

Wellness with a French Accent : Le Monastere des Augustines in Quebec City

[Cathy Bennett Kopf](#) - March 6, 2023



Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

- Make this the year you gift yourself a wellness getaway. You deserve some quality “me” time, a chance to put the world on pause. There’s a surprisingly affordable luxury option north of the border in Canada. [Le Monastere des Augustines](#) is a boutique wellness hotel housed in an historic monastery in [Quebec City](#), a UNESCO world heritage site.

Stunning modern architecture blends beautifully with centuries-old stone walls. Unique accommodation and treatment choices allow you craft a stay based on your needs. Want to go back to basics ? Stay in an historic nun’s cell. Prefer plush ? Choose a contemporary cocoon with modern comforts. All packages include gourmet, good for you, chef-prepared meals made with locally sourced ingredients.

And to make your soul feel just as good as your body, this non-profit secular organization has a mission beyond wellness: it works to protect the healing legacy of the Augustinian sisters who gifted the property to the city of Quebec.



Old meets new in the lobby of Le Monastere. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

Occupying a 400-year old monastery, Le Monastere des Augustines is a contemporary [wellness hotel](#), offering guests a spa retreat in the heart of Canada's Quebec City.

Programs and treatments at Le Monastere draw upon the healing traditions of the Augustinian sisters who founded 12 hospitals after arriving in New France in 1639. They gifted the building and their trove of historic documents and artifacts to the people of Quebec in 2013, paving the way for the creation of this unique boutique hotel.

Highlights of a Le Monastere Stay

- Boutique wellness retreat
- Prime location in the heart of Old Quebec City, between rue des Remparts and rue Charlevoix
- Chef-prepared farm to table cuisine
- Modern accommodations in an historic building
- Unique and personalized holistic health treatments draw upon centuries of healing tradition

[Check Le Monastere Prices / Availability](#)

History of Le Monastere des Augustines

It took many years for the French to approach colonization of New France seriously following Jacques Cartier's expeditions in the mid-1500s. The massive territory stretched from present-day Quebec to the Gulf of Mexico. It consisted primarily of outposts populated by fur traders who relied heavily on the indigenous people to survive in the foreign climate and terrain.

Enter the Boss Ladies of 1639.

Three Augustinian sisters were tasked with the creation of the first hospital in North America to provide healthcare to the settlers. They set sail from Dieppe, France, in April 1639, arriving in July.

The sisters opened their hospital, L'Hôtel-Dieu de Québec, in 1646, the first on the continent north of Mexico. Today, it's a leading cancer treatment facility. They went on to establish 11 additional monastery-hospitals throughout the province, a pillar of Canada's national healthcare system.

In addition to providing direct patient care, the nuns directed administrative functions for the hospitals including employment and treatment program development. All of their accomplishments and dedication to a "culture of care" are immortalized in the onsite museum. It includes displays of the health care treatments of the 1600s—brutal and more than a little terrifying by today's standards.

The Legacy of the Augustinian Sisters

For four centuries, the sisters have lived in the monastery in an insular community, cloistered from the public (except for their daily work in the hospital). At one time, 225 sisters lived at the monastery; in 2023, just six remain.

To sustain their legacy, the Augustinian sisters created a trust to oversee the development of the monastery into a secular wellness hotel and to manage their incredible archive of artifacts and documents.

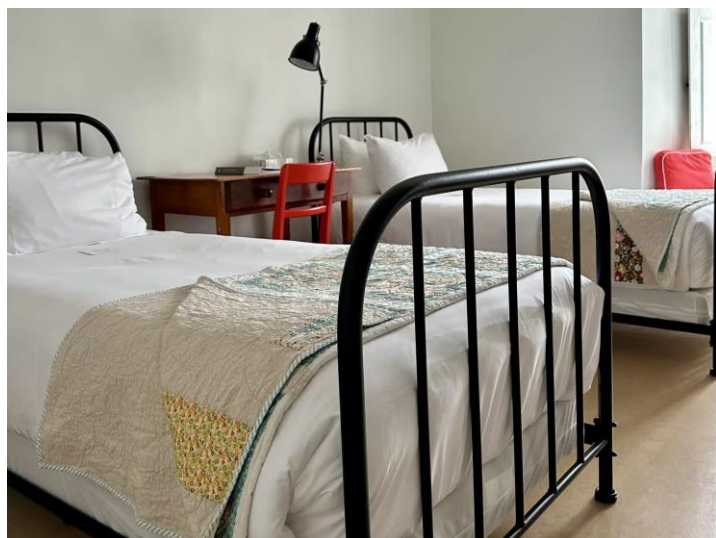
Le Monastere des Augustines opened in 2015 after a multi-year renovation. The building was sustainably redeveloped with many features including a geothermal heating and cooling system and sensor-equipped LED lighting. Hotel operations are also managed sustainably. For example, your unused soap bar gets remade into new soap bars. Worn bathrobes and linens ? They are resold or donated to homeless agencies. Le Monastere is Certified 5 Green Keys, the highest global standard for environmental responsibility and sustainable operations in the tourism industry.

Room Options at Le Monastere

You have two room types at [Le Monastere](#) – a contemporary room or “chambre authentique.” I stayed in both during my visit to the hotel.

Each of the two styles are available in configurations for single or double occupancy. And, to encourage calm contemplation, neither has electronics – no televisions, alarm clocks, mini fridges or coffee makers.

So, what’s the difference between the two ?



Authentic rooms at Le Monastere are no frills but super comfortable. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

Authentic Rooms

These authentic rooms give the feel of a stay in a monastic cell. But there’s no need for alarm. The decor is lean, but gracious. I found it to be a very comfortable and a nice reminder that what we want is often times much more than what we need.

Each of the 33 rooms is laid out differently, with unique antique furnishings and artwork. In mine, the twin size cot featured an uber comfortable mattress, fine natural fiber linens and was topped with a hand crafted quilt. The room had an antique wardrobe (plush bathrobe inside!), desk and nightstand. The hinged windows featured vintage hardware.

There’s a sink in the room. Which comes in handy because toilets and showers are located in shared bathrooms in the hallway. There were three located on my hallway; six in total. Each is single use, not dorm style stalls.



The Augustinian sisters changed rooms each year so they wouldn't get too attached to their furnishings and roommates. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

A replica of one of the sister's rooms is on display in the authentic room wing. Note the plaid blanket on the bed. In winter, the sisters would wear the blankets as skirts for ice skating. Look for the black and white photo in the hallways connecting the room wing with the public spaces.

SheBuysTravel Tip : I brought flip flops with me to wear when traveling to and from the bathroom. Next time I'll bring slippers or buy a pair of moccasins in Quebec City for padding down the hall. My flip-flopping sounded unnaturally loud in the serenity of the hotel. Apologies to my hallmates !



Contemporary rooms have a sleek, bright design. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

Le Monastere's Contemporary Rooms

Staying in one of the 32 contemporary rooms, which feature private bathrooms en suite is a completely different experience. Room configurations include king, queen or two extra long single beds.

The decor is modern. I particularly like the integrated closet and cubbie shelf system. There's a ton of storage, but it takes up no floor space so the room feels huge. If I were to live in a studio apartment, I'd want it designed just like one of these contemporary rooms.

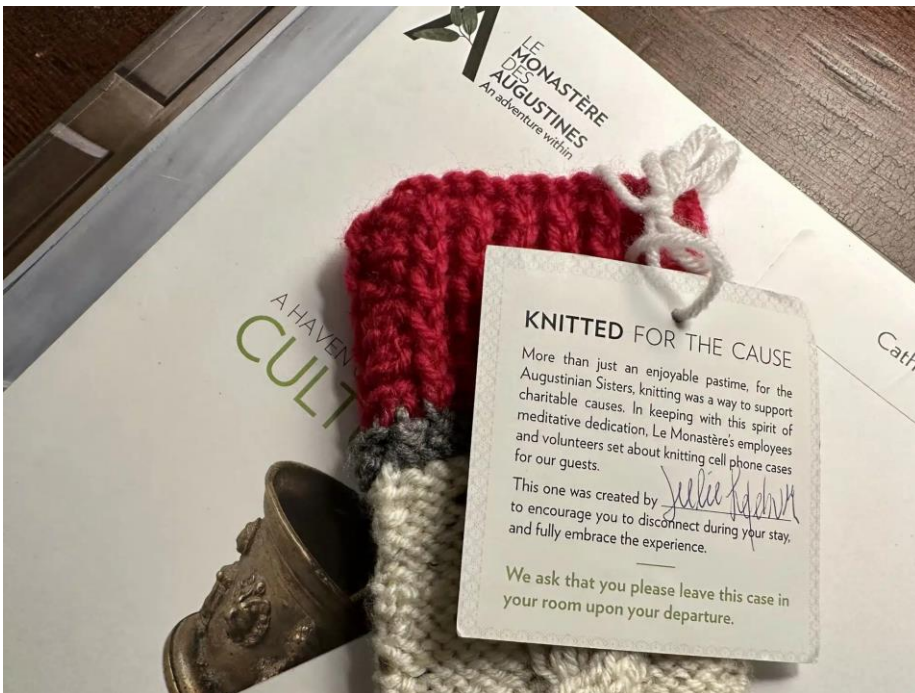


Plenty of storage options in contemporary rooms at Le Monastère. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

A tall window lets in a ton of natural light ; close the window shutters at night by sliding a weighted bolster against them. A desk, chair and nightstands with bright swing lamps for reading complete the furnishings.

The one thing I'd change ? I'd swap out the desk for a comfy reading chair.

The bathroom is large, bright and pristinely clean. The mirror has flush sidelights for the right amount of up-close lighting. A heating element is positioned to gently warm your robe and towels while you soak in the tub. That deep soaking tub is the true "ahh" in the bathroom. Yes ! Buy some bath salts in the hotel boutique. Treat yourself.



Knit cell phone pouches are a gentle reminder to get off screen for awhile. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

Free wifi is available throughout the property. This is great for groups using the property for business meetings but, if you're trying to stay off the grid, it might be a temptation too hard to resist. Try leaving your cell phone in the nun-knit pouch in your room during your stay.

SheBuysTravel Tip : *If you have trouble stepping into deep tubs, ask for one of the two contemporary rooms with no tubs (one king, one with two singles) or stay in an authentic room – the shared bathrooms are huge and the showers are walk-ins.*

Le Monastere Dining Options



Expecting tuna ? Surprise ! Beet tartare was a delicious new treat. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

Le Vivoir

The Augustinian sisters understood that what we eat impacts how we feel and included nutrition as an important part of their healing practice.

Under the direction of Executive Chef Christophe Perny, meals served in the hotel restaurant Le Vivoir feature organic and locally-sourced ingredients. “Organic and local foods are the closest thing to our grandmother’s garden,” notes Perny. In warm months, the hotel’s courtyard garden beckons visitors to take a stroll or spend a few minutes sitting among the plants.

During my stay, the meal featured a tasting menu prepared and presented by Chef Dereck McCann. His passion for food was evident in every bite. Included to sample was a lush foraged mushroom ravioli and a savory vegetarian tempeh. Sadly, Chef is not one of the things you can bring home from Le Monastere.

Meals in Le Vivoir are served two ways, buffet-style and a la carte, and are included in many of the packages. I preferred to taste my way around the buffet so I could try small portions of everything and return to my favorites – I’m still dreaming about the whipped sweet potato pillows stuffed with pulled pork.

You’ll notice raspberries (framboises, in French) included in many dishes. Upon landing in 1639, the sisters feasted on the delicious fresh fruits after months at sea and they remain a mainstay of the menu.



Begin your days at Le Monastere with a peaceful breakfast. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

Silent Breakfast at Le Monastere

I prefer to start my mornings alone, so I can sip my coffee and gradually ease into my day. It's not easy, with two dogs and a husband who hits the day talking. So I was deeply appreciative of the Silent Breakfast at Le Monastere des Augustines.

It honors the tradition of the Augustinian sisters, who took their meals in silence, to enjoy periods of calm and reflection during their busy days. For me, Silent Breakfast in the hotel restaurant, Le Vivoir, was a peaceful way to clear away the night's fog, to consider my intentions for the day and to focus on the food on my plate. Mindful eating is encouraged at Le Monastere ; it's much easier to do when you're quiet and still.

The breakfast buffet selections include hot entrees, fresh fruit, oatmeal and a variety of breads with locally sourced jams from nearby Ile d'Orleans.

It was a treat to have blueberry crepes each morning with fresh maple syrup. But also to try something new. Carrots for breakfast wouldn't be something I'd normally go for, but served matchstick-style with a rich seasoning, they had the mouth feel and taste of hashbrowns.



Jams, jellies, oils and vinegars from local producers are available for purchase in Le Comptoir Commande. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

The Comptoir Commande

In the States we call it “grab and go.” In keeping with the Le Monastere attitude, the hotel calls it “select and savor.” The chef-crafted takeaway fare, including salads, snacks, soup and sous-vide-prepared meals for reheating, are available at The Comptoir Commande.

Open to guests and the public, The Comptoir Commande also has a selection of the local products used in meal preparation at Le Monastere. I couldn't bring home the bread (or Chef !), but a jar of rhubarb jam definitely made it into my luggage.



Nutrition was an important part of the Augustinian sisters lives and treatment protocols. Photo credit: Cathy Bennett Kopf

Mindful Eating

The food philosophy at Le Monastere is not about limits or deprivation. Rather, Le Monastere asks guests to try mindful eating. Consider your food with all of your senses and express gratitude to those who've participated in satisfying your hunger: the farmers, winemakers, cooks and servers.

This was an important takeaway for me. I eat on auto-pilot most days, slurping microwaved lunches at my desk. The Le Monastere approach to eating made me slow down and pay attention to whether I was sated.

And it allowed me to truly appreciate the selection of organic, biodynamic wines and beers that are served with meals. I also was able to savor every bit of the desserts that are as decadent as the treats I find in my neighborhood patisseries.



Group activities are held in casual and comfy spaces. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

Wellness Activities at Le Monastere

You may choose to stay at Le Monastere and not access the wellness activities. But why would you ? If you did, you would miss out on affordable programs that have an immediate effect with takeaways you can continue when you return home.

Soft Yoga

Even if you're not regularly practicing yoga, don't hesitate to join one of the sessions at Le Monastere. They're held in the building's historic, below-grade vault. It's survived fire and bombings and the stone arched ceiling provides an acoustic treat when you chant "om." The space is also used for music performances ; read on to learn more.

The instructor feels out the comfort level of the participants and directs the session accordingly. It's a no-pressure environment with accommodations made based on abilities. For example, Marjolaine, our instructor, showed us how to do a seated sun salutation as a great way to incorporate movement into our office work days.

Parent-child yoga classes are held once a month. They're open to the public for a small fee to introduce children to the practice.

Massage

The wellness highlight for me was the [Monastic Signature massage](#). It's one of several massage offerings at Le Monastere.

The 90-minute treatment reflects the centuries-old tradition of care the Augustinian sisters have provided to their patients. It begins with a warm foot bathing ritual and includes the gentle application of warm essential oils. It's a transcendent experience.

I find it difficult to quiet my mental brain bees during massage sessions. But the medieval chant soundtrack, combined with my massage therapist's oil application elevated me to a different plane.

Additional massage options are available in 30-, 60- and 90-minute lengths.



Have trouble sleeping ? Try the Morphee box to calm your mind and body. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

More Wellness Activities to Try

Fill out your stay at Le Monastere with other wellness activities. In advance of your stay, consider what your goals are. Stressed and need relaxation strategies ? Sleep deprived ? Want to change up your eating habits?

Setting your intention helps direct your attention – one of the key mantras I packed with me to bring home.

- **Morphee Box.** This clever pod contains a collection of more than 200 meditations, nature soundtracks and visualizations in 8- to 20-minute lengths. It's designed to help you get to sleep or return to sleep during the night. Body scans, one of the [six ways the NY Times recommended to help you fall asleep faster](#), are included.
- **Neuro-Bed.** Relax your nervous system through a combination of music and vibrations on a specially designed neuro-massage bed. Sessions are 30 minutes, a quick way to unwind.
- **Private Consultations.** Want to work on breathing techniques to reduce stress ? Develop a mediation practice ? Maybe you're more interested in an overview of what holistic health is and how it can help you ? Book a private consultation to discuss your needs and develop strategies that will work for you.
- **Walking Meditation.** Have your meditation attempts been unsuccessful ? Perhaps you need to get off the cushion and on your feet. Accompany a guide on a 45-minute walk through the streets of Quebec (indoors, if weather's an issue), focusing on breathing and introspection.
- **Journaling.** Request an "Adventure Within" notebook when you arrive. It presents a journaling activity guided by sights you'll find in and around Le Monastere.

When you book a wellness package, you'll be contacted by a member of the hotel's wellness team in advance of your stay to discuss your needs and treatment options.



The rue Charlevoix entrance to Le Monastere in Quebec City. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

Wellness Retreat Pricing

The affordability of a wellness stay at Le Monastere makes it appealing, particularly for American guests who can take advantage of the US dollar's strength vs. the Canadian dollar. The following price information is in CAD ; when I visited in February 2023, the USD is worth \$1.36 CAD, which equals a 25% discount when you pay in American dollars.

A one night Monastic package in an authentic or contemporary room, single occupancy, including silent breakfast and access to the museum and common rooms is \$144. You can pay as you go for treatments, consultations or additional meals.

Different multi-night packages are available. For example, a three-night renewal stay includes nine meals at Le Vivoir, a 90-minute holistic health consultation, 60-minute massage or reflexology treatment, a 60-minute private session (breathing, movement or posture focus), scheduled daily movement activities like yoga and a guided tour of the museum. The single occupancy price ? \$375 per night. Do the math. That's less than \$1000 US for a 4-day, 3-night wellness retreat including meals and treatments.

More Things to Do at Le Monastere



Body and soul : the antique hospital bed and handmade flowers reflect the devotions of the Augustinian sisters. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

Tour the Museum

In addition to gifting the building to Quebec, the Augustinian sisters gave the city its priceless archive of 50,000+ historic documents and possessions. A permanent exhibit devoted to the sisters' daily lives, religious devotion and service as caregivers to the sick is open to the public. Incredibly, the 17th century trunk that accompanied the founding sisters from Dieppe, France, is on display.

The museum at this historic site is open Tuesday to Sunday, 10 am to 8 pm for hotel guests. English tours are conducted twice a day; check in the lobby for times. The public is welcome from 10 am to 5 pm ; current admission prices can be found [here](#).

If you're not taking a guided tour, borrow the two "A Living Heritage" walking tour booklets from the front desk.



You have to get close up to the art to see that it's crafted with tiny twirled paper ribbons. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

Until May 2024 guests can also experience a temporary exhibit, Re-Connect. Throughout their history, the sisters carved out time in their busy days to renew their energy – by crafting and playing games.

They understood that playtime provides much needed balance for the body and the mind. The exhibit is intentionally designed to engage visitors with the sisters' sketches, elaborate embroidery and paper quilling and handcrafted flowers they made and sold to support themselves.



Want a unique home scent ? The signature 1639 aroma is light and fresh. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

Shop the Boutique

Follow your nose to the petite hotel boutique in the first floor lobby. I refused to leave Le Monastere without bringing home the hotel's signature scent. It enveloped me the minute I arrived and followed me throughout my stay. It's natural and clean, the polar opposite of the cloying scents pumped into trendy hotels these days.

In the trove of artifacts and documents gifted by the sisters, the recipe for the scent was discovered, remixed and branded "1639." It's available in a variety of products include an essential oil.

The tea blends served on property are also from the archives and available for sale in addition to other wellness items, prints, books and more.



Join the sisters for morning or evening vespers in the chapel. Photo credit: Cathy Bennett Kopf

The Sound of Music

The Augustinian sisters gather in the morning and evening in the chapel to sing vespers, a prayer cycle of gratitude.

Hotel guests and the public are welcome to observe in silence. It's a not to be missed moment.

Confirm times with the front desk.



Grab a cushion for concerts in the Le Monastere vault. Photo credit : Cathy Bennett Kopf

The vault is also used for intimate concerts.

During my stay, [Bernard Bosa](#) performed a mesmerizing performance featuring crystal and Tibetan bowls, a xylophone crafted from quartz and an Australian didgeridoo. Seating for approximately 50 is on hotel-provided mats and cushions or chairs positioned along the walls. It's an acoustic delight.

Important Considerations When Booking a Stay

There's No Pool

If a wellness retreat isn't complete for you without a pool, you won't find one on property at Le Monastere des Augustines.

Don't despair, though. Le Monastere has packages that include access to [Strom Nordic Spa](#), a fab Nordic spa in Old Quebec City. It features saunas, steam baths, hot tubs, cold plunge pools, a lazy river and flotation bath and infinity pools on the southern bank of the St. Lawrence River.

I've been twice. When I picture heaven, it looks like the Strom Spa.

If You Need to Cancel

Stuff happens. In Quebec City in winter, snow happens, making travel difficult, if not impossible. You can cancel free of charge until 4 pm (local time), 2 days before the scheduled arrival.

For any late cancellation, the amount of one night's stay plus taxes will be charged. So, watch the weather forecast and plan accordingly.

What if You Don't Speak French

Quebec City has a distinctly European flavor and the native language is French. It's why the city's so charming.

Don't fret if the only French word you know is "Bonjour !" At the hotel, your treatments and classes will be conducted in English.

Getting to Le Monastere

As mentioned, Le Monastere des Augustines is located in the heart of Old Quebec City. The pedestrian entrance is located on rue Charlevoix. But if you're driving to the hotel, use the 77 rue des Remparts address for navigation purposes. It's where you'll find the parking lot. Note that there is a parking fee.

Arriving by plane ? It's about a 1/2 hour drive from Quebec City's Jean-Lesage Airport via taxi or rideshare to the hotel. Public transportation options from the airport can be found [here](#).



The toboggan slide is a must-do in Quebec City in winter. Photo credit: Cathy Bennett Kopf

Things to Do Near Le Monastere

The location of Le Monastere can't be beat. Old Quebec City is split into Lower and Upper Towns, joined by steep inclines. The hotel is smack dab in the middle, so it's an easy walk down to the charming cobblestoned streets of Le Petit Champlain or up to Dufferin Terrace, the Plains of Abraham and the towering castle hotel, the Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac.

Some of the things I did during my [wintertime visit to Quebec City](#) :

- Take a toboggan run down the historic [Au 1884](#) slide
- Go ice skating at Place d'Youville near the historic St.-Jean Gate, part of the stone fortress that once surrounded the city
- Pause for a moment in the gorgeous Notre-Dame Basilica-Cathedral
- Shop the unique boutiques located on Le Petit Champlain or find the latest fashions at Simons department store, operating in Quebec since 1840
- Sip a crafted cocktail in the [Chateau Frontenac's 1608 bar](#)



The forest illumination celebrating the culture of the First Nations is stunning. Photo credit: Cathy Bennett Kopf

Within a half hour drive of Le Monastere des Augustines :

- Visit the natural beauty of the [Montmorency](#) waterfall
- Head to Wendake to experience the history and traditions of the Huron-Wendat First Nations including the stunning [Onhwa' Lumina](#) forest illumination
- Find four seasons of fun at Village Vacances Valcartier, site of the Ice Hotel and snow tubing in winter and a warm weather outdoor waterpark.

[Check Le Monastere Prices / Availability](#)

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