



(Photos clockwise from top left) On frozen pond at Spa Eastman (tranquility room inset); Wendake's Hôtel Musée Premières Nations exterior; inside the longhouse; roasting bannock: Spa Eastman hot pool with mountain view.

Discovering the new

By Jane Muller

Transcending to a deep level of calm at a centuries old monastery, practicing the meditative slow motion moves of Qigong, immersing into a frozen pond, toasting bannock over the coals of a wood fire and dining in a castle were all new experiences.

They were in keeping with the “new year, new you” theme of this visit to Quebec’s Eastern Townships and Quebec City. Alas, I’m the same old me but the beginning of 2020 did offer many things new to me as promised by our hosts from Quebec Original and its regional tourism partners.

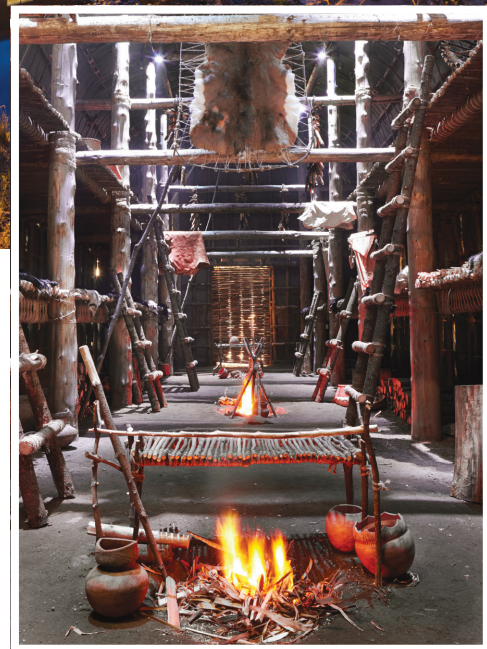
Such media tours are akin to a vacation buffet, complete with a variety of activities, tours, food, lodging and the previously mentioned new expe-

riences that just named a few. I offer here some highlights of the “new”.

Spa Eastman

Promoted as one of the best spas in the world, Spa Eastman stretches out over a 326-acre estate in the heart of the Eastern Townships. For more than 40 years it has provided a picturesque escape with an amazing view of Mount Orford and 15 km of wooded walking trails. The vacation spa’s thermotherapy installation features two outdoor hot pools and in the winter the pond ice is kept open at the dock to accommodate a revitalizing cold dip. The cool pool inside the spa is always at a refreshing 11 degrees C and is right next to the toasty steam room (hammam). There are also several sultry saunas and an indoor pool.

Spa Eastman provides a health retreat with a selection of exercise, relaxation, spa treatments, massages and learning options. The all-inclusive stays allow time to unwind in a comfortable room and the chance to explore the surprising flavours of the spa’s trademarked Tonique Cuisine. The ingredients for the healthy gourmet menu are gluten-free, dairy-free, non-GMO, local and seasonal. We all agreed that the exceptionally good bread



did not suffer from its lack of gluten.

It would be so simple to switch to a dairy- and gluten-free diet if all of the food tasted this good. While enjoying this feel-good retreat, guests can also treat their bodies to yoga, Pilates or qigong (pronounced chee gung), an ancient Chinese mind-body practice with movements similar to Tai Chi but fewer and simpler. The challenge is to slow down and that is also ultimately the benefit. A therapeutic massage followed by a tranquility walk along the snowy trails continued the calm.

It was suggested that guests stay at least two nights to reap the spa’s benefits. For an even more impactful outcome, stay for a week and also sign up for follow-up support when back at home to keep on the path to better health. After a full day and two nights, the positive effects of a spa retreat in this tranquil setting could be felt.

Wendake

It is possible to sleep in an authentic longhouse and toast bannock over an open fire just 15 minutes from downtown Quebec City. Situated within the traditional territory of the Wendat people, the four-star First Nations Hotel and Museum bring the culture of the first nations together with a modern boutique hotel, impactful exhibits and restaurants featuring a taste of Huron-Wendat dishes prepared with wild game meats, wild berry sauces and forest herbs. All of the rooms face the Akiawenrahk (Saint Charles) River and forest landscape that we explored during a snowshoe hike lead by our guide Andawa Laveau. The 19-year-old’s name means “river” in the Wendat language. A proud member of the bear clan who bears a beautiful tattoo on his forearm as a tribute to his heritage, Laveau had us settle into the longhouse

