



Montreal gives us the world's first floating spa

An old ferry boat with 678 portholes makes for an oddly restful place to be pampered, finds **Olivia Greenway**

IT can't be that difficult to find a boat, especially if it's moored. When the taxi driver said "You can't miss it!" my heart sank as that is precisely what I knew I would do.

In my defence, my two colleagues and I were battling a snowstorm in the dark, in downtown Montreal, knee-deep in newly arrived snow. A dog walker saved us from frostbite by pointing to the other side of the St Lawrence River and a nearby footbridge.

From the outside, Bota Bota appears quite small; it's only when you walk up the gangplank and into the reception area you realise that the boat is spacious. It's also a dedicated spa; in fact, it's the world's first floating spa and has only recently opened.

Turning an old ferry boat into a Scandinavian spa was a tall order for the design team and took two years to complete. "Our team set out to recreate an

environment reminiscent of an ocean liner voyage, even though the ship would remain at dock, contemplating the Montreal skyline and the river," says Jean Pelland, project design architect and senior partner at Sid Lee Architecture.

All the nautical features of the boat remain - the 678 portholes, the wrought-iron rails and stairs and the wooden decks, but the minimalist design, using calming, soft colours of grey, black and white is welcoming and restful.

Spas are something girls like, but owner Natalie Emond told me that men are making up half of their customers and there has been a deliberate attempt to appeal to both sexes.

After checking into reception, we were given a bath robe and towel and taken downstairs to our locker to change into

The floating spa is moored in the industrial docks of Montreal.



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our swimwear. The spa focuses on water treatments, to energise and aid relaxation. With the temperature minus 14 outside, I was not sure I wanted to try the hot tub out on deck, but for me it was the high point of our visit.

There were perhaps twenty steps to take to the tub, across a snowy deck. Once inside my womb-like sanctuary, I was able to view the skyline, like a string of fairy lights and all around me, outside the tub, the inky black of the river.

If I tilted my head backwards, I could

With the temperature minus 14 outside, I was not sure I fancied the hot tub out on deck

feel the snow flakes entering my mouth and I even scooped up a handful of snow from the outside of the tub to make a snowball. It was surprisingly relaxing, being cosseted by the warm water with the vibrancy of the city just across the river.

My colleagues had tried the sauna and steam room and then we cooled down in the plunge pool, which takes a bit of courage if you are not used to it. An alternative is to take a cold shower. Wrapping up in your bathrobe, it's now time to relax, perhaps positioning yourself in a large porthole, padded for the purpose

and reading from a selection of magazines, or you could choose a squishy sofa.

Downstairs are the 30 treatment rooms, all with portholes and mood lighting. It's a dedicated quiet zone to afford the maximum benefit of peace and relaxation to the clients. On offer are several facials (from \$85), body treatment (from \$60) and massages, either Californian or Swedish (from \$90). Both are fairly firm, though the Californian is slightly more gentle.

If you are not up for being pummelled or don't want a facial, a manicure or pedicure could be the answer. The Bota

Chic room itself is a delight. Full length windows flood the room with light and wonderful views of the city; leaf patterned mats in beige and black, light grey sofas and orange and red cushions help to make the space feel bright and fun.

Bota Bota has a café serving reasonably priced light meals and drinks for spa customers, so you could spend several hours here.

If you are lucky enough to find yourself in Montreal, it's worth a visit. Just try to choose a day when it's not snowing. www.botabota.ca

Royal honeymoon: three months to go

Travel industry insider **Nigel Massey** casts his bets on where **Will and Kate** will celebrate their nuptials

GIVEN the furore surrounding the Royal Wedding, there has been surprisingly little speculation as to where Prince William and his new wife Kate will go for their honeymoon, even though it's just three months away.

Recognizing the tough times we are all facing and keen to show his understanding I believe that His Royal Highness will opt for a destination that is neither ostentatious nor likely to compromise their security, but certainly remote and reflective of their love of all things outdoors and sporty.

I am going on the assumption that – being as clever at PR as they are – the couple will shun the glitz and glamour of Bali or Las Vegas, not least because of fears of a double-dip recession. Here are my five picks for the most likely top honeymoon spots and naturally they are all in the very best of taste.

Almuña, Gaucin, Spain



Set on a hillside farm in 500 acres with views across the Straights deep into North Africa, Almuña is a stunning jasmine clad seven bedroom family home in the heart of Andalucía near Gaucin in Spain. It offers William and Kate the greatest privacy in what is a madly romantic setting. They can ride, ramble, swim, mountain bike, golf, kite surf and enjoy home-cooked Spanish food far out of reach from the prying paparazzi and, if they so desire, go on exquisitely planned several-days riding trips. The home of the deeply British Arbuthnot family who would host their stay, Almuña ticks all the right boxes. And should the lure of the bright lights prove overwhelming, Sotogrande is but a short drive away. www.arbuthnottholidays.com

Hell Bay, Scilly Isles



Owned by The Duchy of Cornwall (Will's Dad) Bryher in the Scilly Isles sends out all the right signals. It is an understated and discreet hideaway and can only be reached by boat at one landing jetty. Unspoiled island a mile by half a mile with palms, white sandy beaches, overlooking the Atlantic, Hell Bay Hotel is idyllic and very romantic. Lovely suites, with extensive decks and sea views, honest English food and a whole host of outdoor activities – from yoga to yachting, birding to cycling to diving. "New England meets the Caribbean meets Cornwall" – what's not to love? Certainly it sends the right patriotic signals. www.hellbay.co.uk

Crillon le Brave, Provence



Atop the tiny village of Crillon le Brave in Provence, Hotel Crillon le Brave is 25 miles from Avignon at the foot of the 6,000ft Mont Ventoux. The Vineyards of Chateaufort du Pape and Cote du Rhone are 30 minutes away. Here William and Kate can escape, enjoying swimming and cycling, tennis and riding, a spa, visits to the local wine makers and even a little cultural and historic sightseeing, knowing that they will be able to stroll incognito through the many small and beautiful local villages of Provence. There are also big brownie points to be had from going to a destination reachable by train rather than car or plane. (Eurostar goes straight to Avignon). www.crillonlebrave.com

Hemingways, Kenya



In Kenya (a country for which William has a real love), Hemingways is but a 90 minute flight from Lewa Down where he asked Kate for her hand. This hotel is far from ostentatious, a handsome hotel overlooking the Indian Ocean with three miles of white sandy beaches. It is seldom written about, jealously guarding the privacy of its guests. Here their Royal Highnesses can swim in the sea, enjoy sailing, tennis, windsurfing and fishing, picnics on 100-year-old dhows, explore the stunning local Marine Park, watch the sunset over cocktails and dance until dawn to the sounds of the local band that are unlikely to make The X Factor. www.hemingways.co.ke

Los Potreros, Argentina



To guarantee total privacy William and Kate couldn't go wrong with Estancia Los Potreros, in the foothills of the Sierra Chicas mountains, near Cordoba. Set over 6,000 acres of rolling hills and valleys, the happy couple could hire the estancia exclusively and enjoy their honeymoon riding up to the waterfalls for a midnight dip, relaxing on the honeysuckle veranda with a glass of malbec, or Kate would learn to play the game her husband adores, polo, on the estancia's own grounds. Owned by an Anglo-argentine family, the charming Beggs, Los Potreros is perfect escapism with a quintessentially English twist. www.estancialospotreros.com

TRAVEL NOTES | by Donata Huggins



Four Seasons returns

Four Seasons returns to Mayfair this week with the re-opening of the Four Seasons Hotel London, Park Lane. With views over Hyde Park and interiors designed by Pierre-Yves Rochon, the hotel is sure to become one of central London's must-stay destinations. Call the hotel on 020 7499 0888; www.fourseasons.com/london.



A room in the trees

The UK's first treehouse hotel is opening on the edge of Snowdonia National Park in May. The leafy surrounds offer a romantic and peaceful getaway for families and couples. But don't panic, the eco-friendly house has an ensuite Swedish compost toilet and a wood-burning stove to heat a spring water shower. www.redletterdays.co.uk



Zambia beckons

Are you a marketing guru? Do you want to win a 15-day safari holiday in Zambia for two? Well here's your chance: the Zambian Tourism Board is holding a competition to find a new brand to attract travellers. See www.zambia-tourism.com for details. Closing date is 25 February 2011.

VARSITY HOTEL, CAMBRIDGE



The Varsity is a beautifully-built hotel – once you get past the unprepossessing brick exterior. But what is most remarkable about it is that it is Cambridge's first proper, world-class luxury hotel. Complete with stunning penthouse suites, a wonderfully sexy roof terrace that will be brilliant in summer and a state-of-the-art spa, it would make any 800 year-old university town proud.

ROOMS: I was lucky enough to stay in a

penthouse suite. All the rooms – with names like Senior Fellows Suite and the Fellows King Rooms – are decorated in smooth woods, chic fabrics and, most importantly, come with divine views of the Medieval town. But this one (pictured) was staggering. Wall-to-wall windows make you feel like you're outside, sweeping wood floors, plenty of seating, two TVs (what for?) and a high-class espresso machine confirm you've arrived. Elsewhere, the hotel is strangely small

and claustrophobic; labyrinthine, close corridors and a brick wall-facing lounge.

SPA: Part of Glassworks, the super-swanky gym only the most privileged of students can afford, the spa is in a neighbouring building but its affiliation with the hotel ensures a top line of treatments. The highlight is the exquisite jacuzzi looking over the river; elsewhere are eight treatment rooms where you can experience the full range of Aveda's therapies.

REVIEWED BY ZOE STRIMPEL

FOOD: There's no in-house restaurant, so guests eat at the River Bar Steakhouse and Grill, a slightly atmosphere-less restaurant round the corner. Our dinner was very nice though: baked camembert and swordfish with vegetables, and the Italian waiter was a dear. Breakfast is best taken in your room, nibbled on while the gardens of Magdalen College and the rest unfold before you. Rooms from £100 to £390. www.thevarsityhotel.co.uk