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Girls' getaway in Kingston

Vintage clothes and wand-cleaning kits among the Limestone City's offerings

BY LAURA BYRNE PAQUET, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN NOVEMBER 18, 2008

What did you do?

I escaped to Kingston for a girly-girl weekend.

Why?

One of my sisters and I "kidnapped" our other sister as a treat for her birthday.

Why Kingston?

My sisters live in the Toronto area, so we wanted to meet somewhere in the middle that also had a spa. Cobourg and Prince Edward County were also strong contenders, but Kingston had the greatest selection of things to do in the off-season. (Many smaller towns only come to true tourist life after the Victoria Day weekend.)

Where did you stay?

Kingston is stuffed with elegant inns, many housed in rambling Victorian limestone mansions. (After all, unless you have a dozen kids or a big dog who really likes his space, what the heck are you going to do with 10 bedrooms?) Because we wanted a place where we could bunk together comfortably, without one person squished into a rollaway cot, we chose the Rosemount Inn, built in 1850 (46 Sydenham St. South, toll free 888-871-8844, www.rosemountinn.com). There, we stayed in the two-storey Edwards Suite in the detached Coach House (prices from \$250/night for two people).

Wow, two storeys all to yourself! What was it like?

Downstairs was a spacious living room with a gas "woodstove," a small dining room table, and a kettle, microwave and bar fridge. The couch pulled out to a good-sized comfy bed, while the loft upstairs had a large, bright bedroom. (Bring an eyeshade if morning light bothers you, as there's a skylight.)

Three women. One bathroom. Problems?

We weren't tripping over each other as we put on makeup. The loo, complete with a powerful shower, a

spacious vanity and an enormous whirlpool tub, was big enough to hold a dance in.

But was the kitchenette big enough to make breakfast in?

No, but there was no need--all stays at the Rosemount include bountiful breakfasts that won't win any South Beach diet prizes but are gorgeous nonetheless. We gathered first in the parlour like gentlemen callers, before being summoned to the breakfast room at our appointed time (probably to give the staff time to clear and reset the tables after the first feasters departed).

Is breakfast quiet?

Likely not. If you're the sort of person who doesn't like dealing with people until at least 11 a.m., you'd best stay elsewhere, as guests are seated at communal tables. Both of the groups we dined with -- another set of travelling sisters, and a mom with two daughters -- were chatty and fun, so we enjoyed it.

So after you feasted on pastries and other goodies, did you do something energetic to work it all off?

Um, yeah. Sure. OK, not really. I immediately waddled off to the onsite Vinotherapy Spa. It's small and very popular, so if you're with friends who would all like treatments at the same time, book early. The weekend we were there, one of the estheticians was off sick, so the three of us went through one at a time. No hardship, though--while one sister was primped, the other two chatted and shopped.

What treatments did you have?

I started off with the "Pedi-Pamper," a term that made me snicker inexplicably every time I had to say it. Perhaps I envisioned my feet wrapped in disposable diapers.

What exactly is a Pedi-Pamper?

It's not a pedicure, as everyone from the reservations clerk to the esthetician was careful to point out. Basically, it's a foot soak in a big bowl of warm water and essential oils, with a delightful foot-and-calf-massage chaser.

Sounds nice. Did you try anything else?

I'm genetically unable to enter a spa without having a massage, so I went for the 50-minute full-body aromatherapy version. By the time I was done, I was like buttah.

Once you were buttery, what next?

It wouldn't be a girly weekend worthy of the name without a bit of shopping. Fortunately, Princess

Street was just four blocks away. As a university town, Kingston is home to lots of great independent gift shops, vintage clothing stores and bookstores--and Princess Street is the motherlode. We had hours of endless amusement at clothes shops like Fancy That (upscale women's stuff, 48 Princess St.), Era Modern Vintage (cool new and vintage wear, 110 Princess St.), and Steilmann (European separates, 206 Princess St.), wandered into countless gift shops, and stocked up on fluffball magazines at Indigo (259 Princess St.).

What was your most unusual shopping stop in Kingston?

Without question, Sacred Source (73 Brock St.), which specializes in all sorts of spirituality books, candles, tapes and other items. It has a particularly strong collection of Wiccan goods. Who knew you could buy wand-cleaning kits?

With all the shopping and spa-ing, you must have worked up an appetite.

We did. Based on a recommendation from the Rosemount, we reserved a table at The Tango (331 King St. E.). Traditionally sized main dishes are available, but we decided we could do that anywhere and instead munched our way through a series of tapas-style appetizers. The calamari was a bit disappointing -- cool and chewy -- but everything else served up in this sleek, dim hot spot was superb. I was particularly partial to the sweet potato frites with aioli and curried ketchup.

What else did you do in Kingston?

Loafed around reading magazines, eating junk food and yakking, to be honest. The Edwards Suite was the perfect place to just hang -- Rosemount owner Holly Doughty says it's a very popular place for girls' getaways. But if we'd felt more energetic, we could have checked out a concert at the new K-Rock Centre or done a ghostly pub walk with Haunted Walks of Kingston.

Where can I get more information on Kingston?

Call 888-855-4555 toll free or visit www.kingstoncanada.com.

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