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The Wellness Monastery

Within the fortress walls of old Quebec, a centuries-old healing tradition has been brought to the present in a wellness spa that emphasizes quiet and contemplation.

Le Monastere des Augustines opened a not-for-profit hotel and spa in Quebec City this summer, but its story began in 1639. That was when three Augustinian nuns from France arrived by boat, with a mission to care for the sick. On a spot that partly overlooks the vast St. Lawrence Seaway, they created what remains the oldest hospital in North America.

Since medical science was mostly nonexistent, the 17th-century nuns' approach to health was holistic. They knew that a calm, nurturing environment was healing, and that is what they wanted their patients to have – including time outside for fresh air and sunshine. The sisters also created the herbal remedies that were their medicine.

The hospital they founded is now part of the complex known as Le Monastere, and adjoins an elegantly simple wellness hotel (with the space donated by the nuns) that embraces the monas-

tery's traditions. The range of tailored treatments includes sleep therapy, aromatherapy, reflexology and massage, tailored to each patient or guest, as well as yoga and meditation classes.

Since nutrition is another key component, the hotel's restaurant prepares locally grown organic food. In a nod to history, breakfast is eaten in silence. It's a unique and refreshing way to start the day. (At the end of the day, visitors can go to the chapel to listen to the nun's choir sing Vesper hymns.)

Guests can choose one of 33 "authentic" rooms, simple quarters much like those used by the nuns, with Augustinian furniture and a small bed; the 32 "contemporary" rooms are also simple but offer a few more amenities, including a private bath. Colorful woven blankets and rugs complement the rooms' white-washed walls and exposed wooden beams.

All profits from the wellness hotel go back into the social mission of providing care for those who need it at the hospital, and for providing respite, at no cost, in its rooms for caregivers who accompany patients. www.monastere.ca/en —Evelyn Theiss