastery is also elegant and a national treasure – priceless works of religious art adorn the corridors. The Augustinian Sisters have been in residence since the 17th century (even though the few who remain now live in a separate wing) and their healing energy permeates the building. Guests can choose to stay in spotless restored 'cells' where the Sisters used to live – these contain single or twin beds, beautiful quilts (sewn locally), and antique furnishings which belong to the Sisters and are on corridors lined with priceless art. Bathrooms for the cells are shared and spotless. You can also stay in equally restful en-suite contemporary rooms with sloping ceilings. There are peaceful nooks and crannies throughout the monastery to chill out in – part of the joy of a stay here is the freedom to wander, and soak up the ambiance.



Stay in a restored 'cell' where the Sisters used to live



Jini Reddy felt instantly becalmed here

How was it for us: I hadn't known what to expect – the website doesn't do justice to the loveliness of the place – and when I arrived, I felt instantly becalmed. I was bowled over by the depth of care and spiritual 'nourishment' on offer here. I felt able to go inward, deepen and relax with little effort. It's a heart-centred, gentle, inclusive environment with a sustainable ethos – and care for the earth matters to me as much as my own healing.

I adored my morning 'Awakening' meditation class and enjoyed the occasional glimpses of the kindly Sisters, in the corridors. I was inspired by the intangible feeling of peace and divinity here – in the broadest sense. There are not many places in the world where you can both chant the (Sanskrit) Gayatri Mantra *and* attend a Catholic mass (if you so choose.) And though the grounds are not big, there is a garden, and courtyard in which herbs are grown. The monastery is a not-for-profit social enterprise and carers of cancer patients in the adjoining hospital (the Hotel Dieu, founded by the sisters) can stay for free – which is wonderful. I would definitely return.

What we took home: I left with a feeling of being more deeply connected to myself and life, emotionally nourished, physically soothed, and with the sense of being guided in a magical, synchronistic way. There is a special energy at the monastery.

Would we go back: Yes, definitely. I'd love to return to soak up the peace anew, rest and enjoy the therapies.

People watch: Heather Mah is a superb meditation teacher, inspiring and engaging. Massage therapist Helene Chenard had very healing hands, gentle manner and an intuitive approach. Reflexology with Eric Lesard was a more subtle affair, but great for releasing tension and headaches. Therapists here (like staff) are chosen for their heart-centered qualities, compassion and expertise.



Mindful eating is the mantra

Food watch: Food is either locally grown, free-range or organic and served in the on-site restaurant. Mindful eating is the mantra here, the ambiance relaxed and the fare sophisticated. Many of the dishes have been adapted from the Augustinian Sisters archived cookery books and recipes. Marie Joelle, the chef cooks with flair and caters for vegan and vegetarian and gluten and dairy-free diets, though meat and fish are served too. Breakfast is taken in contemplative silence, and includes a buffet which is followed by a main meal. The kamut waffles served with scrambled eggs, rocket and a puree of maple and apple were delicious.

Lunch and dinner start with a salad buffet and elegant main courses (ie king prawns; seabass; cauliflower, couscous, apples and raisins.). Coffee, lovely herbal teas (derived from the Sisters' brews), and alcohol are served too. There is also an urban cultivator in



the restaurant in which are grown herbs and there's a herb garden outside too. You can buy snacks, juice and hot drinks in the boutique café.

What's queenly: The almost unearthly feeling of peace that descends as you make your way down the cell corridors! Pretty extraordinary. As is the combination of deep relaxation, a stay in such a unique setting with an incredible healing energy and history, all of it driven by a social mission to offer respite for caregivers is unique in the world.



An urban cultivator in the restaurant provides fresh herbs



Bathrooms for the cells are shared & spotless

What's lowly: Some of the guests failed to observe the silence at breakfast (but the staff are looking at ways of resolving this.)

Insider tip: Monastery staff are either bilingual or have a working knowledge of English, but be aware that you are in a Francophone city and French is the predominant language. Bring a dictionary for when you venture into the Old Town.

Price: Price varies depending on the package you choose – there are lots of options.

As an example, the Relaxation and Renewal package costs from \$276 Canadian / £138 per night, per person based on double occupancy for a 3 to 4 night stay, and \$298 Canadian / £150 per night, per person, based on single occupancy. This includes accommodation in either authentic or contemporary room, 3 meals a day, a one-hour holistic health consultation, a one-hour relaxation massage, a one hour movement, breathing and relaxation session, access to all activities on the daily program, access to the museum, access to common rooms and an end of stay appointment with a health coach. You can also just stay at the monastery for \$72 Canadian per night, per person, based on double occupancy in one of the authentic rooms – ie as a B&B, with access to the museum.

Value for Money: Good value, when you take into account the unique setting and ambiance.

monastere.ca

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Reviewed by **Jini Reddy**

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The Monastère des Augustines is an UNESCO World Heritage Site

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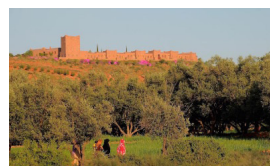
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